

LOSS IN KAZUO ISHIGURO'S NOVEL *THE REMAINS OF THE DAY*

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ABSTRACT: The aim of this article is to explore the various aspects of loss in *The Remains of the Day*, the third novel by Japanese-English writer Kazuo Ishiguro. The theme of loss permeates the narrative, shaping the recollections of Stevens, the protagonist, who dedicated almost his entire life to serving his master, Lord Darlington. The present of the novel is set in 1956 England during a six-day motoring trip to the West Country, but the main story unfolds through the introspective narration of Stevens, the head butler of a manor house called Darlington Hall. Once in its heyday, Darlington Hall now stands in a state of dilapidation, embodying both personal and public history—the glory and fall of an aristocratic class, and a life spent in self-imposed denial. With the benefit of hindsight, Stevens gradually realizes that his singularly focused life of commitment and loyalty to his lord, along with his personal sacrifices, has led to various types of loss in his life, including the loss of his desires, dreams, vision, good name, career, and the emotional loss of the love of his life. In public history, the fall of Darlington Hall symbolizes the loss of an aristocratic class and the end of an empire. Now in old age, Stevens has experienced additional types of loss. Through arguments supported by illustrative examples and explanations, this article aims to delve into the different types of loss in his life.

KEYWORDS: Loss, Darlington Hall, Lord Darlington, Miss Kenton, Good Old Days, Stevens's father, The Remains of the Day

I. Introduction

Loss is an inevitable and pervasive aspect of human experience, tracing its roots back to the concept of original sin in the Garden of Eden. We do not embrace loss, but it does embrace us. Loss can alter not only our emotional landscape, but it can also influence how we define ourselves, how we justify and explain ourselves and how we give meaning to our lives.

The theme of loss runs throughout Kazuo Ishiguro's work, possibly stemming from his personal experience. Leaving Japan at the age of five to move to England and not returning until he was thirty-five, Ishiguro's life has been marked by the loss of his beloved grandfather, the disconnection from his homeland, and the loss of the other life he might have had if he had stayed in Japan. The author has written several novels that have won him international renown, culminating in the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2017. In this article, we will focus on his most celebrated work, *The Remains of the Day*, to explore the various dimensions of loss experienced by the protagonist, Stevens, using the approach of a detailed analysis supported with examples and explanations.

II. Loss of Desires, Dreams, and Vision in the Service of One's Master; Loss of a Good Name

From the very outset of the novel, loss becomes evident in Stevens's life. Mr Farraday, Stevens's current American employer, hints at it when he encourages Stevens to go away for a few days to see the beautiful country, as Stevens and the likes of him lock themselves up in big houses like Darlington Hall serving their masters (Ishiguro, 1993, p. 4). Having always submitted to his lord's will, Stevens has neglected, rather forgotten about his own desires and dreams. This is reflected in his reaction of not knowing what to do with the newfound freedom. Initially, he feels flustered and uneasy about leaving Darlington Hall, but on due reflection, he remarks that this might be of great concern to his employer, as he had previously mentioned to Stevens to take a trip to see the sights of England. Judging from his words, Stevens's situation is pathetic because not only has he lost connection with the real world, confined within the walls of this manor house, but also he does not feel the need to re-establish it. Stevens argues that, though they (Stevens and the likes of him) had not seen "a great deal of the country, in the sense of touring the country and visiting picturesque sites, they did actually 'see' more of England than most, placed as they were in houses where the greatest ladies and gentleman of the land gathered" (Ishiguro, 1993, p. 4). For Stevens, serving at Darlington Hall and meeting prominent

figures over the years was akin to experiencing England. The critic Adam Parkes observes that before he sets off on his motoring trip, the only world he knows is Darlington Hall (Parkes, 2001, p. 55). Stevens's narrow vision becomes evident in his reply to Mr Farraday that within the walls of Darlington Hall he has seen the best of England (Ishiguro, 1993, p. 4). What seems like a prison to Mr Farraday—a loss of desires, dreams and vision—ostensibly is a haven to Stevens. Deliberating upon Stevens's way of living, Brian W. Shaffer argues that he leads a life characteristic of a monk, and his living space, according to Kenton, is very plain and lacking colour (Shaffer, 1998, p. 72). This self-imposed imprisonment comes as a result of the philosophy he is led by in his life: keep distractions at bay to fully commit to his duty. In fact, Stevens's attitude and beliefs mirror the outlook of all the likes of him who, in denying themselves to please their masters, traded away their identities, ultimately leading to the loss of their desires, dreams, and vision.

For Stevens, Lord Darlington is more than a master, though. He is a sort of a father figure Stevens looks up to and closely identifies with. His portrayal of Lord Darlington as a benevolent master is characterized by idealism and short-sightedness, as evidenced by the fact that he has spent the best years of his life serving him (Ishiguro, 1993, p. 61). He lacked the insight and the vision to foresee that “after the war [Lord Darlington] [would be] vilified for his pro-appeasement stance” (Sim, 2010, p. 47). People and newspapers spoke and wrote all sorts of things about his role in the great affairs that smeared his name. Even in his recollections when Stevens has the whole picture, he still defends his master and contends that things said about him are nonsense. For Stevens, Lord Darlington remains a noble person who had the ambition to restore justice in the world (Ishiguro, 1993, p. 103). Good intentions are not enough, though. Both lord and servant fall prey to their lack of vision. Lord Darlington fails to foresee the developments in historical trajectory and consequently ends up supporting Hitler. His good name once lost is lost forever, which, in turn, tarnishes Steven's identity as someone who devotes his life to a Nazi appeaser.

III. Loss of Ideals and a Career; Loss of a Biological Father and a Father Figure

Lord Darlington's decline is a poignant reminder of living life by the wrong ideals. His vain manoeuvres devastated not only his life, but also the lives of the ones associated with him. Stevens's sacrifices and commitment to service and duty went for nought and his life turned out to be a complete waste. Surely, Stevens refuses to admit that Lord Darlington's political manoeuvres in supporting Nazi Germany were a fiasco. Parkes (2001, p. 28) observes that “Stevens reveals himself to be the unwitting victim of self-inflicted blindness, for it emerges that Lord Darlington is anything but the paragon of virtue for which Stevens has taken him; on the contrary, he is widely regarded as a Nazi sympathizer and a traitor.” Stevens is complicit, as he remains silent to what he sees and hears happening at Darlington Hall. Stephanie Fricke (2016, p. 27) comments that Stevens was well aware of what was going on at Darlington Hall, but he would never do anything to put his master's motives into question as this went counter to his ideology of service. Moreover, he expresses absolute faith in his Lord's superior judgement and he holds the conviction that he is contributing to a great cause by serving a great lord. Fricke adds that “whereas many literary servants, and Jeeves [P. G. Wodehouse's Jeeves] in particular, are portrayed as cleverer than their masters, whom they often skilfully manipulate, Stevens is convinced of his lord's superiority” (2016, p. 26). In the same vein, Rebecca Suter (2020, p. 107) notes that “Steven's vision of professional duty” is that people like him need “to entrust their judgment to those who know better, and abstain from judging the work of their master.” Stevens never falls short of Lord Darlington's expectations, even in the face of adversity. He sees to it that he always lives up to the standard he adheres to as a great butler. During one of the most important conferences at Darlington Hall in March 1923, he neglects his dying father in the room upstairs. With a disturbing calmness and restrained demeanour, Stevens insists on serving the guests, not even taking his leave to say goodbye to him. Instead, he promptly grants Miss Kenton's request to close his father's eyes upon his death. Cynthia F. Wong comments that “[h]is father's lonely life and death seem to prognosticate for Stevens his own impending isolation” (2019, p. 61). Maybe his obsessive devotion and “seemingly monolithic vision” (Suter, 2020, p. 107) can be legitimised if what Stevens says is taken into account. He and the others in his profession had the desire to contribute to the world becoming a better place by serving the great gentlemen of their times, who had the helm of civilisation in their hands (Ishiguro, 1993, p. 116). Stevens (and, by extension, the class he represents) eventually loses his ideals because he lacks the

foresight to see that these ideals will one day become obsolete. In his article *The Servant*, Bert Cardullo remarks:

Being a butler, for Stevens, has been an act of selfless fealty toward a lord, not a mere profession or business—moreover, toward a lord engaged in great undertakings designed to secure England’s future. He has allowed nothing to come between him and his duty to Darlington, not even the love of Miss Kenton, so satisfactory has his relationship with his master been (Cardullo, 1995, p. 620).

In many of his recollections, Stevens reveals his reverence for Lord Darlington and, indeed, he holds an unshakeable belief that by serving a great gentleman he is serving his country and, to a larger degree, humanity:

The fact is, such great affairs will always be beyond the understanding of those such as you and I, and those of us who wish to make our mark must realize that we best do so by concentrating on what is within our realm; that is to say, by devoting our attention to providing the best possible service to those great gentlemen in whose hands the destiny of civilization truly lies (Ishiguro, 1993, p. 199).

Thus, Stevens’s ideal is to contribute to civilization, but he cannot do it on his own, as his power and abilities are limited; that is why he trusts his master’s superior judgment. Stevens serves him so that his master can serve civilization.

However, at times, Stevens is ambivalent toward his lord. He has a strong attachment to Lord Darlington, but this attachment suffers a crisis when Stevens ends up denying having worked for Lord Darlington in two particular instances: one transpires in Dorset when he was asked by one of the villagers (Ishiguro, 1993, p. 120) and the second at Darlington Hall when Mrs Wakefield, a guest of Mr Farraday, was curious to know if he was a real butler and worked for a true gentleman like Lord Darlington (Ishiguro, 1993, p. 123). When Mr Farraday demands an explanation as to why Stevens did not tell the truth, he invents an excuse, stating that it is not customary in England to discuss past employers. He illustrates this point by comparing it to marriage, saying that a divorced woman would not mention her previous marriage in the presence of her current husband (Ishiguro, 1993, p. 125). It is interesting to note that Stevens comes up promptly with the marriage illustration. His bond to Lord Darlington mirrors that of a marriage. It is as though his commitment and sense of duty fulfil the obligations of marriage. Fricke (2016, p. 26) asserts that he totally abandons himself in order to serve his lord. This close bond between lord and servant leads to the idea that Lord Darlington’s choices and decisions can also be considered Stevens’s.

If he complies with them, why then does he hide the fact that he worked for Lord Darlington? Stevens oscillates between two attitudes: on the one hand, he identifies with his lord; on the other hand, he dissociates from him. He relates he told white lies in both instances to avoid unpleasantness (Ishiguro, 1993, p. 126), but one cannot fail to understand that the real cause of his denial is the embarrassment and shame he feels to be associated with Lord Darlington because of the foolish things many people say about him these days (Ishiguro, 1993, p. 125). Stevens’s behaviour seems consistently inconsistent. He justifies his lord and attempts to defend his good name, as seen when he mentions that the allegations of him being anti-Semitic are unfounded and absurd. However, soon afterwards he contradicts himself by recounting an incident when Lord Darlington asked him to dismiss the two Jewish maids on staff for the preposterous reason that they were Jewish and he could not keep them there (Ishiguro, 1993, p. 146). He dismisses what people say about him as nonsense, but then acknowledges that with the passing years, it became apparent that his master’s efforts were misguided and foolish (Ishiguro, 1993, p. 201). Stevens suffers loss. When he sees his lord’s good reputation ruined, he experiences emotional loss and a loss in his career due to his unquestioning and willing trust in his master. His career as a great butler wanes when his lord’s reputation is tarnished. It’s pathetic to see how all his efforts and sacrifices have amounted to nothing. Yet, Stevens rationalizes the situation by arguing that his lord had the capability to weigh the evidence and make decisions, whereas he focused on tasks within his own domain. He states that he feels no shame and harbours no regrets because he performed his duties to the best of his ability, believing he provided high-quality service (Ishiguro, 1993, p. 201).

The only way Stevens finds to save face is by deflecting the blame onto Lord Darlington. He claims he does not feel the burden of guilt or shame, because, after all, he did what was required of him, namely serve his master loyally. It was not him who supported Hitler’s regime; he just served his master. Yet, following his lord’s lead does not make him less responsible. As Robert Eaglestone observes, “[c]hoosing not to do something is an action” (Eaglestone, 2023, p. 187); remaining passive implies

acceptance. Now, Stevens regrets he has refrained from making his decisions. He even hints he has shown himself to be a coward. According to him, his lord was a courageous man because he followed through with what he believed was right, even though it was misguided; Stevens simply trusted in his lord's wisdom and, by dedicating his life to his lord, he thought he was doing something worthwhile. Yet, he hides behind his lord because he lacks not only the power, but also the mental independence to rise above the ordinary. He allowed himself to be led by the nose (Ishiguro, 1993, p. 243).

Fricke (2016, p. 27) asserts that if Lord Darlington is declared guilty because he actively involved in politics, Stevens is declared guilty because he remained passive. In an attempt to redeem Stevens (and the likes of him), it seems that he has no choice, but to rely on the great gentlemen at the forefront of world affairs. Stevens is not a gentleman himself and will never be, as he was not born such, but he tried to give his best by serving a great gentleman. This is “cause for pride and contentment” after all (Ishiguro, 1993, p. 244). Kazuo Ishiguro comments in an interview that “we’re rather like butlers” in the sense that “[w]hat we do is we do a job, we work for an employer or organization or maybe some cause—political cause—and we just do a little thing. We hope that somebody up there, upstairs uses our little contribution in a good way” (Swaim, 1990, p. 101). The critic Barry Lewis (2000, p. 77) makes the same point by noting that we are like butlers, in the sense that we are average individuals who use our modest talents in the service of higher interests. Stevens offered his servitude to Lord Darlington because he knew he could not transcend his social status as “a mere auxiliary figure in the antebellum social order” (Sim, 2010, p. 48). He acknowledged his role and complied with it. Most of the time, he appears to take pride in that role, but there are also indications that he fears his life has turned out to be a waste.

IV. The Fall of Darlington Hall—Loss of an Aristocratic Order and an Empire

Loss of Lord Darlington's reputation and prestige is accompanied by the fall of Darlington Hall. Now it belongs to Mr Farraday and, as expected, this new master is rearranging things to suit his taste, which means that the old ways of running the house are waning. For one, Mr Farraday is an American and is used to differed ways of doing things. This is implied by Stevens's contrastive descriptions of Mr Farraday and Lord Darlington. Mr Farraday, who is straightforward and brusque in his remarks, embarrasses Stevens by teasing him about Miss Kenton when referring to her as his ‘lady-friend’. In contrast, Lord Darlington, who is naturally reticent, would never have put an employee in such a predicament (Ishiguro, 1993, p. 14). Second, Darlington Hall has crumbled to the status of “a grand old English house”, as Mr Farraday contends (Ishiguro, 1993, p. 6). Logically, since it is no longer in its heyday, there is no reason to keep it intact. That Darlington Hall has lost its fame and grandeur becomes clear when Stevens wants to recruit new staff, but encounters difficulties in finding people who are willing to serve there. He justifies it by saying that securing recruits of an acceptable standard is quite challenging these days (Ishiguro, 1993, p. 6). Another indication of Darlington Hall's dilapidation is the reduction of the staff, from twenty-eight in its prime to four currently, which really hampers Stevens's smooth running of the house, and it's also dispiriting to see that sections of the house are being put “under wraps” (Ishiguro, 1993, p. 7). According to John J. Su, Darlington Hall represents Great Britain. He remarks:

The decline of the estate in *The Remains of the Day* mirrors the decay of the British Empire—at a time when ever larger sections of Darlington Hall are being closed off and dust-sheeted, Great Britain finds itself shedding its colonies’ (Su, 2002, p. 563).

Wai-chew Sim notes that the novel is set the same month and year as the Suez crisis—July 1956. He sees an analogy between private and public history here:

The Suez crisis refers to the diplomatic standoff that led to a joint operation by Britain and France to seize control of the Suez Canal after it was nationalized by Egypt. Partly because of logistic problems and partly because of the lack of US support, the mission was eventually aborted. Now accounted a failed bid to roll back the retreat from Empire (and hence marking its death-knell), it subsequently dogged the reputation of the then prime minister Anthony Eden (Sim, 2010, p. 54).

Sim, too, emphasizes that the Suez crisis signals the fall of the Empire, which is symbolised by the fall of Darlington Hall in the novel. Elif Öztabak-Avcı (2016, p. 55) adopts a similar line of reasoning to the aforementioned scholars when she argues that the fact that this British grand estate was purchased by an American in the post-war years symbolises the shift in global influence from Britain to the United States as a dominant imperial power, as well as it signals the loss of its colonies.

The juxtaposition of a glamorous past of Darlington Hall as “the hub of this world’s wheel” (Ishiguro, 1993, p. 126) with the empty present (Ishiguro, 1993, p. 7) evokes poignancy for what is lost. The decline of Darlington Hall (and also its owner, Lord Darlington) signifies not only the personal fate of its inhabitants, but also the decline and eventual demise of the aristocratic order, marking the conclusion of a significant epoch in British history.

V. Repressing Feelings, Losing an Opportunity to Love

In the present, Stevens recounts that he is propelled to go on a motor trip to the West Country by a letter from Miss Kenton, whom he had not heard from in seven years. Stevens justifies his decision by stating that the trip relates strictly to “professional matters” (Ishiguro, 1993, p. 5). Under the pretence that he is recruiting new staff and that he finds hints of nostalgia for Darlington Hall in her letter, he assumes Miss Kenton may want to come back to Darlington Hall. He rationalizes his efforts by saying that she has “great affection for this house” and that she is characterized by “exemplary professionalism”, which is “almost impossible to find nowadays” and he adds that she is “just the factor needed to enable me to complete a fully satisfactory staff plan for Darlington Hall” (Ishiguro, 1993, p. 9-10). Stevens refers to her as Miss Kenton, though she has been married for twenty years and is now Mrs Benn. The scholar Wojciech Drąg observes that “Stevens reveals his inability to accept the loss of Miss Kenton as a romantic figure in his life” (2014, p. 46). Stevens claims that her letter has given him cause to believe that she does not have a happy marriage and it is finally going to end (Ishiguro, 1993, p. 48), which, of course, as revealed later in his conversation with Miss Kenton, is just his speculation, or better say, his wishful thinking. Drąg (2014, p. 46) further comments that Stevens’s belief that Miss Kenton may return to Darlington Hall, even though her letters do not clearly indicate any desire to do so, demonstrates his inability to accept the loss and to confine it to the past. Stevens reflects that she is now well into middle age and feels lonely and sad (Ishiguro, 1993, p. 48), and that he discerns a sense of despair in her letter because, as Stevens interprets it, she does not know how she is going to spend the rest of her life (Ishiguro, 1993, p. 49). One cannot help but suspect that he appropriates people to talk about himself. Shaffer states that “Stevens can talk about himself only when he talks about others; when he talks about himself directly he is compelled to lie” (1998, p. 80-81). Speaking about Miss Kenton’s professionalism, Stevens remarks that she was a devoted housekeeper and she would not allow anything to get in the way of her professional priorities (Ishiguro, 1993, p. 51). On the surface, Stevens’s stated reasons for wanting her to return to work at Darlington Hall may seem trustworthy. However, the more he emphasizes these professional justifications, the more he raises doubts about his true motives. Stevens remembers that when Miss Kenton tried to brighten his otherwise austere parlour with flowers, he firmly rejected them, considering them a distraction. This symbolic gesture illustrates his reluctance to allow Miss Kenton to introduce brightness into his ascetic life. She was a distraction and Stevens feared distractions at work. He kept discussions with her cold, distanced, and professional in tone, but he betrays himself when he expresses concern about Miss Kenton threatening to leave Darlington Hall if her girls were dismissed (Ishiguro, 1993, p. 150). Stevens oscillates between assuming the persona of a professional butler, which necessitates setting aside sentimentality, and his desire to retain Miss Kenton as a valued housekeeper. Despite his efforts to appear indifferent and disinterested, his recollections often betray his true feelings. In the end, his repression of genuine emotions leads to personal loss, as he adheres to the belief that a dignified butler must maintain his role consistently and never let his guard down in the presence of others. When Miss Kenton realizes that a romantic relationship with Stevens is impossible, she shifts gears by spending more time away from Darlington Hall on her days off, a change that unsettles him (Ishiguro, 1993, p. 170). More than once, you can sense that there is an “emotional turmoil taking place beneath a seemingly placid exterior” (Sim, 2010, p. 45). At some point, Stevens confesses that he felt perturbed by the thought that Miss Kenton’s outings might indicate she was meeting a suitor, which would be a significant loss for Darlington Hall if she were to leave. He masks his feelings by framing it as a professional rather than a personal loss (Ishiguro, 1993, p. 171). Miss Kenton might not have left Darlington Hall if Stevens had

not kept a stiff upper lip and had shown romantic interest in her when she asked what more he wanted out of life. Despite being at the peak of his career and having everything under control, he was too focused on his work and too stubborn to admit his feelings for her (Ishiguro, 1993, p. 173).

Professional life takes over every other aspect, obliterating even his love life. Stevens responds that his vocation is not fulfilled until he helps his lord achieve the ambitious goals he has set for himself (Ishiguro, 1993, p. 173). With the benefit of hindsight, Stevens confesses that he has failed to recognize this moment as a crucial moment in his life (Ishiguro, 1993, p. 176), which he seems to regret now. As a matter of fact, he missed this opportunity more than once. Loss cannot be recovered and those turning points, as he calls them, are now just “dreams [rendered] forever irredeemable” (Ishiguro, 1993, p. 179). After all these years, Stevens still insists that the meeting with Miss Kenton will be of a professional character (Ishiguro, 1993, p. 180), demonstrating that he has not learnt his lessons. Again, he is either too proud to admit, or completely blind to see that he has feelings for Miss Kenton. Miss Kenton is married to Mr Benn and has a daughter by him, who is expecting a child. Although she confesses to Stevens that she did not love her husband at first, now she does, but always wondered what kind of life she might have had with Stevens. However, she knows her rightful place is with her husband. Stevens finally admits, albeit to himself, that he felt immense emotional pain (Ishiguro, 1993, p. 239). Ivan Stacy comments on his loss by saying:

(...) Stevens is aware of the consequences of his actions, but only belatedly so, and he emphasizes the fact that he could not foresee these effects at the time the decision was made. The most notable instance of this is when he relates how his decision to end his one-on-one meetings with Miss Kenton was a ‘turning point’ in their relationship that destroyed the possibility of any future intimacy. He reflects that ‘one can surely only recognize such moments in retrospect’ and his tragedy is that he assumed that there still lay ahead of him ‘an infinite number of opportunities in which to remedy the effect of this or that misunderstanding’ when in fact the moment to act had already passed (Stacy, 2023, p. 243).

It is too late for Stevens to recover the loss of Miss Kenton. Love and the opportunity to have a family with her are gone once and for all.

VI. A Lifetime in the Master’s Service—Loss of the Good Old Days, Loss of Youthful Vigour and Efficiency

Currently an aging butler, Stevens admit that over the last months he has made some minor errors while performing his tasks. He downplays their importance by saying that they are “trivial in themselves” and misattributes them to “a faulty staff plan” (Ishiguro, 1993, p. 5), thus attempting to conceal, or perhaps being unable to acknowledge, that he is losing his skills as a great butler. However, his slips of tongue reveal more than he is aware of, as is the case when he mentions “alarming theories as to their cause” (Ishiguro, 1993, p. 5). He persistently attempts to deny the presence of loss, inadvertently amplifying its significance. In doing so, he paradoxically reveals more than he conceals. His strategy involves masking loss through emphasis on his butler skills, exemplified by drawing up an impeccable staff plan, for instance (Ishiguro, 1993, p. 5). But during an evening conversation with a retired butler at the pier on the final day of his journey, he says that he now notices more errors in his work (Ishiguro, 1993, p. 243). Filled more with regret than pride, Stevens declares this time that he did his best to serve Lord Darlington, acknowledging that he now is “far from reaching the standards [he] once set for himself” (Ishiguro, 1993, p. 243). After expending himself in his master’s service, Stevens is no longer young, and he does not have the same vigour and efficiency he once had.

In his old age, Stevens is reluctant to change his old ways, but change is underway. Having served many important gatherings at Darlington Hall, it is unfortunate that he must now adapt to Mr Farraday’s plan “to hold only very rarely the sort of large social occasions Darlington Hall had seen frequently in the past” (Ishiguro, 1993, p. 7). Feeling disoriented in this new reality, he struggles with everyday practicalities, such as choosing appropriate attire for the journey; forgetting to refill the radiator with water, which leads to overheating, or running out of fuel and becoming stranded. The truth is Darlington Hall is the only world he has ever known. To prepare himself for the motoring trip he consults *The Wonder of England* by Jane Symons (Ishiguro, 1993, p. 11) in the hope that he will become familiar with the sites, ludicrously naïve to grasp that the books present an idealized version of England,

adding here the fact that they belonged to the 1930s. Unaccustomed to change, he feels ‘a slight sense of alarm’ (Ishiguro, 1993, p. 24) when he leaves Darlington Hall and goes away on his motoring trip.

Stevens’s struggles are also evident in his interactions with Mr Farraday. Stevens observes that as an American gentleman, Mr Farraday often has a very different way of doing things. For example, he enjoys bantering (Ishiguro, 1993, p. 14), which makes Stevens feel awkward and perplexed because he is not accustomed to bantering. On two occasions he tried bantering to practise himself to master this skill, but failed dismally, first his employer did not find his witticism remotely funny, then the local people in Tauton, Somerset, did not understand him (Ishiguro, 1993, p. 17, 130). Moreover, his current employer strikes Stevens as bad-mannered. Stevens confesses he was astounded by some of the things Mr Farraday would say to him, as a result “bewilderment” and “shock” were detected in his expression (Ishiguro, 1993, p. 15). Undoubtedly, he longs for the old-world charm embodied by Lord Darlington and Darlington Hall. Sadly, that is now a bygone era.

Loss of the good old days is evident in Stevens’s nostalgia for what he refers to as “true camaraderie in [their] profession” (Ishiguro, 1993, p. 18). He recalls the evenings in their servants’ hall where they would debate over the affairs that their employers were dealing with upstairs; matters, which hit the newspaper headlines, or every aspect of their vocation. There were disagreements, of course, but the overall atmosphere was that of mutual respect (Ishiguro, 1993, p. 18). Back then, people had the same interests. Today, they prefer to pass the evening drinking in Ploughman’s Arms or Star Inn, rather than by the fire of the servants’ hall discussing and showing fellowship (Ishiguro, 1993, p. 19). Regrettable as it is for Stevens, he cannot reverse the passage of time.

In his contemplation of what defines a great butler, Stevens draws parallels with the British landscape. In an interview, Ishiguro comments that Stevens believes that beauty and greatness lie in his ability as a butler to show a cold, reserved demeanour, suppressing emotions much like the British landscape maintains a serene exterior. This ability to restrain turmoil and feelings, he argues, is what gives butlers and the British landscape their elegance and dignity (Vorda and Herzinger, 1990, p. 76). Stevens considers his own father the epitome of a great butler due to possessing these exact qualities (Ishiguro, 1993, p. 34). He recounts two incidents to support his claims: the first involves three inebriated gentlemen who spoke disparagingly about his employer. Stevens’s father made them apologize by maintaining his composure and resolve until they yielded (Ishiguro, 1993, p. 40), and the other involves his father obediently serving the general responsible for his older son’s death in the Southern African War, all for the sake of his employer’s business aspirations. Despite his hatred for the general, he remained in close proximity to him for four days (Ishiguro, 1993, p. 41). Thus, Stevens admires his father’s restraint and his sense of extreme sacrifice, as, according to him, this is a mark of dignity and professionalism (Ishiguro, 1993, p. 42). But, Kathleen Wall (1994, p. 25) contradicts this thought by suggesting that the restraint Stevens’s father demonstrates while serving the incompetent general, whose actions led to the death of Stevens’s older brother, indicates a suppression of personal emotions so intense that it becomes disturbing, especially when viewed as a model for one’s own conduct.

It is worth noting that when it comes to personal feelings, Stevens resembles his father, whom he strives to emulate as the quintessence of a great butler. The position of an under-butler at Darlington Hall is not something Stevens’s father likes, because he is “a professional of the highest class” (Ishiguro, 1993, p. 51), Stevens observes. Yet, he cannot compete with the young highly professionalized butlers at this age, as he is “ravaged by arthritis and other ailments” (Ishiguro, 1993, p. 51). Stevens considers his father a person of remarkable distinction from whom you can gain a wealth of knowledge (Ishiguro, 1993, p. 54), but, sadly, he is not in his prime anymore. He recalls a conversation with Miss Kenton, but then corrects himself by suggesting that his memory might be mistaken; In fact, it was Lord Darlington who mentioned to him that, despite his past as an immaculate butler, his father’s abilities had significantly declined now (Ishiguro, 1993, p. 59). The decline in physical abilities, coupled with the loss of prestige, is not only a recollection Stevens has concerning his father, but also a fear he harbours about himself in old age. Both Stevens and his father are reluctant to concede that loss is inevitable. Stevens minimizes the importance of his father’s errors by saying that they are very trivial in nature, something that is remindful of what Stevens confesses in the beginning of the novel about himself. It is disheartening to confront what Lord Darlington says: “Your father’s days of dependability are now passing” (Ishiguro, 1993, p. 62-63). Stevens recalls his father’s declining physical condition in

his final days, a reality he now finds himself facing, despite his efforts to conceal it. Stevens is growing old, but he cannot admit that his prime is lost and gone.

VII. Conclusion

As observed in this paper, Stevens lives in a state of self-denial driven by a profound sense of duty and loyalty to his master. He believes that by giving his all to his profession, he not only pleases his master and builds a good name for himself as a great butler, but also contributes something worthwhile to humanity by serving a master who influences political affairs. Sadly, a shift in the historical trajectory destroys all his aspirations. Stevens's narrow vision and misguided ideals lead to various types of loss in his personal life. He loses a father figure in Lord Darlington when the latter makes a wrong political move by supporting the Nazis, resulting in a loss of prestige and good reputation that also affects Stevens's career, making him feel that his life has been a waste. Consequently, Stevens's desires, dreams, and ideals are shattered and ultimately buried with Lord Darlington's demise. Moreover, his single-minded devotion and narrow vision hinder his chances for a love life and family with Miss Kenton. Now in old age, he laments the loss of the old ways, a biological father, and the best years of his life. However, loss is not confined to the personal realm. The wrong decisions of Lord Darlington, supported by Stevens, lead to public loss. Ultimately, the decline of Lord Darlington and Darlington Hall marks the fall of the antebellum order and the decline of the British Empire.

Stevens cannot turn back the time to recover what he has lost, and the truth is that loss has left its mark on his life. Nevertheless, he must make use of what remains of the day. Cardullo (1995, p. 621) suggests that the title of the novel alludes to the remains of Steven's life—the peaceful evenings after his dutiful daily service; the solitary retirement that lies ahead of him—and to the twilight of the British Empire. While loss is irreversible, Stevens's outlook remains hopeful. Generally, we are accustomed to reading novels that portray the future as bleak and characters as miserable and doomed after experiencing loss. However, Kazuo Ishiguro's characters maintain a hopeful attitude about the future. They endure the adversities of life with dignity—a concept that Stevens promotes throughout his narrative—and strive to make the best of what remains of the day. Instead of continually lamenting what has been lost and falling into despair, Stevens resolves to look forward and serve his present master to the best of his abilities, even perfecting the art of bantering to please him.

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