Misreading One's Place in Kazuo Ishiguro's the Remains of the Day (1989)

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Abstract

Kazuo Ishiguro's novel *The Remains of the Day* (1989) presents in its plot a series of misreadings, which are heavily influenced and conditioned by the English class system and the assumptions that it propagates. This thesis shows how those misreadings, although they may seem trivial at first, have a significant impact on the lives of the characters, and can serve as a tool to maintain the *status quo* of the class system. However, not all misreadings in the novel are class related, and the thesis analyses the causes, implications, and consequences of such misreadings as well. Ishiguro depicts two periods in the novel: the 1920s and 1930s are shown through the memories of the main character, while the present plot takes place after the Second World War, in 1956. The war in some ways forever changed the English society, and this thesis examines how Ishiguro presents the extent of those social changes. The themes of performance, failure, dignity, nostalgia, and regret, which are all prevalent in the novel, are also discussed throughout the thesis.

Keywords: **class, dignity, fascism, misreadings, performance**

Table of Contents

1. Introduction

Kazuo Ishiguro's 1989 novel *The Remains of the Day* introduces readers to the strange life of Stevens, a character who almost flawlessly embodies the well-known stereotype of an English butler. The novel follows him on a six-day journey which he has undertaken with the goal of meeting an old friend he secretly hopes might bring back some meaning and order to his life, which has gradually come to be one of regret and failure. Though the starting point of the novel is this short journey in 1956, he spends as much time, if not more, reminiscing and thinking about his past. Consequently, the narrative constantly switches between his memories of times before the Second World War and events in the present of 1956. While the whole novel is seen through his eyes, what soon becomes apparent is a recurring pattern of him and other characters misreading people and situations. These, in most cases, unfortunate misreadings serve as more than just devices to move the story along; they have an immense impact on the lives of characters, and reveal as much about those who are guilty of misreadings, as of those who are being misread. In particular, they also show how the English class system is deeply ingrained into everyday interactions between people, because many of the misreadings happen as a result of assumptions about the appearance, manners, behavior, and abilities of people belonging (or appearing to belong) to a certain class. The novel further suggests that the English class system depends on misreadings: each class performs its assigned role, which come with a series of assumptions that are impervious to actual evidence. This thesis traces how this dynamic between the class system and misreadings is portrayed in *The Remains of the Day*, paying particular attention to how the changes and continuities brought about by the Second World War are represented in the novel.

2. Before the War: "All the world's a stage"

Performance is at the heart of *The Remains of the Day*, and the main character is undoubtedly the best performer in the whole novel. "It's a great privilege, after all, to have been given a part to play, however small, on the world's stage." (Ishiguro 173), says Stevens at one point, looking back over his career, and failing to realize how much literal truth there is in his figuratively intended statement. The very nature of Stevens's chosen vocation is highly performative because to be a butler is to act – it is to act as if you do not have any personal opinions, any passions, any private life, any disapproval of your employer, any characteristic or behavior that would make you stand out of the background, where you, as a butler, ultimately belong. A butler is the perfect servant, above all obedient and non-thinking, but with the correct accent and the correct manners (Tamaya 47). What differentiates Stevens from other butlers, however, is the fact that he never steps out of his role. Not even those closest to him are allowed to know his true feelings and thoughts, which dehumanizes Stevens in the eyes of others and creates an insurmountable distance between him and the people in his life. The artificialness of his behavior can only bring out the frustration in those few who do care about him, like Miss Kenton, who is driven to ask: "Why, Mr. Stevens, why, why, why do you always have to *pretend*?" (Ishiguro 138). Miss Kenton and Stevens worked together under Lord Darlington in the 1920s and 1930s, and she is the only person in the novel to take a deeper interest in Stevens: she tries to break through his cold demeanor in an unsuccessful effort to get him to show emotions for her, or for anything else other than work, for that matter. However, Stevens shuts down every one of her attempts, not because he doesn't have any feelings for her, but because his act does not allow for the showcasing of personal feelings. One example of Stevens hiding his sentimentality is when he is trying to conceal from Miss Kenton the fact he enjoys reading

romance novels (Ishiguro 150-152). Stevens is the narrator, but it's Miss Kenton who reveals to the reader what kind of book Stevens is reading, as he would have never admitted to it himself if he wasn't forced to address it by her insistence on taking his book from him. Even the slightest and most trivial sign of personal interests or enjoyment needs to be kept secret for the sake of his act. What he does admit to feeling is nothing more than occasional embarrassment, confusion, slight distress and anxiety, except at the end of the novel when he finally realizes the emotional consequences of such behavior. Ultimately, Stevens has, consciously or unconsciously, accepted his act as his way of life, making it all he knows and almost entirely assimilating with his professional persona. He even refers to his clothes as "costume" on several occasions (Ishiguro 8-16).

One extension of his act is the narrative itself. The novel is written in the form of a diary, one of the most intimate literary genres, but there isn't much intimacy to be found in Stevens's writing. Stevens never even mentions his first name, nor is he concerned with any topics that are unrelated to his work at Darlington Hall, so anything that would reveal traces of his personality is intentionally excluded from the narrative. Just as the norms of his profession reduce him to almost an object, so too has Stevens objectified himself by refusing to acknowledge the feelings and thoughts that make up the person he is. The language he uses in writing is predominately formal and polite, exactly the kind he would use in his interactions as a butler. However, sometimes emotions end up seeping through his words, even though he never explicitly articulates them. This is very noticeable in the way Stevens speaks about his life at Darlington Hall before the Second World War. His memories of those years are shrouded in nostalgic sentiment and a fondness for the way things used to be. He was happy working for Lord Darlington, then a prominent English aristocrat who Stevens believed could change the world for

the better through his political activity. A sense of security, purpose and confidence accompanied Stevens at that time, and he was certain of his place in the world, which was firmly by his employer's side. He performed his professional role perfectly and never provided Darlington with a reason to complain, and so had plenty of reason to be satisfied with himself: "I carried out my duties to the best of my abilities, indeed to a standard which many may consider 'first rate'" (Ishiguro 186). There is also much talk of all the grand visitors who used to come to gatherings and conferences at Darlington Hall, as it was once a place where the presumed crème de la crème of the society would meet.

Despite Stevens's obvious nostalgia for those times, there are still plenty of clues in his storytelling which reveal that there was something very wrong happening at Darlington Hall in the pre-war period. The stage was being set up for the biggest war the world had ever seen, and contributing to a part of this was none other than his beloved Lord Darlington. This is where Stevens's predisposition to perform and pretend kicks in because, even though he is now, in the post-war period, aware of Darlington's malpractice, he still makes excuses for him, downplaying the significance of his actions and stubbornly trying to convince himself in the innocence of his now former employer. An alternative to that would be admitting that he had sacrificed all his meaningful relationships and aspirations, his youth and his hard work, for the cause of a man who was a fool at best, and a racist supremacist and a traitor at worst. This is something Stevens is just not yet prepared to do, so the account of his past is actually a carefully constructed narrative full of justifications, evasion, and pretense, made with the aim of maintaining his own delusions and self-denial (Wong, 20). To better understand the process of depersonalization that Stevens has put himself through, we first need to look at Stevens's relationship with his father, which in many ways defined Stevens's act, opinions and values.

2.1 How the Student Surpassed the Master

There is no mention of Stevens's mother in the novel, so it would appear that the only role model for the young Stevens was his father, who was also a butler utterly devoted to his profession. To say that Stevens has simply been following in the footsteps of his father wouldn't be too much of an oversimplification, as he certainly looks up to him and considers him to be the embodiment of dignity (Ishiguro 27). Acquiring dignity is of great importance to Stevens, and he spends a great amount of time in the novel contemplating the notion of dignity and determining who has the ability to achieve it. For Stevens, dignity means never publicly displaying one's emotions (Ishiguro 36), and this rather radical idea was one instilled into him by his father. Stevens learned to behave so restrictively by looking at the example of his father, who was never emotionally available to him precisely because he was at all times engaged in the performance of his professional role. Their relationship in the novel might as well be that of somewhat friendly acquaintances, as there is no affectionate or familial aspect to it. When they do speak, they speak out of necessity and the interaction is usually very formal, aloof and cold. Stevens is aware of it too, noting that: "even the[ir] brief exchanges necessary to communicate information relating to work took place in an atmosphere of mutual embarrassment." (Ishiguro 55). At one point they both worked and lived at Darlington Hall, but Stevens's father never wanted to "waste" time with his son on anything that wasn't related to work: "Come to the point then and be done with it. Some of us have work to be getting on with." (Ishiguro 56). Their distant and reserved relationship became the model upon which Stevens built all of his other relationships, which is why he doesn't have any meaningful ones. In fact, it could be said that Stevens is a better and more committed performer than his father because he never allowed himself to have any personal relationships, whereas his father had two sons. That fact implies that Stevens's father did have

some kind of personal life and a certain level of intimacy with another person, and so he couldn't have been at all times devoted to his profession like Stevens is. However, Stevens's father clearly never put much value on the family life and relations, and consequently, neither does Stevens.

To prove that his father is worthy of all the admiration Stevens has for him, Stevens recounts an episode when a general, who had caused the needless death of Stevens's brother Leonard, came as a guest to the house of one of his father's employers. Stevens's father kept his composure perfectly and did his job of serving the general without showing a trace of anger or emotion, which would have been justified and natural because the general was a war profiteer and Stevens's brother was one of the soldiers who died in a shameful military action conducted for the general's personal gain (Tamaya 48). Stevens's father did not question the ethics of his employer enjoying the company of such a person nor let his feeling or opinions get in the way of work, and Stevens, being an excellent student, took the same approach with Darlington. The employer must always come first and everything else is second. Stevens more than proved that he had learned this lesson when he decided to serve the guests attending one of Darlington's conferences rather than be with his father, who was at the same time breathing his last breaths in his room at Darlington Hall. Stevens, well aware of the state of his father, was convinced he was making him proud by continuing to work, and sadly, he was probably right. However, not even Stevens could completely suppress the emotions caused by the death of his father, and when news of it reached him while he was serving the guests, tears started to fall down his face. In telling that story, Stevens never states that he was crying, the reader finds that out from the worried looks and questions of some of the guests he was serving. This refusal to acknowledge the existence of more profound and intense feelings is again a part of his act.

Stevens also entirely misread the signs that led to the death of his father. When his father first began to work under Stevens's management as an under-butler at Darlington Hall, he was 72 years old and had had a life-time's working experience as a butler. However, soon after his arrival, he started to show signs of obvious physical and mental weakness: he began forgetting his tasks, not performing them correctly, leaving implements around the house and such like. Stevens was aware of these continuous blunders, but preferred to deny their evidence: he was not capable of dealing with the uncomfortable realization that his father's health was declining, and was unable to accept that a man whom he admired so much for his professionalism and dignity was starting to lose both. Instead, Stevens downplays the significance of his father's errors and ignores them until Darlington orders him to lower the number of his father's responsibilities after seeing him lose consciousness while at work. When the doctor showed up, he confirmed that Stevens's father had been overworking (Ishiguro 54). Miss Kenton had also tried to draw Stevens's attention to this issue before: "The fact is, Mr Stevens, your father is entrusted with far more than a man of his age can cope with" (Ishiguro 50), but he dismissed her concerns and kept believing in the invulnerability of his father, which was just an act. If Stevens hadn't been so preoccupied with his own role, perhaps he could have seen through that act, but even then, it is unlikely that Stevens would have taken any drastic measures to stop his father from working. To take away some of his father's responsibilities would mean to take away his dignity too, and Stevens would have never thought to "humiliate" his father by doing so if Lord Darlington hadn't ordered it. However, this reduction in his duties wasn't enough, and Stevens's father ended up suffering a fatal stroke while working. This isn't to suggest that Stevens could have prevented the death of his father, but simply to show how deeply rooted is Stevens's glorified perception of his father('s profession), and how he prioritizes his act above all else, even the wellbeing of his father.

2.2 Stevens's Enchantment with Lord Darlington

Stevens's relationship with Lord Darlington very much resembles the relationship he had with his father, it is almost as if he replaced one idol with another. He looked up to, and blindly trusted, both of them, always letting them lead the way and never looking where they were leading him. Stevens also never developed a close bond with either of them, even though he shaped his entire life and personality according to the unspoken demands of those two men. Of course, his profession also has requirements of its own, which only further set Stevens on the path of uncritical thinking. Butlers are there to serve, not to judge, and Stevens criticizes other butlers who look too closely at the characters of their employers:

> For it is, in practice, simply not possible to adopt such a critical attitude towards an employer and at the same time provide good service. It is not simply that one is unlikely to be able to meet the many demands of service at the higher levels while one's attention is being diverted by such matters. (Ishiguro 185).

Indeed, there were plenty of disturbing matters regarding his employer that Stevens could have been diverted by, but he made the choice to ignore them because that is what the role of a butler demands, and there is nothing Stevens does better than play the roles that have been given to him. Lord Darlington was informally involved in England's foreign policy in the years between the two World Wars, when he tried to ameliorate the unjust treatment of Germans caused by conditions of the Treaty of Versailles. He finds it all so ungentlemanly, to kick the enemy while he's down, and thinks that, since the war is over, the hostility should also end. However admirable his initial objective might have been, Darlington let his seemingly honorable values cloud his judgment and cause him to be easily manipulated and used in the 1930s by Nazis and

British Fascists for their own goals and purposes. All the while, Stevens worked for him and had the chance to witness the degeneration of Darlington's beliefs and see the sort of people who attended his conferences and meetings, but never once came close to questioning Darlington's newfound ideas, even when these began to impact negatively on people around him. For example, when Darlington decided that the Jewish maids should be fired, Stevens carries out his orders without much thought, firmly believing in the infallibility of his employer. Miss Kenton, on the other hand, who doesn't glorify Lord Darlington, is appalled at the news and even contemplates leaving herself. Not only does Stevens turn a blind eye to the mistreatment of other people by Darlington, but he also excuses his own mistreatment at his hands. For instance, Darlington let Stevens be questioned and humiliated by his guests so that they could show how a common citizen doesn't know enough to be allowed to vote. Darlington even apologizes for that episode the day after, but Stevens insists that there is nothing to apologize for. In stark contrast, in the post-war period, Stevens is offended when his employer, Mr. Farraday, makes a distasteful joke implying that Stevens is still interested in sex at his age: "This was a most embarrassing situation, one in which Lord Darlington would never have placed an employee." (Ishiguro 11). The fact that he is upset about a bad joke, but not his own degradation and Darlington's support for the people that would take away his rights, shows how much Stevens idealized Darlington, but also how little value he puts on self-worth as opposed to superficial dignity.

It could be argued that Stevens truly didn't know any better at the time, since he was focused on little else besides his work, but the issue is that he still continued to defend Darlington even when the evil and the hatred behind the ideologies Darlington supported had become apparent to everyone. Even after the war, he refers to the firing of the Jewish maids as if it was some kind of insignificant misunderstanding, dismissing it as a "minor episode in the thirties

which has been blown up out of all proportion" (Ishiguro 125). Moreover, when Stevens tries to justify Darlington's association with fascists, he says that Oswald Mosley, the leader of the British Union of Fascists, was only at Darlington Hall on three occasions, and refers to Mosley as a "gentleman" (Ishiguro, 125). This shows that no matter how harmful and damaging the behavior of aristocracy might be, members of lower classes are still inclined to ignore it and show them their due respect by treating them as gentlemen.

Ironically, one of the very reasons why Stevens chose to work for Darlington is his aspiration to be in service with someone who would have a strong and positive impact on the world: "What I mean is that we were ambitious, in a way that would have been unusual a generation before, to serve gentlemen who were, so to speak, furthering the progress of humanity." (Ishiguro 104). Stevens believes that through Lord Darlington he is also, however humbly, contributing to that progress. For example, Stevens thinks that the pristine condition of the silverware he had been polishing played a significant part in Darlington's mission to bring closer Lord Halifax, then one of the cabinet ministers of England, and Herr Ribbentrop, the German ambassador. Darlington encouraged him in this belief too: "By the way, Stevens, Lord Halifax was jolly impressed with the silver the other night. Put him into a different frame of mind altogether." (Ishiguro 124). Darlington in all probability wasn't lying, but simply exaggerating, because to imply that the condition of the silver had made much of a difference on the whole situation with the German ambassador is hardly realistic. Such implications about the significance of Stevens's work only encouraged him to be more rigorous in the performance of his duties, and to feel like he was doing something of great importance, while in reality, he was just a glorified servant. This kind of rhetoric may be one way to keep the workers from lower classes satisfied with their place, while the actual power and responsibility remain in the realm of

aristocracy. Stevens's depersonalization is complete as he makes serving his only initiative in life, completely erasing all traces of personal desires and aspirations that are not related to his profession, and so managing to play his part in the system perfectly:

> As far as I am concerned, Miss Kenton, my vocation will not be fulfilled until I have done all I can to see his lordship through the great tasks he has set himself. The day his lordship's work is complete, the day he is able to rest on his laurels, content in the knowledge that he has done all anyone could ever reasonably ask of him, only on that day, Miss Kenton, will I be able to call myself, as you put it, a wellcontented man. (Ishiguro 158).

Sadly, Stevens simply assumed that Darlington works for the benefit of all, and misread him as capable, knowledgeable, wise, and well-meaning. He believes that members of nobility are in positions of power because they deserve to be there due to their capability, intelligence or similar characteristics, and not because they inherited their privileges and wealth. Similar assumptions are encouraged by the class system because they help maintain the existing condition of social hierarchies. However, the reality is very different, since Darlington wasn't capable enough to make positive change, nor intelligent enough to see the dangers that the Nazis posed for his own country and the entire world**.**

2.3 The Price of Amateurism

One of the characters in the novel described Lord Darlington as: "A classic English gentleman. Decent, honest, well-meaning. But his lordship here is *an amateur*." (Ishiguro 94). This refers to the political activity of Lord Darlington, who began to meddle in England's foreign affairs armed only with his righteous ideals. Above all, Darlington believes in honor, honesty and

justice, and that is why he is so opposed to Europe's treatment of Germany after 1918. Those ideals didn't prevent him in advocating for the meeting of Hitler and the Prime Minister of England, and insisting that the villainous picture of Hitler that was being painted at the time in Europe was due to a misunderstanding. That is but one of many Darlington's mistakes that could have had disastrous consequences. Darlington was clearly not well-equipped for the role he had tried to play, as he doesn't seem to be an authority on anything; he is no actual politician, no scholar, no businessman, no expert – he truly is an amateur in every sense of the word. However, that was not seen as a problem by the English society, on the contrary, being an amateur is a part of being a gentleman. Darlington can afford to be an amateur, there is no need for him to be anything more because the expectations for the aristocracy are set so low, and their ineptitude often goes unquestioned. A person from any lower class would have had to prove themselves to be exceptionally capable, resourceful, and probably highly educated to be given the attention and the treatment Darlington was given just because of his title. Even just to serve the aristocracy, to be a butler for example, one has to be extremely professional and diligent.

Darlington's political failures are not attributed to his incompetence or ignorance, but to his ideals, as one of his friends states: "He's sincere and honourable and doesn't recognize the true nature of what he's doing." (Ishiguro 207). However, not even his ideals are as noble as they may seem at first, and more disturbing beliefs also influence his efforts. Among others, is his view that democracy is outdated and should be abolished. "The man in the street can't be expected to know enough about politics, economics, world commerce and what have you." (Ishiguro, 184) is what he says on one occasion, but Darlington hardly knows anything about "the man in the street" because he spends his time in the circle of people of equal or similar social status. Yet he would give himself and the likes of him the exclusive right to decide on the matters

that directly influence the lives of those people of whose needs he knows nothing, which then shows the true nature of his ideals of justice and fairness. The leading role was intended for him by the class system, and he has, just like Stevens his, adopted the role wholeheartedly. He advocates for the ideas he believes in under the guise of progressiveness: “We’re always the last, Stevens. Always the last to be clinging on to outmoded systems. But sooner or later, we’ll need to face up to the facts. Democracy is something for a bygone era.” (Ishiguro 183). However, what he is actually arguing for is an authoritarian government, which is hardly an innovative or revolutionary model of governing. This kind of hidden longing for the past might have been what drew Darlington to the ideas of Nazism and Fascism, both of which used nostalgia and nationalism in their propaganda (the myth of Rome in Italy, the myth of Fatherland in Germany). In the 1930s, the glory days of the British Empire were already fading, and Darlington wistfully looked back at the times when the power of the ruling class was greater and the English hold over the world stronger. This was at the core of the British Fascist movement, as Mosley said in his memoir: “It was a movement to secure national renaissance by people who felt themselves threatened with decline into decadence and death and were determined to live, and live greatly.” (Mosley 239). Hand in hand with that go Anti-Semitism, racism and the desire for a nation to be pure and clear of all foreign influences **–** ideas that Darlington implicitly accepted.

Some of those ideas are also found in Stevens, who probably just soaked up and reflected what he had heard Darlington say. It can be seen in his inescapable sense of superiority and elitism when he discusses ideas relating to nationality and dignity, which are intertwined because he thinks only the English have the ability for emotional restraint, which is necessary for the achievement of dignity. It is also why he thinks only the English can be proper butlers: there is something performative in the very nature of Englishness, and performance is the crucial factor in his

profession. Stevens relates the characteristic of restraint to the landscape of his country: “I would say that it is the very lack of obvious drama or spectacle that sets the beauty of our land apart. What is pertinent is the calmness of that beauty, its sense of restraint.” (Ishiguro 22). Stevens sees himself reflected in that quiet scenery, his idea of beauty and greatness correlates to the absence of intense expression of emotion and being, in favor of simple calmness and composure that he sees in the nature of England (V&H 141–142 in Wong 58). This greatness is not reserved for all of his countrymen because Stevens thinks that not even every Englishman can master the art of emotional restraint so thoroughly that he eventually attains dignity, even though it is desirable to strive for it (Ishiguro 27). Dignity is one of the things that distinguishes a gentleman from other people, and of course, not everyone gets to be a gentleman in a class-based society, even if it means denying people such a humanizing trait as dignity. Not to stop there, Stevens proclaims that the rest of Europe, and indirectly the rest of the world too, is incapable of being dignified: “They are like a man who will, at the slightest provocation, tear off his suit and his shirt and run about screaming. In a word, ‘dignity’ is beyond such persons.” (Ishiguro 36). The tone and the words he uses to talk about continental Europeans, such as “breed”, and calling the English people a race of their own, perhaps reflect the years of working for, and being influenced by, a Nazi sympathizer.

Lord Darlington was probably based on a couple of real-life figures, since there were plenty of examples of the British aristocracy associating themselves and supporting the Nazis and Fascists in the 1930s. According to Tate (4), there were several organizations devoted to championing the ideas of Nazism, attracting new followers, and even preparing the grounds for a possible revolution. Many aristocrats, military personnel and members of the Parliament were involved in these groups (Tate 4). The influence of Nazis ran all the way to the very top of the

English society – even the king at the time (1936), Edward VIII, was a Nazi sympathizer (Sykes 2017). This topic is often overlooked, since the narrative of the English always being the keen adversaries of Nazis has long been seen as a more appealing national narrative. As a result, after the war, the aristocracy generally did not have to admit any wrongdoing and were not held accountable for their actions in the 1930s. However, during the war, citizens of lower stature who had been found out to be helping the enemy were often prosecuted and jailed (Tate 41-42), which indicates that the Second World War did not usher change when it comes to judicial treatment of classes. As far as the reader knows, Lord Darlington was never held responsible before the law either, even though for a time he was endangering the country with his political efforts.

3. After the War: A New Face of England

England after the Second World War is a very different place for Stevens. Although Darlington wasn't prosecuted, the war did bring about his fall from grace and his public condemnation due to his relations with the enemy. Not long after Darlington died, Stevens found himself working for the new owner of Darlington Hall, a wealthy American whose behavior and manners are a mystery to Stevens. He feels like a fish out of water trying to converse with the easy-going, jocular and rather forward new employer. Stevens has limited himself only to behavior that is in accordance with his profession, so he is confused to say the least. Furthermore, the change of owner is not the only change Darlington Hall went through. The staff has been greatly reduced since the times of Lord Darlington, and now consists of only Stevens and a few others, and many areas of the Hall have been closed off since there wasn't enough money to keep the staff that would maintain them. The whole country at the time actually experienced a significant decrease in the number of domestic servants:

> The statistics are clear enough: over a million female domestic servants throughout the thirties declining to around 350,000 in 1951. This process was largely a function of the disruptive and the participation dimensions of the war: quite flatly, domestic servants could do a good deal better for themselves by working in the various war industries. (Marwick 210).

Once the war industry had no need for them, many did not go back to their old positions, since the attitude towards that type of profession had also changed. New jobs like waitressing, bartending and hair dressing were more appealing to the working class. Marwick (210-211) argues that this resulted in a reduction in the differences between the classes, as no class was privileged by being able to hold servants. However, these changes came about gradually, in fact,

the ruling class often resisted changes that would bring about better opportunities and conditions for the working class, such as the initiatives in the famous Beveridge Report (Marwick 213). It is undeniable that the position of the working class changed for the better after the Second World War due to their increased access to education, housing and health care, but whether that had any significant impact on the entire structure of the class system is questionable. In the novel's portrayal of 1950s, the structure at its core doesn't crumble, it just adapts to the new conditions. Mr. Farraday's acquisition of Darlington Hall parallels the rise of the United States to the position of the most powerful country in the world, a place not so long ago occupied by the British Empire. And just as America took on Britain's mantle and established its own rule of oppression over the world, albeit in a different fashion, so Farraday continued on the traditional dynamic of a master and a servant, not changing much but simply adding a couple of jokes and laughs into the mix. Indeed, he explicitly asked for the same sort of service that Stevens had provided for Lord Darlington:

> I mean to say, Stevens, this is a genuine grand old English house, isn't it? That's what I paid for. And you're a genuine old-fashioned English butler, not just some waiter pretending to be one. You're the real thing, aren't you? That's what I wanted, isn't that what I have? (Ishiguro 115-116).

Like Darlington before him, it seems that Farraday is attracted to the idea of the old, feudal England, which suggests not only that this type of nostalgia is still present after the war and isn't going away any time soon, but also that it exists in countries which are generally known as progressive and democratic. America's class system may be different than England's, but it would appear that both the American and the English ruling class want the same power structures of the past to be preserved for their enjoyment. Even so, Farraday does act as if he cares more about Stevens than Darlington did, as he showed concern for his wellbeing on a number of

occasions (Ishiguro 2), but the essence of their relationship remains the same as the one Stevens had with Darlington. There is one notable difference, however, and it concerns Stevens's perception of Farraday. Stevens is just as willing as he was before to do everything in his power to please his employer, but he doesn't idealize Farraday like he did Darlington. This is probably related to Stevens's already mentioned opinion that only the English can be true gentlemen and possess dignity. That's why Stevens often refers to Farraday as "American gentlemen" (Ishiguro 2, 11, 78, 127, 223), and not just gentleman – there has to be a distinction. However, their dynamic alone cannot serve as a representation of the society as a whole, but over the course of Stevens's journey in 1956, we can see how Ishiguro depicts other class-related power dynamics in English society after the Second World War.

3.1 England outside of Darlington Hall

The theme of misreading continues to follow Stevens on his journey through the English countryside to visit Miss Kenton, now Mrs. Benn. Most of the misreadings that happen during his journey are caused by his unintentionally misleading appearance - his courtly manners and way of speaking paired with the elegant clothes and expensive car he borrowed from Mr. Farraday matched the conventional idea of an upper class gentleman in the post-World War II era. When Stevens finds accommodation at the house of Taylors after running out of petrol one evening, word spreads quickly through the entire Moscombe community that a renowned gentleman is spending the night there. Here, Stevens does not put on his usual act of a perfect servant, though he would have never dared to have ventured out of his comfortable and familiar role had he not been mistaken for a gentleman of high rank and had not been off duty. The initial misreading was by Mr. Taylor, but none of the villagers who came to dinner to meet the 'gentleman' had any

doubt of Stevens's high social ranking and class, with the exception of Doctor Carlisle. This poses a question: what exactly makes a gentleman, if Stevens can be mistaken so easily for one? The people of Moscombe can't seem to define it:

> You can tell a true gentleman from a false one that's just dressed in finery. Take yourself, sir. It's not just the cut of your clothes, nor is it even the fine way you've got of speaking. There's something else that marks you out as a gentleman. Hard to put your finger on it, but it's plain for all to see that's got eyes. (Ishiguro 169).

A gentleman is both easily apparent and yet indefinable, a trait that allows the ruling class a lot of latitude. It is all about appearance and show, rather than character or deeds. The claim that clothes and manners are not what makes a gentleman is obviously not true, since that is largely the reason why villagers thought Stevens was a gentleman in the first place. However, according to one of the villagers, there are some other preconditions to being a gentleman, namely, the possession of "connections" (Ishiguro 174). Even though the local doctor, Carlisle, is presumably comfortably-off and well-educated, he wouldn't be considered a gentleman of the same caliber as Stevens is pretending to be, for he lacks connections, i.e., influence and important social contacts. What is not being said here is that such social ties come from being born into an upper class family and are exceptionally difficult for people of lower classes to obtain. So by that requirement, the overwhelming majority of people can never be considered gentlemen. When Stevens is asked to share his thoughts on the subject of what makes a gentleman, he replies that it is essentially a matter of dignity, but he doesn't express his opinion that dignity is not attainable for everyone. Different characters have different definitions of what it means to be a proper gentleman, but ultimately it is either indefinable or unreachable for common people, which keeps the line firmly drawn between the aristocracy, who have that privilege by default, and the other

classes. Interestingly, neither Stevens nor other characters who have well-defined ideas of what it means to be a gentleman ever discuss what it would take for a woman to be considered a gentleman. There is nothing in their discourse that indicates that women could be considered appropriate for the role of gentlemen, which says something about their view on the position of women in society: the notions of dignity, power and influence are all connected to the idea of a gentleman, but that idea is never related to women

And yet, this situation shows that it really isn't that hard to assume the role of a gentleman: it all comes down to knowing the act, one that Stevens spent years watching Lord Darlington perform, and so is more than capable of reproducing it. If some villagers, like Harry Smith, show the will to democratize the category of gentleman, their behavior is still guided by notions of class and hierarchy. The misreading of Stevens dictates their conduct and the role they are supposed to assume, and they fall into those roles very easily and naturally, which leads to a conclusion that the class system was still very much present in the minds of people after World War II, and that it strongly influenced people's perception of themselves and others. For instance, Mr. and Mrs. Taylor are immediately worried that Stevens will find the accommodation they provided for him somehow lacking, and they think that none of the villagers who show up to meet Stevens are educated enough to make for good company, with the exception of Dr. Carlisle. Most of the people who show up that night automatically have a high opinion of Stevens, and eagerly ask him questions and listen to his answers as if they were in the presence of a great intellect. By behaving this way, they are creating a power dynamic that has no basis, as Stevens is not only not the sort of gentleman they assume he is, but he is also anything but a profound thinker. It is all an act, but it created privileges like the free accommodation, free food and exceptional treatment Stevens is granted. Furthermore, the residents of Moscombe are not alone

in their misreading, as this is not the only time in the book that Stevens is mistaken for being upper-class. The landlady of a guest house in Salisbury also seems to think that Stevens is some kind of aristocrat and apologetically offers him a double bedroom for the price of a single room (Ishiguro 20). Likewise, the people in the Coach and Horses inn in Somerset pay special attention to Stevens, look at him curiously and try to engage in conversation, no doubt mistaking him for someone of a higher class (Ishiguro 117-118). A batman in Mortimer's Pond nearly mistakes him for a gentleman, but eventually correctly guesses his profession, saying that he was confused because Stevens drives an expensive car and talks "almost like a gentleman" (Ishiguro 109), proving again that an image of a gentleman depends on those performative factors.

However, only at the dinner at the Taylors' house did Stevens encourage the misreading (albeit after it had already happened); in the other cases, he had no active involvement. Tamaya (52) argues that Stevens felt compelled to fulfill the expectations he was presented with at the Taylors' house, since that is what a good butler and a good Englishman should do. It is arguable whether that is the only reason Stevens decided to lie. After a lifetime of service and sacrifice, Stevens seemed quite happy to receive this misrecognition. Indeed, he might also have seen it as misdirected gratitude for the work he had done with Darlington. That work, of course, was greatly exaggerated, as he describes attending the needs of foreign guests at Darlington Hall as meddling in "foreign policy" (Ishiguro, 172). Just for a few moments, Stevens perhaps felt comfortable in this new role, but that was quickly taken away by his own self-consciousness (Gehlawat 498) and by the arrival of Dr. Carlisle, who immediately recognized Stevens for what he really is. Dr. Carlisle never reveals Stevens's true identity in front of Moscombe's residents, but still subtly lets on that he knows Stevens is not a nobleman by calling him "old chap" (Ishiguro 178) and later "old boy" (Ishiguro 188), while everyone else calls him "sir". (Ishiguro

166-177) Stevens also finds it hard not to fall into his familiar role once someone of higher social status has come into the picture: “I said, and indeed, it was no easy task to suppress the instinct to add ‘sir’.”(Ishiguro 176); notably, Stevens didn’t have a similar issue when talking to any other Moscombe residents, who he would have considered beneath him. The next day, when Dr. Carlisle is driving Stevens back to his car, there is another instance which shows how differently Stevens perceives the doctor from the rest of the villagers. During the ride, Dr. Carlisle asks Stevens what he thinks dignity is about, and Stevens is caught off guard by that question because he is not used to being asked for his opinion by someone above him in the social hierarchy.

Stevens's overall opinion of the villagers is heavily influenced by Lord Darlington's beliefs and his unfavorable view of democracy. That can be seen when Harry Smith, the loudest and most assertive of the villagers, gives a speech about how every Englishman should at least in some capacity be involved in the running of the country because it is a matter of dignity to do so. Stevens politely agrees with him, but actually thinks Harry Smith couldn't be more wrong: “even taken on their own terms, his statements were, surely, far too idealistic, far too theoretical, to deserve respect.” (Ishiguro 179). Stevens is just repeating what he had heard Darlington say in the past about common people and their right to be involved into the decision-making process, and it is another example of how ideas perpetuated by the higher classes still linger in the minds of lower-class citizens. Even Harry Smith only engages into the discussion with Stevens because he thinks he is a member of a higher class. Smith also believes that the right to freedom is a part of the English national identity, and so his notion of liberation is racially defined: “Our doctor here’s for all kinds of little countries going independent. I don’t have the learning to prove him wrong, though I know he is.” (Ishiguro 177). So even though Smith constantly emphasizes how important it was to preserve the right to freedom by fighting in the Second World War, he would

not allow the nations under the British Empire to fight for their own freedom. While Smith talks a lot about every man's involvement in politics, he has not done much for his community, let alone for the whole country; for him, it is mainly just talk – another performance. Dr. Carlisle, in contrast, was once a hopeful socialist looking to bring change to his community, but gave up as he became disappointed over the years with the passivity of men like Smith. An individual who is not from the top levels of the social or economic hierarchy can hardly make a meaningful change in the world, even if the conditions for the lower classes were better than they had been before the war.

3.2 Miss Kenton's letter

The very first of Stevens's misreadings in the novel is the last to be analyzed here, but not because it lacks importance. In fact, this misreading sets the whole plot in motion, and it is related to the letter he receives from Miss Kenton (now Mrs. Benn), whom Stevens has last seen twenty years ago, when she left her position at Darlington Hall to get married. Despite the fact that their exchange of letters had hardly been frequent, the two of them did not lose touch over the years. In her last letter, Mrs. Benn reveals that she is going through a tough period in her life due to issues in her marriage, and has decided to leave her husband for the time being. Stevens, prompted in part by his own desire for her return, immediately jumps to the conclusion that Mrs. Benn would like to come back to work at her old position, and he knows that this would be greatly to the benefit of Darlington Hall. However, Mrs. Benn had never actually stated in the letters that she wanted to come back. Stevens is nevertheless confident in his interpretation of the letter, and since he has a professional excuse to go and see her, he decides to undertake a short journey to offer her the job, which sets the plot of the novel in motion. It is highly unlikely that Stevens would have gone to see Mrs. Benn without a professional pretext, as there are only a

handful of moments in the novel when we see Stevens doing something for the benefit of himself rather than of his employer. One reason for the misreading of this letter might lie in Stevens's deep dissatisfaction with the way his life had turned out. He may be subconsciously looking for consolation in knowing that there is someone else who is also discontented with where their choices in life have brought them. He is quick to call her marriage of twenty years a failure, even though he knows very little of it from the contents of her letters, and he could be projecting onto her his own thoughts on his life when he writes: "At this very moment, no doubt, she is pondering with regret decisions made in the far-off past that have now left her, deep in middle age, so alone and desolate", and "I cannot see why the option of her returning to Darlington Hall and seeing out her working years there should not offer a very genuine consolation to a life that has come to be so dominated by a sense of waste." (Ishiguro 39). These words well describe the state of Stevens's own life at that moment, but he would never admit this to himself or others, and, at surface level, seems blissfully unaware of the irony of him feeling sorry for Mrs. Benn when he has no family, no friends, no hobbies, no interests, no noteworthy achievements; in short, no life outside of his profession at all. The return of Mrs. Benn would not only bring him the comfort of knowing that he is not the only one dealing with these feelings of disappointment, but it would also bring Darlington Hall one step closer to its former state, which would be helpful for Stevens since he is having trouble getting accustomed to the demands of Mr. Farraday, and often reminisces about past times at Darlington Hall. His cloaked desperation at this point in life could have easily influenced the way he interpreted the letter.

A more important reason for the misreading, however, emanates from Stevens's genuine feelings of affection for Mrs. Benn, which he never allowed himself to show during the time they worked together at Darlington Hall. The hope of again having the companionship of Mrs. Benn,

especially in such difficult, new, times, is probably one of the key reasons for his misreading of her letter and intentions. One subtle clue of his feelings may be that, throughout the novel, Stevens keeps referring to Mrs. Benn as Miss Kenton, both when he is talking about her in the past and in the present, perhaps in an attempt to ignore the reality of her marriage, which is not unlikely since he constantly denies things that he doesn't like. He is seeing what he wants to see in her lines, grasping at every word that might signal her return. But as the time of their meeting draws closer, Stevens begins to doubt his initial interpretation and grows uncertain, constantly rereading and reanalyzing the letter. At one point, he begins to suspect that he may be misreading it: "In fact, one has to accept the distinct possibility that one may have previously - perhaps through wishful thinking of a professional kind - exaggerated what evidence there was regarding such a desire on her part." (Ishiguro 128). Tellingly, he finds a professional excuse for his exaggeration, but by the end of the novel it is clear that Stevens does have feelings for Mrs. Benn that may very well cross the line of friendship. After all, the only moment in the book where Stevens deliberately lets down his guard and admits his true feelings to himself is when Mrs. Benn tells him that she sometimes wonders what their life together would have been like - "Indeed - why should I not admit it? - at that moment, my heart was breaking" (Ishiguro 220). This is the single instance when Stevens expresses his deeper emotions **–** not even the death of his father was acknowledged in terms as strong as these, and it all the more significant by the fact that he spent his whole life practicing emotional restraint. For a second we see how much she means to him and how soul-crushing it was for Stevens to realize that he has missed the opportunity for happiness with her long ago.

3.3 Dealing with regret

Miss Kenton is the exception among the main characters of the novel in terms of misreading. She shares her feelings of disappointment with her fate with many other characters, but she didn't bring herself to that place in life due to a misinterpretation of some kind. While working at Darlington Hall in her youth, she clearly didn't see her service as a key to fulfillment, but was well aware her options were limited due to her socio-economic circumstances. Stuck in a job which required her to live at the work place, she finds little opportunity to meet new people and form connections with anyone else but the staff there. Not having close family and financial security made it hard for her to leave her position at Darlington Hall, even when she is disgusted by Darlington's order to fire the Jewish employees: "Where could I have gone? I have no family. Only my aunt. I love her dearly, but I can't live with her for a day without feeling my whole life is wasting away." (Ishiguro 137). The society she lives in provides no chances for her escape, except for marriage, and she decides to seize that opportunity. She does this knowing that there is no hope for a future with Stevens, but also to vex him (Ishiguro 220). However, Miss Kenton does not seem to misread the character of her future husband, she is, to an extent, aware that she will not be happy with him, which is apparent when she tries to provoke some kind of emotion from Stevens during her last days at Darlington Hall, so that she would have an excuse to refuse the proposal.

Now after twenty years of marriage, she is still occasionally dissatisfied with her life, but always comes to the conclusion that she belongs next to her husband (Ishiguro 220), whom she has learned to love. In her choices, one can see the key difference between how Miss Kenton deals with regret, and how Stevens deals with it. For many years Stevens had denied feeling any regret because his regret relates mostly to Darlington's mistakes, as he had tied himself to

Darlington's goals so tightly. But he also outright lied about his association with Darlington: both times in the novel when Stevens is asked if he had worked for the infamous Lord Darlington while he was alive, he denies it (Ishiguro 110, 115). Stevens also at times switches to first-person plural when he talks about his regrets, even though he usually uses first-person singular:

> After all, what can we ever gain in forever looking back and blaming ourselves if our lives have not turned out quite as we might have wished? The hard reality is, surely, that for the likes of you and me, there is little choice other than to leave our fate, ultimately, in the hands of those great gentlemen at the hub of this world who employ our services. (Ishiguro 225-226).

Stevens in all likelihood does this as a way to cope with his mistakes, again trying to convince himself that he is not alone in his failure and that most people in some way share his fate. Miss Kenton, on the other hand, has no problem admitting that she sometimes suffers from feelings of regret and nostalgia because those are the consequences of her own independent decisions, which then makes it much easier to accept. She also never had any delusions of grandeur about herself or of any of the people in her life, so she didn't have to go through the painful process of disillusionment like Stevens did. Another helpful factor is her family, she has a daughter who is soon to become a mother, and those are Miss Kenton's remains of the day, while Stevens has none.

4. Conclusion

The misreadings in *The Remains of the Day* range from inconsequential issues, such as whether to enter into a conversation with someone, to life-changing decisions, such as completely devoting yourself to serving someone whose character you understand in a certain way. Not all of these misreading were the direct consequences of class-based societal expectations and roles, but many of them were, which shows that, even though the lines between the classes were blurred in the years after the Second World War, the system merely adapted to the new conditions, as is evidenced by the ways in which it conditioned the novel's characters and their actions. The novel also depicts what happens when a person completely identifies themselves with the roles assigned to them by that system and the society. In Stevens's case, it resulted in a life of solitude and alienation from others, along with gut-wrenching regret over his past mistakes, with not even work offering any consolation in the face of the fact that he has thrown his life away for nothing. Stevens deals with this by denial and shifting the blame for his faults, but his act eventually crumbles under the weight of reality. The novel ends with Stevens's decision to try and learn how to banter, which is something that Mr. Farraday loves doing, but which Stevens has never been able to replicate and satisfy his employer. In one interview, Ishiguro stated that it is a sad, but also a positive note on which he ended the novel: "This ability of people to somehow raise this kind of ridiculous courage, to say, 'I'm going to make my life better, I'm going to change'. There's something actually admirable about that, even though you know it's not going to work out." (Ishiguro, 2017, 00:49:25-00:49:42). Stevens thinks that by doing what he has always done, abiding by the wishes of his employer and neglecting his own, he will somehow better his life and find some fulfillment, and that may be his final misreading. He misreads himself, as he did before: his hidden need for human affection, acknowledgement and understanding will never be

satisfied by professional excellence and achievements. This misreading shows that Stevens regrets his mistakes, but didn't learn anything from them. He always fulfilled every expectation set before him by his profession, father, employer and English society, so he doesn't truly grasp what he did wrong **–** in his mind, he had done exactly what he was supposed to do. The beliefs that motivated him before are still very much alive in him, although not as strong as before. Consequently, Stevens will never move from the place intended for him by the class system, and the only thing he has to look forward to is "work, work and more work." (Ishiguro 218).

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