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EXISTENTIAL IDEAS IN THE REMAINS OF THE DAY, A NOVEL BY KAZUO ISHIGURO

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Abstract

The Remains of the Day is the novel of a Nobel Prize winning author, Kazuo Ishiguro. Mr. Stevens is the protagonist of the novel, telling his story through his roadside journey, when he was going to meet Miss Kenton a former employee in Darlington Hall. The novel deals with 'the ageing speaker, Stevens, moves through these various narrative modes in order to make sense of his memories of his days as a butler at Darlington Hall' in the year before the Second World War. The story goes in stream of consciousness technique, the butler tries to justify his vocation and sometimes accept his mistakes which he had done in his past. Unfortunately, 'Stevens proves incapable of constructing an acceptable life story or of atoning for his past mistakes because he has passed his life refusing to self-narrate.' (Hammond, 96)

Keywords: Butler, Staff Plan, Mistakes, Letter, Journey.

Mr. Stevens is a butler in Darlington Hall and has an opportunity to meet a former employee Miss Kenton after 20 years, she had left the Darlington Hall. When Stevens gets this opportunity he tells "It seems increasing likely that I really will undertake the expedition that has been preoccupying any imagination now for some days" (RD, 1).

Stevens was always busy in his household arrangements so he never think about the life out of Darlington Hall. When his lordship ask him to go for a tour he thus contented himself saying simply : "It has been my privilege to see the best of England over the years, within these very walls" (RD, 4).

Journey of Mr. Stevens starts after receiving the letter of Miss Kenton, who is now Mrs. Benn. The novel suggests that 'they had deep feelings for each other although their relationship never progressed beyond convivial 'cocoa' evenings when, they met in

Miss Kenton's parlour to discuss the smooth running of the estate' (Wai Chew Sim, 44). He failed to realize his relationship with Miss Kenton and he also failed to attend to his father as he lay dying in an upstairs bedroom during a diplomatic conference held at the hall in 1923.

When the journey start Stevens loses in his past and talks about a butler's dignity and how a staff plan works. Now a days Stevens has been responsible for a series of small errors in the carrying out of his duties. This thing happened due to over burden of work, but Stevens was not aware about this burden. After receiving the letter of Miss Kenton, he explained "containing as it did along with its long, rather unrevealing passages, an unmistakable nostalgia for Darlington Hall. I am quite sure of this distinct hints of her desire to return here" (RD, 3).

Thus he decides to drive to the West Country and call on Miss Kenton. Miss Kenton never wants to leave Darlington Hall, she had a strong feeling for Mr Stevens but he never understand her feelings and decide to leave Darlington Hall.

The text of the *Remains of the Day* (1989) reveals a repressed emotional past of Mr Stevens in Darlington Hall. Stevens was too much diligent for his work that he always thought about the work plan, it shows at one place "I spent many hours working on staff plan, and at least as many hours again thinking about it as I went about other duties or as I lay awake after retiring" (RD, 8).

James Phelan states that:

"Butler does not have conscious awareness of his feelings and argues that Steven's misremembering is a sign of his repression of feeling." (96)

At one place Mr. Stevens admitted that in past few months, he has done many minor mistakes, but he realizes these mistakes after receiving the letter of Miss Kenton as so often occurs in these situations, I had become blind to the obvious - that it until my pondering over the implications of Miss Kenton's letter finally opened my eyes to the simple truth:

"that these small errors of recent months have derived from nothing more sinister than a faulty staff plan" (RD, 5).

The *Remains of the Day* is the record of a search for the form of telling that will allow Stevens to understand his past, assign value to his years of service and sacrifice. His confusion and anxiety signal uncertain feelings for Miss Kenton, but through his tangled memory reveal a inclination to understand her role in his life. Steven's story is unconsciously communicated and unfold a repressed emotional past of which Stevens is unaware. In trying to understand Miss Kenton's part in his story, Stevens must follow a different strategy of narrating. In a large portion of novel he talks about his professional relationship with Miss Kenton. It becomes increasingly clear that he wants to know exactly where his personal relationship with Miss Kenton went wrong. In this particular

eagerness for evidence, he plays a game of the romance novel, which first surfaces when we learn that he is secretly a reader of sentimental love stories. Stevens remembers a scene in which Miss Kenton, curious to know what he is reading. Before we discover what he is reading, his tone suddenly changes. Stevens never voiced his feelings of love and always try to use the language of those sentimental love stories, which he used to read. He also ask why 'he should not find pleasure in tales of men and women who have romantic affairs and expresses their feelings for each other, often in the most elegant phrases?' (RD, 168).

In his youth Mr Stevens was very energetic and diligent, if any staff members would like to go leaving his/her job, he never stop him, but now at this stage he needs a true companion. When he receives the letter of Miss Kenton, he becomes happy because what mistakes, he is doing for last few months, wants to improve now with the help of Miss Kenton, after making a good staff plan. Mark Kamine very well explains the condition of Steven mind:

"unprotestingly obedient throughout his life, and he now finds himself full of regret and struggling to give voice to his feelings. His tale is an account of Stevens confronting his moral and emotional emptiness" (45).

A butler is a person who have no rites to have a lady friend. When Mr Farraday seized the opportunity to grin broadly at Stevens and say with some deliberation 'My, my, Stevens. A lady friend and at yours age.'

It was a very embarrassing situation for Mr Stevens because he always busy in making good staff plans and entertained his guests with his best way. When we talk about his dutifulness in his profession, it was on its height, when he was busy in handling his guests at Darlington Hall and his father was laying on his death bed, he had no time to take care of his father. When Miss Kenton asked

"Mr Stevens, will you permit me to close his eyes." (RD, 111)

It was a most crucial moment for a son, that he was not with his father in his last moments of life. So being a butler Stevens did his best but he has no personal life, no one to take care of him. Few things are not clear in his narration:

“his confusion and apprehension signal unresolved feelings for Miss Kenton and his attempts to order his tangled memory reveal a desire to understand her part in his life, but these is no certain evidence that he does not know that he loves her or that he does not recognize her departure as a personal loss” (Kazuo Ishiguro, 97).

In the whole novel Mr Stevens try to justify the job of a butler. There is always a fear in his conversation that in near future butler's job would not be understand a bad job, so he always clarify the meaning of his references weather he would be satisfied with his job or not. Mr Stevens talks about his past through the whole journey and the important character in his story is Miss Kenton. We talk about a person most when the person has more importance in our life. It is understandable that the journey of Stevens provides him some space so that he ‘recounts the narrative of his life to his new acquaintance, and through the act of feeling, the emotional release take place’ (Yugin Teo, 40).

Stevens could make his life more meaningful, he could live a better life after understanding the meaning of his own existence, Miss Kenton and Stevens had a good relationship in their profession. When after so many years Stevens got letter from Miss Kenton, he realizes something:

“his feeling for Miss Kenton awakens and felt that he has lost something. At certain points Kenton showed her feelings but Stevens ignored. He was so much caught in his profession that he never grew up the seeds of love in his heart. For Mr. Stevens butler's dignity and discipline more than any other feeling, he was a butler and has nothing less and nothing more. When Miss Kenton resigned, he could not say a single word without a butler's formality for his employer.”

It is very clearly shown in Miss Kenton's letter that she is not happy with her present life, ‘the rest

of my life stretcher like an emptiness before me’ (RD, 248).

These words disturbs Mr Stevens and his suppressed feelings for Miss Kenton awake. When Mr Stevens arrives at Weymouth to meet Miss Kenton, comes to know that she is now Mrs Benn and living happily. She is waiting for her grand children. Now Stevens realizes his guilty of past actions because he has no one to think about. Mrs Benn ask Mr Stevens:

“What does the future hold you back at Darlington Hall.” (RD, 249)

Then Stevens replies “well what ever awaits me, Mrs Benn, I know I am not awaited by emptiness. If only I were. But oh no, there's work, work and more work.”

In her meeting with Mr Stevens, Mrs Benn accepts that she wants to live a better life with him, she accepts and says extremely desolate occasions when you think to yourself ‘what a terrible mistake I've made with my life’, She makes a ware to Mr Stevens, ‘for instance, I get to thinking about a life I might have had with you Mr Stevens’ (RD, 251).

But later she realizes her rightful place is with her husband. She accepts time will not turning back now. Hearing these words of Mrs Benn, Stevens replies it took me a moment or two fully digest these words of Miss Kenton (RD, 251).

Stevens emotions over flow and provoke a certain degree of sorrow, “why should I not admit it? at that moment, my heart was breaking.’

Mrs Benn's eyes had filled with tears when the bus pulled up, Stevens smiled and said:

“Now, Mrs Benn, you must take good care of yourself. Many say retirement is the best part of life for a married couple. You must do all you can to make these years happy ones for yourself and your husband. We may never meet again, Mrs Benn” (RD, 252).

Stevens left alone sitting on the bench and seemed to give some consolation himself:

“I should adopt a more positive outlook and try to make the best of what remains of my day.

After all, what can we ever gain in forever looking back and blaming ourselves if our lives have not turned out quit as we might have wished?" (RD, 256-57).

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