
**THE STRATIFIED ENGLISH SOCIETY: THEORIZING
PSYCHOANALYSIS IN KAZUO ISHIGURO'S *THE REMAINS OF THE
DAY*.**

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ABSTRACT:

Amalgamation of literary theory or criticism with various literary texts has been one of the captivating trends of research in the modern-day world. Today, there has been a widespread prevalence of interpretation of various texts using the critical lens of literary theory. Modern day research demands innovation, it pertains to the process where a particular theory creeps into the domain of so called a "text." The theory of psychoanalysis emerged with two of its father-figures, Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan in the 1960s, a period perfect for its emergence taking the turbulent times of the post-war period into account. This theory glaringly portrayed the intricacies of the mind, the ramifications of thoughts and most importantly captured what otherwise remained hidden, the subtle dealings of the human nature. Numerous issues have placed themselves to be significant parts of the theory of psychoanalysis but the concerns associated with the human mind sit pretty at the top. The Remains of the Day, by the famous inborn Japanese writer, the Nobel prize winner, Kazuo Ishiguro, without a second thought, epitomises the intricacies associated with the central character of the novel, the butler, Stevens. This novel has always been considered a post-imperial or a post-colonial one thereby relegating the inherent presence of the theory of psychoanalysis to a subordinate position. There are numerous happenings in the novel which very well pertain to this theory. This paper is an attempt in order to bring into light the inner thoughts of the mind of the butler Stevens by using the psychoanalytical theory. Also, what this paper does is that it completes a full circumference of the English society of the mid-twentieth century which was very evidently class-ridden at that time. The hypothesis that this paper adheres to is that this novel can very well be read as a psychoanalytical novel.

Keywords: *critical, mind, psychoanalysis, society, theory.*

INTRODUCTION:

“I have always had a deep feeling for the mystery of life, and essentially my plays have been an effort to explore the beauty and meaning in the confusion of life.”

---Tennessee Williams

The above quote rams the death-nail to the very idea of the beauty of life. ‘Life’, this word looks pretty short and simple to the naked eye but has immense potential as it is adorned with numerous so called off-shoots. Mystery appears to be an integral part of the life of an individual not in terms of magical deeds but in terms of the workings of the mind. When we talk about mind and its inner thoughts, inevitably there appears a tendency to get a hold of the interior processes, but then, it is not humanly possible. To make a proper discussion on this, what is better than *The Remains of the Day* by Ishiguro. The novel is replete with thoughts, character-depictions and most importantly the oscillation between the past and the present. If one observes minutely, the novel very well weaves back and forth thereby drawing connections between the present scenes and the time gone by.

Judith Butler, in her famous book, *Gender Trouble* remarks,

“there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results” (Butler 2006:34).

The above line gets very well applied to the hero of the play, the elderly butler of Darlington Hall near Oxford, Stevens who undertakes a six-day excursion to the English West Country that takes him first to Salisbury, then Dorset, Somerset, Devon and Cornwall, before ending in Weymouth. The towering personality of this individual very well surpasses other characters in the novel. A quirky old butler, to be absolutely precise, steals the show in this novel with his pendulum of the life getting stuck between two simple yet powerful words, “dignity” and “duty.” He quite aptly justifies what Judith Butler intended in the line. He performed his role, he executed what he needed to do and all these never deterred him from the path of serving or rather accomplishing his duty as a butler. He very well carved out his own world of duty, a world where the very sense of serving was just ingrained in his mind. This again speaks volumes of the English society at that time.

The story hits its very stride when the very journey undertaken by Stevens appears to be pregnant with numerous implications. This journey also represents his attempt his attempt to come to terms

with the fact that his long years of professional service, from which he has drawn enormous vicarious satisfaction, have been devoted to a man, Lord Darlington, whose political naivety and moral weakness were utter destructive for his own country. The years of long and dedicated service by Stevens provided ample fodder to his different thoughts which yet again highlight the theory of psychoanalysis. The entire life of Stevens, in one sense, becomes sheer dedication to Lord Darlington regardless of the latter's nature and character and in the other sense, it becomes a denial of his own living. In other words, the dedication on one side proved the denial to materialism on the other side. The gripping and equally captivating story of the butler told amidst the oscillation between the past and the present evidently brings to the fore numerous psychoanalytical elements.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

The combination of various historical events along with the vivid presence of literary theory is indeed a new area of research or so to say a much lesser explored area. In the past, although fair amount of research was done but those appeared to be one-dimensional in nature. They were basically written taking into account how *The Remains of the Day* appears to be an account associated with the human memory. Others focused how different genres can be seen in the non-linear narration of the plot.

Catherine Wong (2014) has tried to make an in-depth study of the distorted plot of the novel or rather the breakdown of narrative in her research paper. "Collapse of narrative: A study of narrative distance in the confessional narrative in Kazuo Ishiguro's work" (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>). Here, she tries to comprehend how the very use of language in a way becomes the medium of transmission of thoughts and feelings between the audience and the narrator. This leads to the depiction of the confessional narrative.

Maha Abdel Moneim Emara (2015) has tried to study *The Remains of the Day* from a historiographical point of view in his research paper, "Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*: A Historiographical approach" (<http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/elle.V5n4p8>). This paper is basically a delineation of how there are distorted narrative techniques used in order to throw light on the various events of history. Moreover, this paper also deals with the fact of presenting history from a subordinated position.

Kenny Johansson (2011) makes a study of the narrative of the novel under the title “The self-contradictory narrative of Mr. Stevens in Kazuo Ishiguro’s *The Remains of the Day*.” He deals with the aspect of how Stevens, in the process of his narration tries to communicate with his reader, as suggested by lines like, “I think you will understand” (5). The paper also makes a study of the sophisticated language used by the butler.

Although the above mentioned reviews are quite belonging to the present time, old reviews too present the same picture-

Mathilda Slabbert (1997) in her dissertation entitled, “An analysis of the work of Kazuo Ishiguro, His Biculturalism and his contribution to new internationalism” focuses on the different cultured aspects of Ishiguro and the consequent influences it had on the themes of *The Remains of the Day*. It also deals with the process of re-creation of the past with the help of memory.

Tom Penner (1999) in his thesis entitled, “Performing Liminality: Kazuo Ishiguro’s *The Remains of the Day* and Anita Brookner’s *Look at Me* basically deals with the life of the Butler Stevens. The thesis also reflects the idea that the journey towards the process of self-discovery in a way becomes identical with the reader. The employment of the Reader-response theory by Wolfgang Iser in this thesis proved to be of immense help in order to draw certain connections between the narrator and the reader.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

The following objectives will be envisaged for the research work:

- 1.To address the different workings of the mind in the personality of Stevens which in a way contributes to the incoherence or the distortion of the basic plot. This fact drives home the point that human memory is always correlated with various events which can be interpreted at various personal and historical levels. Having said so, this very assertion also replicates the point that this text is not a mere fiction but something which has traces of the personal life of the main character.
2. To portray that Stevens was the inherent victim of his own sense of “dignity.” The refinement or the politeness which he always stressed on proved to be his nemesis at the end. To substantiate, it was seen that Stevens was never able to come out of his sense of “duty” to lead his “own” life.

3. To show the amalgamation of literary text and literary theory thereby contributing to the fact that there are numerous inherent psychoanalytical elements in the text.

4. To bring to the fore various ramifications of psychoanalysis in the text. Although the term “psychoanalysis” appears to be a hidden term in relation to the text, the paper will aim at proving the depiction of the traits in the character of the butler, Stevens to be falling under this umbrella term.

NEED FOR THE STUDY:

Various literary texts, since the time of them being written, have always had traces of certain historical or theoretical background. The novels of Kazuo Ishiguro are always replete with the customs, traditions and the ways of living of the Japanese people (mainly *A Pale View of Hills*, and *An Artist of the Floating World*). *The Remains of the Day* can be surely said to be a bifurcation as it comes away from Japan and has traces of major theoretical movements. The need for the study lies in its exploration of the various inherent psychoanalytical elements which were unexplored before. The study appears vital in its dealing with the research question which opens up a vast arena of research. Moreover, the significance of the study also lies in its amalgamation of both literary study and literary theory which greatly helps in proving the hypothetical propositions.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

The research is based on the following methods:

1. The research is primarily based on qualitative approach. It focuses on the textual analysis of *The Remains of the Day*. This method abundantly helps uncover the intricacies of the research problem.

2. The research is descriptive in design. So the descriptive outlook paved the way for bringing to the fore the hypothetical assumptions.

3. Theoretical analysis of the plot of the novel forms another key method for coming to a conclusion of the research question.

4. To study psychoanalysis as a specific theory and not a cumulative outcome of different supporting viewpoints. Adopting this method is of utmost benefit because the research question of the thesis deals with the presence of psychoanalytical elements in the text.

5. Extensive analysis of the personality of Stevens which discloses the fact that the various distortions in his life are nothing but the very medium of the incoherence of the plot.

PROBLEM STATEMENT:

The Remains of the Day by Kazuo Ishiguro abounds in psychoanalytical elements as well as other theoretical elements in spite of its dominant idea of the personal memory narrative of Stevens. One of the significant problems associated with the previous researches of this novel is the problem of ignoring or overlooking major issues like the setting of the novel- July, 1956, the year when the Suez Canal was nationalized, the location- Darlington Hall, the six-day road trip of the butler Stevens to Compton, Cornwall, the sense of “dignity” and “duty” as shown by Stevens towards someone who was not a gentleman in ‘real sense’ of the term.

Making an in-depth study of the aforementioned issues leave us no stone unturned to make the assertion that there are glaring elements associated with psychoanalytical criticism in the novel. Therefore, this thesis deals with the basic question of addressing these elements and bringing them to the fore which would also prove the novel to be purely psychoanalytical in nature. The problem of not addressing these issues not only affects the intricacies of the novel, but also, at the same time, hinders proper research of the novel. This research is a humble attempt to bring to the fore the various psychoanalytical elements in the novel. Doing so, it also uncovers the different historical events shown to be having direct connections with the life of the butler, Stevens.

THEORETICAL DELIBERATIONS:

It is a well-known fact that whether consciously or unconsciously, human beings are prone to numerous thoughts and fancies which are nothing but illusions to the core. These illusions in a way play a vital role in alleviating both the inner complexities of the mind along with internal stress. Such a state of an individual broadly falls under the school of psychoanalytic theory of which Sigmund Freud stands as the towering colossus. Freudian psychoanalytic theory can very rightly be considered a science which comprises mainly of two notable components, the unconscious (id) and the conscious (ego). The influence of Freud in modern day analysis of psychoanalytic theory cannot be belittled. The basic premise of psychoanalytic studies rests on the fact that consciousness of every human being might be present or absent and every mental being is unconsciousness at the

outset. Regarding the huge influence of Freud, the comment by W.H. Auden appears to be perfectly apt,

“If often he was wrong and, at times absurd, to us is no more a person now but a whole climate of opinion under whom we conduct our different lives...” (W.H. Auden, 1991).

The entire narrative of the butler Stevens might be characterized as a stumbling endeavour to salvage something valuable, or at least defensible, from a life that he suspects has been wasted as the dedicated service to Lord Darlington which he rendered throughout his life was not worth the person. Considering this very instance, it can very well be said that the real substance of the novel is then Steven’s attempt to piece together his past, and to integrate it with his present. The literal journey from Darlington Hall to the West Country is a narrative device for dramatizing the more important journey that he makes at the level of consciousness. Ishiguro reinforces this point by locating all the significant action of the past, unfolding it only via the memories and the speculations of the reflecting narrator. In this way, Ishiguro continues the surreptitious assault on dramatic content that are also vividly evident in his other works.

This very assault can easily be understood in the plotless and incoherent narrative of the novel. Steven’s suppression of his love for Miss Kenton is a ploy to divert the reader’s attention to the action that takes place in the narrator’s consciousness- the journey Stevens thinks he is making, the detours he takes to disguise the fact that he is really following another course, and the stops, starts, hesitations by which he exposes his own duplicity to the reader, even as he himself remains deceived. To make it very precise, the real story of the novel is the story of the mind. The lines below clearly highlight the very state of mind of Stevens which depict the different scenarios.

“In the summer of 1956, Stevens, an ageing butler, has embarked on a six-day motoring trip through the West Country. But this holiday is disturbed by the memories of his past service to the late Lord Darlington, and most of all by the painful recollections of his friendship with the housekeeper, Miss Kenton. For the first time in his life, Stevens is forced to wonder if all his actions were for the best after all ... A sad and humorous love story, and a witty meditation on the democratic responsibilities of the ordinary man” (Ishiguro, p.2).

The concept of unconscious mentality is generally taken into account in terms of its role in relation to the mind stuff theories in William James' *The Principle of Psychology*. According to James, mind stuff theories imply the theories which regard the normal mental states as compound which can be numerically analysed.

“Unconsciousness may be perceived as entirely composed of, or at least as including some ideas that were not originally conscious but that could become conscious” (Sears, 1943).

Considering the amount of stress which human beings undertake as a result of their illusions, there has to be a shell as a protective measure and “defence mechanism” comes to the rescue of an individual. Defence mechanism, in short, can be said to be a kind of unconscious mechanism helping the individuals to come out of their stress and anxiety. Although started by Freud, this concept was widely discussed by his daughter Anna Freud. She in her *The Ego and the Mechanism of Defense* (1936) draws out various inner mechanisms which defend the ego. This very fact can be linked to the life of Stevens whose excursion into the past is not only a personal journey, however; it is also a journey into the history of England. This is not simply a matter of investigating the “facts” of the history of England.

Like the other novels, *The Remains of the Day* communicates a larger interest in the relationship between personal identity and national consciousness, the relationship between individual and collective memory, and the ways in which those relationships are represented in the form of a historical narrative. This novel also voices a specific concern with how the past of Ishiguro's adopted country has been imagined, or constructed, in the writing of English history and literature. In this sense, this very novel implies that this literary and historical tradition has been a major vehicle of a national consciousness that Ishiguro finds a way to express both his interest in universal human themes and his engagement with equally pressing, though more local, problem of English politics and English literary form.

The id, ego and the super-ego are the three intertwined layers of the model of human psyche developed by Freud. The id can be referred to as the basic desire of an individual. Behind every wish of a living being, lies the id. Super-ego is the contrary of id as it is the storehouse of all the external happenings including sense of guilt and socially constructed theories. Ego appears to be the most significant apparatus of the three as it is nothing but the reality acting as the balancing link

between the id and the super-ego. Stevens, the dedicated Butler, devoted his entire life to serving Lord Darlington in a society which was purely based on class. The stratification of class was so rigid that the ones at the higher levels distanced themselves from others. The position of a butler, to be absolutely honest, was not a privileged position at that time and the idea was ingrained in the mind of Stevens that they were made to serve the Englishman and this very state of mind was enough for them to serve even relegating their personal life a backseat. We find that Stevens enjoyed the position of a butler in the sentences below: It is sometimes said that butlers only truly exist in England. Other countries, whatever title is actually used, have only manservants. I tend to believe this is true. Continentals are unable to be butlers because they are as a breed incapable of the emotional restraint which only the English race are capable of. . . . In a word, 'dignity' is beyond such persons. We English have an important advantage over foreigners in this respect and it is for this reason that when you think of a great butler, he is bound, almost by definition, to be an Englishman" (Ishiguro, p.32-33).

OBSERVATIONS AND INTERLINKING IDEAS:

The significant aspect of the novel is that the primary source of interest is not what happens, but what the narrator says and why he says. There is a sense of an inherent verbal release in the novel. Stevens speaks like a man who has waited a long time for an opportunity to express himself. Now that he has his chance, Stevens hardly indulges in an uncontrolled, decorous, restrained. Stevens very well appears to be a methodical when he speaks as when he performs his duties as a butler. His language is pure "butler-speak," as David Lodge has called it- a language that in itself "has no literary merit whatsoever [...] completely lacking in wit, sensuousness and originality." Stevens holds our attention, however, because his language repeatedly confesses its own shortcomings as a means of telling his story. The very way of telling his story is greatly structured within his workings of the mind.

Stevens tries to live up to the stereotype of the English butler, for which his employer is paying good money, by "thinking of some witty reply":

“More like swallows than crows, I would have said, sir. From the migratory aspect” (Ishiguro, pp. 16-17).

In Stevens’s mind, the night when he rejected Miss Kenton’s advances is inextricably connected with his memory of one of Lord Darlington’s most important conferences, which brought together several high class people. It is typical of Stevens that he brushes off Miss Kenton by insisting that he must attend to his duties because “events of global significance are taking place in this house at this very moment” (Ishiguro, p-218). This vividly highlights the fact that Steven’s commitment to professional duties repeatedly serves as an excuse for evading the deeper emotional issues of his life. This very well indicated that he has ingrained the idea of service towards his master in his mind.

The nature of this evasion also prepares us for the second significant change of perspective on Stevens’s part- a change that concerns his attitude toward his employer. Stevens, as we have noted, is utterly devoted to Lord Darlington, and refuses to doubt him even when young Cardinal states quite plainly that he has become the “pawn” of the Nazis (p-222). To this statement Stevens blatantly remarks, “I’m sorry, sir, but I have to say that I have every trust in his lordship’s good judgement” (p-225). By the closing scene on Weymouth pier, this trust has evaporated, taking with it both Stevens’s idealized image of Lord Darlington and his own self-respect:

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

The above lines give the sense that Stevens sees that in giving Lord Darlington his unquestioning devotion, he has condemned himself to a fate even worse than his master’s for in leading a merely vicarious existence he has become that pawn of a pawn. At this moment of partial self-recognition, Stevens is forced to accept that the concept on which he has founded his entire life- dignity- is utter hollow. The Butler-narration of Stevens in the novel distinguishes himself as Everyman figure.

Steven's Prufrockian rationalizations and self-deceptions, his constant reordering of the past in the very act of recalling it merely confirm his extraordinary ordinariness. The different contours and dimensions of the narrative, its obsessions, repetitions, and ironic reversals, give expressive shape to what are, in the end, utterly normal ways of thinking and feeling. What the novel shows us is the heart and mind of an entirely ordinary character, who suffers because he lacks deep insight into his own life.

The pretext for Stevens's inquiry into the meaning of dignity is his attempt to answer the question, "what is a great butler?" (Ishiguro, p-31). In order to find out the answer of this very question, Stevens turns to the fictitious Hayes Society, which asserts in the pages of the *Quarterly for the Gentleman's Gentleman* that a butler of "the very first rank" is distinguished by a "dignity in keeping with his position" (Ishiguro, p-33). Stevens contends that dignity may be acquired "over many years of self-training and the careful absorbing of experience" (Ishiguro, p- 33). We also find how Stevens explains that dignity "has to do crucially with a butler's ability not to abandon the professional being he inhabits" in the following lines:

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

Ishiguro has claimed, somewhat misleadingly, that Stevens, as the "perfect butler" is a metaphor "for someone who is trying to actually erase the emotional part of him that may be dangerous and that could really hurt him in his professional area." A very minute observation of the novel depicts the otherwise. Stevens's preoccupation with professional dignity, which is reflected in his efforts to maintain a controlled and reserved narratorial demeanour, serves to repress personal feeling. The novel thus reflects the emotional and psychological cost of the dignified style for a man who is consumed by his professional role.

CONCLUSION:

All told, *The Remains of the Day* can very well be told to be the first-person retrospective account of an aging narrator. However, what strikes is the lucid, tightly-controlled narrative which is remarkable for its deftness and a beguiling simplicity of surface that expresses subtly interwoven themes both of pain and loss. The title of the novel is indeed shrouded in mystery. On one level, “the remains of the day” refers to what is left of Stevens’s life: the final years, the reflections are supposed to be the best of all, because it is then that one is able to put one’s feet up and look back with satisfaction at a life well spent. This, again, points to another of the title’s implications: what is meant by “day” is the glorious past, when Lord Darlington’s fame was at its height, and Stevens himself was at the peak of his profession.

However, there is a subtle irony in the life of Stevens’s life which forces us to consider less glorious interpretations. The more Stevens tells us glorious days or his days have been well spent, the more we doubt it. While we might take the “remains” of Stevens’s day to signify what persists or endures of his past life, we might view them also as its ruins or corpse. Stevens’s entire narration might be characterized as a stumbling endeavour to salvage something valuable, or at least defensible, from a life that he suspects has been wasted. The captivating narration of the mind grippingly adorned with the psychoanalytical ramifications is what makes the novel stand out. The vivid portrayal of the thoughts of the minds of Stevens also aptly justifies the research problem as well as the hypothesis thereby proving the novel to be an all-encompassing whole.

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