

# **The Constant Butler**

**Role Strain and Role Confusion in Kazuo Ishiguro's**

*The Remains of the Day*

Anton Altgård

EN5001

School of Humanities

Halmstad University

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Supervisor: Marcus Richey

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## Introduction

Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* is a masterful comedy of manners that narrates the tale of the aged butler Stevens, who on a journey through the English countryside finds himself on a proverbial trip down Memory Lane. This frame story envelops a tale that is told in flashbacks and recollections, which in-between philosophizing on his occupation and the disgrace of his late former master relates how Stevens essentially gave up friends, family and potentially even love to pursue the questionable ethics of professionalized servitude to perfection. These glimpses of Stevens' past are at once a both moving and entertaining study of identity, class and society that start off as a means of self-justification and climax in the narrator's realization of what he gave up, as well as how in doing so he failed to grasp precisely the quality that he sought to acquire all his life - that is to say dignity. Critical responses to *The Remains of the Day* have focused on all of these variables, with Gipson and Soucar outlining the political implications of class and society where Marcus, Terestchenko, Westerman, Foniokova and the joint works of Phelan and Martin examine the psychological undertones of the former. The mainly Marxist-inspired political analyses will be largely ignored in this paper, being that they can safely be deemed irrelevant to the topic. Terestchenko's theories on bad faith and ideological obedience, Marcus' outline of Ishiguro's use of self-deception as a character trait in Stevens and Westerman's and Phelan and Martin's respective arguments for and against Stevens' unreliable narration will on the other hand be referred to in some detail. Rather than disputing these works, this essay will tie most of them together in an analysis that focuses not on any one of these aspects per se, but rather attempts to provide a psychological framework on which these propositions may reasonably be based.

Although various approaches to psychotherapy have been applied to *The Remains of the Day* in the aforementioned analyses, none have linked it to Role Theory, as defined in the context of Psychodrama. However if the abnormal importance that Stevens attributes to becoming a perfect butler is taken into account, *The Remains of the Day* is practically saturated with textual evidence of how social role imbalance is the source of Stevens' dilemmas both in the narrated and the narrating time. Although whether it was Ishiguro's intention to create this effect is unclear, the setting of the novel in a world that is transitioning from the war eras to modernity moreover fits in all too well with the sociological aspects of Role Theory. In brief, it has been proposed that changes in society that render certain social roles obsolete put pressure on the individuals that hold these roles to either adapt or renew themselves in pace with societal developments. Stevens, being a butler, would have felt such strain acutely, being that the decline of the great British houses over the aforementioned period led to a sharp decline in domestic service professions at the time. (Lee, 1988)

Drawing upon both the Psycho-dramatic and the Sociologic aspects of Role Theory, this paper aims first of all to propose that Ishiguro's main character in *The Remains of the Day* suffers from an over-developed occupational role, which has eliminated or at the very least marginalized his other social roles. Secondly it will argue that the latter's reflections that are brought about over the course of the plot are a consequence of role strain, which as a palpable yet indirect plot element forces him realize that his occupational role is slowly but steadily becoming a thing of the past. In facing such a fate, he is in turn forced to confront how his extreme commitment to his job has left the rest of his life empty, for which he begins to look back at and reconsider the roles that he could have had but neglected in life. On top of outlining this approach to rationalizing the events of the novel, the paper will theorize upon that in choosing to tell such a story, Ishiguro is promoting a view of the world

as a place in constant motion, in which, like the post-modernist perspective, there are no set or universal values that withstand the test of time. Juxtaposed against the satirical undertones of the novel, as well as against the time period in which it is set, this statement will in turn be interpreted as critique against the destructive qualities of conventions in society.

## **Mr. Stevens' Relationships**

We are introduced to Stevens as the narrator of the novel, which is effectively told in the form of his journal over the course of the planning and execution of a motoring trip. As we are thus entitled to his point of view, we are early on acquainted with the man behind the proverbial pantomime that in his opinion constitutes a butler's professional dignity. Yet although his absolutist opinions on the matter are not truly expressed until a later stage of the novel, it is apparent from the very beginning of the novel that Stevens is unusually dedicated to his vocation. Suffice it to say that work-related reveries invariably dominate his discourse, bringing us everything from generational differences within the field (121) to general philosophizing on the ideal butler (33) in conjunction with events to which such musings lack obvious connections. Yet as obvious as it is that Stevens attributes great importance to his job, one has to read between the lines to find out just to what extent he prioritizes being a butler over other aspects of life. Using Role Theory of Psychodrama as a framework, this entails analyzing to what extent Stevens has developed different societal roles that he inhabits in different settings, such as a professional role that is assumed at work versus a husband, father or friend role that defines his behavior at home or in other informal settings (Clayton 1993, Biddle 1986). As seems to be the case with Stevens at a glance, these roles may be over- or under-developed, which given the zero-sum nature of personality traits leads to disproportionate neglect or enhancement of other social roles. An under-developed social role

must thus have been neglected in favor of a different role, which presumably is more in line with the individual's preferences; whereas an over-developed role would have expanded out of proportion at the expense of one or more other social roles (Clayton 1993). Yet as obvious as Stevens' workaholic tendencies might be, it would be problematic to assume that he exhibits a disproportionate role distribution simply on account of the nature of his discourse. Suffice it to say that his work-oriented prose could just as well be circumstantial, being that he claims to have professional reasons for undertaking his journey. For this reason, the key to examining whether or not he suffers from an over-developed occupational role lies not in his work-oriented thought patterns, but instead in his interactions with the people around him. These highlight not only his relationships to others, but also aspects and qualities that are over-represented, unilateral or even absent in these. While each and every person that Stevens interacts with provides clues to his dysfunction in this department, it is in his somewhat more personal relationships to his father and the former colleague Miss Kenton that more palpable evidence may be found.

The father and son relationship between Stevens junior and senior demonstrates Stevens work-oriented personality particularly well, fact as it is that both individuals seem to have stressed professional esteem over healthy family relations. Stevens' senior, for one, is primarily elaborated on as an accomplished butler who, in spite of his supposedly unrefined character, achieved Stevens junior's idea of professional dignity while he was at the peak of his career (43). Or so we are led to believe, though it should be noted that it is a much older Stevens Senior that we are presented with in Stevens Junior's memories, and that the latter only has second-hand proof of that his father ever amounted to what others claim he has. Nevertheless, this very description of the father highlights Stevens junior's view of the latter. Indeed, any esteem for his father that Stevens junior possesses appears to be chiefly based on his father's professional dignity. Not only does he defend his father when the latter's

competence is questioned both by Miss Kenton (58 and 62) and his employer (64), but he also consents to the man's continued role in the running of Darlington Hall in spite of the latter's evident health problems (69). Granted, Stevens junior's lack of concern in this department is more understandable if one takes into account Stevens senior's own priorities. Suffice it to say that where Stevens senior at least recognizes the need for lightening his father's workload, if only after due pressure from concerned parties of the household, Stevens senior appears to respond to it by attempting to smooth over his ailments by blaming exterior factors for his recent mistakes (68-69). Arguably he might have done so out of sheer embarrassment, whether to lessen any sense of personal guilt or as a means of denying that age has begun to infringe on his ability to carry out his tasks. However this notion is proved wrong at Stevens seniors' death-bed, in which the elderly butler ends up in during a grand event that his and his son's employer is hosting at Darlington Hall. Stevens junior does manage to find time for his father at this point, though Stevens senior's main concern seems not to be his failing health as much as it is whether or not the ongoing event is fully "in hand". He voices as much in spite of that he suspects he is on the verge of passing away, which is apparent in the subsequent attempt to communicate his personal feelings to Stevens junior (101). This attempt takes the form of an afterthought more so than a matter of great importance, for which it expresses an emotional distance between father and son that has only been hinted at previously. Unsurprisingly it fails to bridge the gap that has long since developed between father and son, just as it fails to compel Stevens junior to stay behind to attend to his dying father instead of returning to his role in running the party. Stevens junior's social role as the son of William Stevens dies with the father shortly afterwards, though considering that their conversations had for some time been reduced to work-related communication (66), this role had in all likelihood long since ceased to exist in everything but Stevens juniors' rhetoric. That is, presuming that it had existed in the first place, as given their respective commitments to their

shared profession, it is possible that their relationship never assumed a more filial character. If such was the case, it could furthermore be speculated that Stevens junior, for all his thoughts on the matter of his profession, became the near-perfect butler that we are introduced to not so much from analyzing great contributors thereof as he did by emulating his father.

Yet although Stevens might have acquired his dedication to his job from within the family, he has taken this aspect of himself even further than his father ever did. Of this his own existence (and that of the one brother who perished in the Boer war) is the most obvious proof, it being the physical evidence of that at some point before or during his father's career, his father fell in love and started a family. Stevens Junior has on the other hand achieved none of the above, nor does it, considering his age in the narrating time, seem likely that he ever will on both accounts. This could, of course, be attributed to sheer misfortune, or for all that matters to a lack of interest in settling down. That being said, a key element of the plot relates how Stevens gave up the potential love of his life to continue the pursuit of his ideals. Given his work-oriented personality, it is hardly surprising that the person who was the closest to breaking through his professional constraints also was a colleague of his at Darlington Hall. Miss Kenton, who was once the resident house-keeper of the household, might have been a nuisance of sorts to begin with for Stevens, being that she was the most active proponent of Stevens' father's much-needed retirement. Their disagreement on this topic created plenty of complications in the household, as her and Stevens' inability to see eye to eye on the topic resulted in general communication problems that eventually became so severe that it forced the two of them to keep in touch with one another exclusively in writing (83). However the point of contention became a unifying factor following Stevens' father's demise, after which they got over their differences to the point where they were not only able to resume direct communication, but also commenced meeting regularly in Miss Kenton's parlor for a cup of cocoa at the end of each work day. While Stevens emphasizes the professional character of



these rendezvous to the reader, even he goes as far as to admit that they discussed informal matters on occasion (155). Although this new dimension to their relationship fails to prevent further clashes between the two of them, subsequent conflicts undermine rather than strengthen the professional reasons for their meetings to a point where they appear more as two friends than they do two colleagues. The dismissal of the Jewish maids from the household, for one, appears to spark to life some of their initial hostility, as Stevens supports their employer to the fullest in a matter on which Miss Kenton threatens to hand in her notice. However Miss Kenton fails to act on her resolve, for which the episode results in friendly teasing from Stevens' side and a most personal confession of cowardice from that of Miss Kenton's (56-61). Similarly the arrival of the inexperienced housemaid Lisa, whom Stevens doubts, and Miss Kenton assures, will be a productive employee, ends in an emphasis rather than a decline of the familiarity between them in spite of how they essentially prove each other to be wrong. Technically Stevens is triumphant, as although the housemaid turns out to be an excellent worker, she soon elopes with one of the footmen of the house. However prior to this event Stevens and Miss Kenton engage in intimate bantering about the girl in a manner that surely cannot be claimed to be professional (165). Moreover Stevens does his best to console Miss Kenton after the girl's departure, when given their previous interactions one would have thought him more likely to boast of his correct assumption of the girl's unsuitability for employment (167).

While these incidents seem to have brought about Miss Kenton's admiration for Stevens, Stevens proves his meager capacity for assuming different social roles in how he comes to think of the change in their relationship as something problematic. It is on these grounds that he rebukes her supposed advances when she intrudes on the privacy of his parlor (178), as well as why he fails to swallow the bait when she tries to make him jealous by seeing another man on her contracted days off (180). Rather these episodes stress to him the

need to re-establish his personal boundaries, which he rationalizes as a necessity in the claim that “There is one situation and one situation only in which a butler who cares about his dignity may feel free to unburden himself of his role: that is to say, when he is entirely alone” (178). This rather harsh view of his occupational requirements underlines what Stevens expects from life, both in terms of what is important and what he expects to have aside from his job. This attitude causes him to come up with a reason for discontinuing their evening meetings as well, thereby ensuring that the professional aspect of their relationship once again marginalizes their friendship in spite of Miss Kenton’s continued attempts to keep it alive (184).

Either of the above examples of role dysfunction may be further explored through the corresponding role theory of Sociology, which is more or less directly related to the psychotherapeutic version of the discipline. While it too is termed Role Theory, it does not concern how a balanced or imbalanced array of social roles contributes to the individual’s overall mental condition. Rather it focuses on the different and sometimes conflicting demands and expectations that arise for the inhabitants of a particular role set (Merton 1957, 113). This might seem like a redundant factor in analyzing Stevens, who for all intents and purposes only ever seems to inhabit a professional role. If on the other hand we take sociological role problems into account, we encounter further proof that Stevens has taken his professionalism a step too far. The term role confusion is particularly relevant to his case. Role confusion pertains to the dilemma of which role to inhabit in a situation at which two or more conflicting roles are applicable, such as if a teacher was to have one of their family members in their classes. While a well-adjusted individual presumably would be able to maintain the professionalism with which they treat their other students in this example, it is hardly a stretch to assume that a teacher who in such a situation subjects their family member to preferential treatment in some shape or form suffers from an over-developed filial role – be

it as sibling, parent, grandparent, spouse or whichever other social role that is applicable. In the case of Mr. Stevens, then, it could be proposed that additional proof of his over-developed occupational role is to be found in instances where he insisted on a professional approach in spite of facing a choice of one or more other social roles to inhabit. Such situations invariably also occur in his interactions with both Miss Kenton and Stevens Senior, for which we will return to these individuals once more.

In brief, role confusion is quite possibly the very reason behind why Stevens fails to adopt the role of son to his father, or the role of lover or at the very least love interest of Miss Kenton. For starters, Stevens' admission that he and his father conversed less and less before his father's accident in the summer house (66) allows for the interpretation that they were once more intimate with one another. As this observation pertains to a time period over which Stevens' senior had been a colleague of Stevens, Stevens would for some time have faced role confusion in terms of whether he ought to treat his father like a colleague or a family member. That he chose the former can be attributed to his overwhelmingly work-oriented personality, though the fact that even the briefest conveying of work-related information tended to assume an air of mutual embarrassment hints at that Stevens never straightened out how to act in the company of his father. Moreover, taking Stevens' aforementioned likeness to the latter into account, the word mutual seems to imply that this case of role confusion was shared ever since the moment Stevens' senior became a member of staff at Darlington Hall.

The shared workplace might similarly have impacted on Stevens' ability to become attached to Miss Kenton. In this relationship the role confusion is all the more evident, as Stevens appears to choose the wrong role with which to regard Miss Kenton in situations like their meeting following the death of her aunt. Stevens' underlying intention here is according to Stevens himself to inquire if there is anything he can do for Miss Kenton, as he

had previously been so rude as to forget to offer her his condolences. However instead he brings up the rather irrelevant subject of whether or not the new recruits at Darlington Hall are settling in well (187). As he moreover presses the point in spite of its tactlessness in that situation, he demonstrates clearly that when faced with conflicting role options, he gravitates towards his professional role as a butler instead of that which he could have inhabited as an alternative.

### **Mr. Steven's Self-deception**

Stevens' inability to adapt to different social roles is an interesting character concept not only for the psychological aspect that it lends in the book, or for the hilarity that is occasionally produced because of it, but also for how Ishiguro employs it as a driving factor of the plot. Only an overdeveloped professional role could, for one, result in the blind obedience that Stevens exhibits towards his employer in the dismissal of the Jewish housemaids (155). Where a perfect butler obeys his master's every whim, a well-adjusted butler would hardly have acquired the degree of ideological conviction that Terestchenko identifies as the sort of cog-in-the-machinery mentality that Stanley Milgram studied in the Milgram experiment (2007; 11-12). For the uninitiated, this study aimed to explain events such as the Nazi holocaust by examining whether ordinary people would go against authority for the sake of their moral convictions. The experiment by which this was tested involved what for the participants appeared to be torture of increasing severity, yet a considerable amount of the participants proceeded with it when prompted to do so in the name of science by the apparent authority that presided over the test. Others protested or refused, though the point at which they did so varied from early on to just before or even after the experiment reached fatal proportions (Milgram 1963). Someone falling into the latter department would

be more likely to follow Miss Kenton's example when confronted with anti-Semitism in their employer, voicing disgust or disagreement when at first introduced to the idea only to then stay silent when it comes to actually doing something about it. Stevens, on the other hand, is an obvious member of the first category for how he does what he is told in spite of his moral convictions. A similar example can be found in Stevens' unwillingness to question his employer's sense in getting involved in international affairs, and that even after being prompted to consider it by the more critically minded Mr. Cardinal Junior (232-233). Here Terestchenko uses Milgram's theories to suggest that the aforementioned ideological conviction, as best summarized in pride in obedience and professional performance, turns Stevens into an instrument of destruction – which in Stevens' case amounts to an indirect and somewhat diffuse contribution to the undermining of the British Foreign Ministry (235). Yet as vague as his role in the matter is, the proposal seems all the more accurate for how it wouldn't be a stretch to imagine a Stevens blinding himself to the killing of innocents in concentration camps, had his master happened to be German. Although arguably minor features of the story, these aspects contribute to the liberating climax of the plot, at which point Stevens looks back on his life as a failure to achieve dignity rather than as a series of successive steps to achieving it through personifying his profession (255-256). Yet there is more to this critical moment than the realization that his blind obedience as a butler is not as dignified as he had previously thought.

Another concept that is dealt with by the sociological approach to role theory is role strain, which Macionis and Gerber (2010; 129) define as the stress or strain that an individual experiences when incompatible behaviors, expectations or obligations are associated with a social role. In the case of Stevens, there exists plenty of textual evidence to suggest that role strain factors into his life. He frequently remarks on the changing times, which have brought him as a butler from the coordination of a dual-digit number of staff in the management of a

manor-like house to providing equal service with a mere staff of four (7). These changes, although cited to have occurred after Lord Darlington's death and the subsequent selling of the house to Stevens' employer in the narrating time (the American Mr. Farraday), presumably mirror the gradual decline of the servant profession that occurred after the Second World War. In spite of these changes, Stevens has not wished to burden the remaining cook and housemaids of his four-man staff with unfamiliar duties, for which the sheer weight of tasks he has assigned to himself instead of to his supporting employees has made him both overworked and prone to occasional errors (9-10, 51). These he refers to as proof of that he requires another member of staff, which after reading the letter of the former Miss Kenton's (now Miss Benn's) failed marriage (50) in turn becomes the primary motivation for his motoring trip to visit his former colleague.

That being said, there is more to Stevens' motoring trip than the recruitment of a competent housekeeper to assist with and oversee the various tasks around Darlington Hall that needs doing. This is apparent in how over the course of the journey Stevens re-reads the letter at least twice, each with the result that he gets less and less convinced of that Miss Kenton is really communicating a desire to return to Darlington Hall. Moreover Stevens retrospective pondering over what might have happened had he acted differently with Miss Kenton hints at that he has had good reason to reconsider his choices. In that light, Marcus' (2006) outline of Ishiguro's use of self-deception in his portrayal of Stevens is evident. On top of explaining self-deception as contradictions between a person's behaviour and subconscious, Marcus defines Fingarette's concept of self-deception applied to narrators as the equivalent of repeated avoidance of telling the whole story. This, in turn, leads to gaps in the narrative that signify the particular event or fact that the narrator wishes to leave unsaid. To cover up these gaps, the narrator is likely to seek means of filling them by way of inventing a story that matches the facts that they have actually stated (130). This theory is practically verified by

Stevens, who is repeatedly revealed to have modified his story over the course of the narrative. The most obvious example is how Stevens' self-proclaimed professional angle to his motoring trip later appears to be a way of rationalizing his altogether different desire to see Miss Kenton both to his employer and to himself, as to do anything for a mere personal reason would be to go against his dominant social role. That leads, in turn, to the question why Stevens suddenly finds reason to connect with a former prospective love interest, when prior to that he seemed to have been alienated to the concept of personal relationships. Once more the answer may be found in sociologic role theory, as factors beyond Stevens' personal situation contribute to an added dimension of role strain that could well have had the aforementioned consequences.

As has already been mentioned, the progress of time has resulted in a great deal of changes in Stevens' profession. For one, he is carrying out duties that traditionally would be delegated to lesser staff members. On top of that he is struggling with the concept of bantering, which his new employer has indirectly introduced him to and which he has come to think of as an expected addition to his role. Granted, Stevens' own account relates only to the task distribution at Darlington Hall, but he also encounters proof of that similar or even greater alterations have occurred in other houses. Valets visiting alongside their masters are said to be sparse, as well as of a very different stock and breed from what they used to be before the Second World War in terms of their professional dedication (19). Another example is one English colonel's sole servant. This former batman is cited to be a combination of all imaginable household staff roles in one, acting at once as butler, valet, chauffeur and general cleaner (125). While this jack of all trades must be an extreme version of the increased demands on the average servant, surely he serves as a reminder for a butler of Stevens' caliber that he is falling behind on the times. This effect is in turn augmented by the batman's comment on his employer's property. "He ain't got much use for a house this size now," (125)

neatly summarizes the decline of the great English houses by referring to the change in the British social climate that caused it. Although little more than an offhanded remark, it must be presumed that Stevens' work-oriented personality would interpret it from a professional point of view, for which a likely association would be how the redundancy of a grand household is equated with the dissolution of the large servant staff that once ran it – or, for all that matters, of the butler's standing as the chief coordinator thereof. Now, a younger butler might have had the option of evolving with the times, perhaps by developing additional competences along the lines of how the aforementioned batman has taken on a general servant role in the place of an increasingly outdated specialist variety. Alternatively they could change professions altogether, becoming something else entirely for which there is an increased demand in society. However a butler of Stevens' age is hardly fit to change profession. He has no choice but to expand on his competences as well as he is able, but his potential in terms of the extent to which he is able to develop a greater range of abilities is limited precisely on account of his age. Stevens might not have recognized this problem for what it is, but he has picked up on his shortcomings and wondered about their implications. Granted, he writes these off as signs of being overworked, assuming the cause to lay not so much in his new responsibilities as it does in the amount of them that he has on his list of things to do. However *something* provokes enough of a change in Stevens for him to take off on his motoring trip, and given the textual evidence of a move from specialists to generalists among servants, it is fathomable that Stevens experiences role strain in the form of the feeling that he is no longer on top of his profession. The subsequent feeling of inadequacy that Stevens must be attaching to his outdated social role normally leads to role change, or in other words the gradual abandonment of the obsolete role in favor of either new or existing social roles that remain relevant to the individual's situation. In Stevens' case there are no other roles to resort to, given that he for most of his life has neglected assuming any role but that of a butler in the



presence of others. However that does not mean that he would not try to find an alternative role to define himself by. On the contrary, it may be assumed that the very reason for Stevens' choice to visit Miss Kenton lays in what they could have had together, as Stevens' allusion to it suggests that he was aware of what could have happened if he had acted differently with her. Furthermore the reason he suddenly finds himself preoccupied with his former relationship to her to the point where he reads more than he ought to into her letter is on account of said role strain, which is forcing him to re-examine his roles in life.

Taking the role strain aspects of the narrative into account, it seems natural for Stevens to mull over his interactions with Miss Kenton, as well as to gradually move from a predominantly occupational perspective as the dignified butler of Darlington Hall to the ultimate collapse of his extreme professionalism, and the subsequent insights about his life on a more personal level. Indeed, with the concept of role strain in mind the very process that leads Stevens to the climax of the plot becomes even more apparent, thereby raising a number of questions about earlier interpretations of *The Remains of the Day*. Phelan and Martin's evidence of Stevens' questionable credibility as a narrator is particularly curious, as role strain offers an alternative explanation to Stevens' apparent propensity for lies and pretension. The times at which he relies on these to get out of uncomfortable situations occur after episodes in which his sense of role strain would have intensified, such as after his encounter with the colonel's jack of all trades of a servant, who must inadvertently have demonstrated his versatility by helping Stevens' out with his vehicle (125); or, at an earlier stage of the plot, after being questioned about his own and Darlington Hall's authenticity by one of Mr. Farraday's American guests (130). Stevens' mounting role confusion is apparent in these scenes, as while he is becoming reluctant to present himself simply as the late Lord Darlington's butler, he has no other clearly defined social roles which he may fall back on when he feels that his occupational identity is for some reason unsuitable. Consequentially he

constructs identities on the spot, for which he ends up telling lies as a means of breaking free of his professional role. A similar example would be his accidental night in the village of Moscombe, where, while quartering with a couple named the Taylors, he is playing along with the assumption that he is a member of the British nobility to the point where he is nigh unto intentionally misleading the locals that have gathered to speak with him (197). Here the charade gets rather out of hand, for which Stevens is grateful when the following morning the local doctor recognizes him for what he really is (218). That being said, he never took the initiative to correct the mistake himself, for which his increasing desire to be someone other than the butler he has been all his life is discernible. These episodes fit into the process of role change as tentative attempts for Stevens to escape his professional constraints. Yet while they hint at a form of the inner struggle for self-justification that Foniokova proposes in *The Butler's Suspicious Dignity* (2006; 10), they are not, unlike what the aforementioned scholar supposes, necessarily evidence of Stevens' unreliable narration. Far from it, his critical readings of Miss Kenton's letter at different points of his journey hint at a general transformation within Stevens, as where he once felt sure of that he read proof of Miss Kenton's desire to return to Darlington Hall he no longer finds anything of the sort. In these moments of insight Stevens unwittingly confronts his tendency to rationalize his thoughts from an occupational perspective, for which, akin to Westerman's idea of the split subject (2004), Stevens becomes an increasingly reliable narrator in spite of his dubious credibility at the start of the narrative in pace with how he gradually comes to terms with his actual motivations. These are most likely that he simply wishes to see Miss Kenton again, and that perhaps he even hopes for a second chance at becoming an intimate friend of hers now that she seems to have separated from her husband. Either way he does appear to reconcile himself to the idea of a rendezvous with Miss Kenton for personal reasons, if only to find out that he was wrong to think that she wants to return to Darlington Hall or to believe that he would find

her in a state of loneliness and despair over her broken marriage. For why else would he be so melancholic at the pier scene, if not out of the realization not only that the profession to which he devoted his life is disappearing, but that in the very act of devoting himself to it, he abstained from things in life that could well have turned out to be more lasting? Granted, he remains work-oriented even at this point, which is adequately summarized in his response to Miss Kenton's earlier query of what is to come next in life for him. "Well, whatever awaits me, Miss Benn, I know I'm not awaited by emptiness. If only I were. But oh no, there's work, work, and more work," (249) he says, with a sense of resignation about the way he speaks it that hints at the emergence of a broader spectrum of considerations in him - ones that could only have been brought about by a renewed focus on himself as a person. However this development is curiously and most anti-climactically negated come Stevens' emotional exchange with the stranger on the pier. Here Stevens initially appears to take the stranger's advice to heart, though his subsequent internal resolve to move with the times by learning to banter with his employer betrays that he has somehow entirely missed the point of his recent experiences. With this in mind, his earlier comment on his future appears underlined by denial instead of resignation - which, given the context, is in all likelihood a reaction to his disappointment at finding that his hopes for himself and Miss Kenton were for naught. To smooth over the emptiness he does feel, courtesy of their brief reunion, he falls back into his old self, thereby negating the miniscule steps he has taken towards balancing out his professional role set with alternative interests.

## **Beyond Mr. Stevens**

In recognizing how role theory underlines most events in Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*, it is safe to assume that Ishiguro's implementation of sociologic and psychotherapeutic role theory is not just a by-product of the plot or character portrait that he

wants to convey. On the contrary, Stevens' case of role confusion is rather pronounced, whereas the role strain that begets it is so prominent a feature of the plot that it is essentially what propels it forward. As both aspects address the passage of time and its effects on people, he appears to be conveying a view of the world as a place in constant motion, in which nothing but change itself is universal and in which people therefore face the choice to either adapt or despair. This is an interesting choice considering the setting of the novel, being that it is juxtaposed against a culture and society that enforced harsh and often arbitrary social constraints that would have complicated moving with the times. Suffice it to say that many of Stevens' butler ideals must be presumed to have been expected in his day and age, as after all he admits to reaching many of his conclusions through discussions with fellow servants (31 and 34). Especially tangible is the barrier between personal and professional life, which is blatantly obvious in how love and marriage apparently are equated with unemployment and moreover hinted at in how family relations suffer similar strain. Given these tendencies, Stevens' role dysfunction might once have been born out of necessity, or at the very least been intensified as a means of fuelling his career. Yet if Stevens' fate is anything to go by, it must be assumed that the key to adaptation lies not so much in devotion to a single area of life as it does in a balance between multiple commitments, if only so as to be able to compensate for turbulence in some areas of life with stability in others. This taken into account, *The Remains of the Day* outlines an intriguing catch-22 that translates to a cutting critique against culture and society alike. To spell it out, if nothing but change is universal, isn't humanity actively infringing on its own ability to cope with this fact by imposing on its members the constraints of rigid conventions? The problem is evident in Ishiguro's twentieth century Britain, for which it bears wondering if, where and to what extent the phenomenon occurs in today.

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