



The Remains of the Day

Tradition and the Individualist Survivor

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This Master's Thesis is carried out as a part of the education at the University of Agder and is therefore approved as a part of this education. However, this does not imply that the University answers for the methods that are used or the conclusions that are drawn.

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Chapter 1: Introduction and Thesis Statement

“No one can live entirely on their own, nor can any country or society exist in isolation.”

- Daisaku Ikeda¹ s

1.0 Introduction

Isolation has long been portrayed in films, plays and novels. Isolation is often found in tragedies, usually as either a direct outcome or consequence of the play, like in Shakespeare’s *Othello*. In it the reader and audience learn how isolation causes the downfall of every character, and how their tragic fate originates from misconstrues and inaccurate conceptions.² John Morreall points out in his chart *Characteristics of Tragedy and Comedy* that tragedies highlight the consequences of one’s actions³ which may ultimately result in social isolation. Tragedies in general mainly deal with what would befall human beings – their disasters, their fortunes and misfortunes.⁴ Originally, their qualities of par excellence, high-breed passion and class of distinguishment would not prevent them from catastrophe and despair, thus emphasising the tragedy further. As stated in *Dictionary of Literary Terms & Literary Theory*: “Tragedy is a disaster that happens to other people, and the greater the person, so it seems, the more acute is their tragedy”.⁵ Furthermore, Aristotle defined tragedy in *Poetics* as

“The imitation of an action that is serious and also, as having magnitude ,complete in itself; in language with pleasurable accessories, each kind brought in separately in parts of the work; in a dramatic, not in a narrative form; with incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish its catharsis of such emotions.”⁶

¹ Brainy Quote 2014

² Shakespeare 1996

³ 2014

⁴ Cuddon 1999:927

⁵ Cuddon 1999:928

⁶ Cuddon 1999: 926

Hopelessness and unavoidability became the profound elements of tragedy, and is to some extent still an important part of modern tragedy. Aristotle declared that the spectator would be cleansed by their feelings of compassion, sympathy and apprehension brought out by joining in on the hero or heroine's sorrow, anxiety and anguish.⁷ According to Aristotle plots could be either complex or simple seeing that the actions often behold a compound of both.⁸ Furthermore, he claimed that a tragedy consists of six important elements; "plot, character, thought, diction, music and spectacle."⁹ Aristotle emphasises the importance of a good plot, considering that to be the most important characteristic of a tragedy. A good plot is a plausible one, order in the plot must be logically linked and have one focal point¹⁰. The protagonist in a tragedy will have a 'tragic flaw', meaning the tragic hero or heroine will have a defect that will ultimately lead to their fall.¹¹ However, in modern times, playwrights from Europe have since the 18th and 19th century endeavoured to experiment with the tragedy formulae.¹² Since the 16th century tragedies have been altered greatly, transformed both in tone and form. Regret, grief, torment and disaster are still part of modern tragedy, but the plot often revolves around a different type of protagonist, the common man, an ordinary individual.¹³ Unlike the protagonists of tragedies in ancient times, what characterises modern tragedy's protagonist is not his manifestation as a hero, but antihero. Unlike traditional dramas he normally lacks dignity and courage.¹⁴ The main character is often considered ordinary, insignificant, passive, dishonourable, gauche or mendacious instead of proclaiming heroism, greatness, decorum or control.¹⁵

In the novel *The Remains of the Day* (1989) by Kazuo Ishiguro and the play *Quartermaine's Terms* (1981) by Simon Gray, isolation and tragedy seem to go hand in hand. The lone protagonists, James Stevens and St John Quartermain, face isolation caused by their lack of will or ability to change. Their tragic choices lead them to not live a full life, which ultimately fades out in the afternoon sun.

⁷ Cuddon 1999:928

⁸ Cuddon 1999:926

⁹ Leitch, Cain, Finke, Johnson, McGowan, Sharpley-Whiting & Williams 2010:85

¹⁰ Leitch et al 2010:85

¹¹ Cuddon 1999:933

¹² Cuddon 1999:932

¹³ Cuddon 1999:933

¹⁴ Abrams 2005:333

¹⁵ Abrams 2005:12

1.2 Thesis Statement

Isolation is the basic in all versions of tragedy proper, or other works written in the tragic mode. In this thesis I wish to argue that individual characters' inability to respond to social changes, thus isolating themselves, is the basic problem discussed.

My main focus is on the novel by Kazuo Ishiguro *The Remains of the Day*, but to broaden my discussions and for contrast of the novel I have chosen to include the play *Quartermaine's Terms* by Simon Gray. I will use Gray's play to point out similarities and differences between the two. Furthermore, I wish in particular to highlight the protagonist, Mr Stevens, in relation to Quartermaine. To start I will look into characters and plots in both *The Remains of the Day* and *Quartermaine's Terms*. I will examine how isolation precipitates their downfall and thus the tragedy. Other characters will be discussed; however, they will not be my primary focal points. This thesis will also consider and deliberate settings, plots and narrative modes. Background information about Kazuo Ishiguro will be given in order to fully understand all aspects of *The Remains of the Day*. Tragedy as a theme will be discussed, where I will look into what makes them tragedies, and if not: why not, and if *The Remains of the Day* is not a tragedy, is it then a comedy? Comedy is usually attributed to plays¹⁶, but an examination of the elements that are important in a comedy will be looked into in regards to *The Remains of the Day*. I will study what separates them from the classical tragedy, looking further into modern aspects of tragedy. There will be a chapter on social change in terms of it being both motive and reason for isolation. I will in the chapter of social change present the tv-series *Downton Abbey* in order to give contrast to *The Remains of the Day*. In the end a conclusion will be given.

¹⁶ Cuddon 1999:157

1.3 Background

I read *The Remains of the Day* by Kazuo Ishiguro for the first time at the age of 15. I was taken aback by stunning metaphors and the acute pain of the insolent Mr Stevens. When I now turn to the novel 12 years later my thoughts were yet again turned to the novel which had become one of my favourites. Whilst attending a course in Pragmatics, as a part of my bachelor's degree in English, I was given an assignment of my choice. In my assignment I chose to concentrate on 'silence in films'. My assignment then focused on Merchant Ivory Film's adaption of *The Remains of the Day* and its use of sound – or lack thereof. This ultimately inspired me to shift my attention to the novel for my master thesis as I remembered it to be as wonderful a novel as a film. Another reason for choosing *The Remains of the Day* was the fact that few had chosen it as a subject for a master thesis. The novel brings before me a number of themes and topics that arouses my curiosity. I personally like novels that make me think about different aspects in life. What I find the most interesting is that the subjects that I have mentioned in former paragraphs are not necessarily something that jumps out at you, sometimes one need to look closely; as if you did not know it was there before you were to come across it quite unexpectedly. What appreciate most in novels are novels that give me subtle surprises.

1.4 Author Kazuo Ishiguro

Born in Nagasaki, Japan on November 8th 1954, Ishiguro moved to Surrey, England at the age of six when his father joined a research project by the British government¹⁷. The Ishiguro family were to stay in England for only a short term and was expected to return to Japan. Ishiguro was, however, long way into his puberty before it became clear that they were to remain in England¹⁸. In 1974, after having travelled for a while in the US, Ishiguro attended the University of Kent, taking courses in English and Philosophy, earning him a Bachelor of Arts degree. After working for a homeless organisation he signed up for the famous novelist and scholar Malcom Bradbury creative writing-course at University of East Anglia.¹⁹ Having discarded his dream to become a song-singwriter, he published his first novel *A Pale View of Hills* in 1982, followed by *An Artist of the Floating World* in 1986. 1989 Ishiguro earned himself the prestigious Booker Prize for *The Remains of the Day* and Salman Rushie praised the book, stating that the book was executed with “a delicacy and humour that do not obscure the tough-mindedness beneath”.²⁰ Ishiguro went on to publish several more novels, such as *The Unconsoled* in 1995, *When We Were Orphans* in 2000 and *Never Let Me Go* in 2005, together with several screenplays and short fiction²¹.

Ishiguro himself admits that moving to England gave him a need to write about Japan because memories were starting to fade into his recollection²². Later his sense of removal and displacement would become one of his trademarks²³. Ishiguro does not see himself as a Japanese writer as such but more of a writer of general topics. As Sim²⁴ points out, there is a more complex nature to his novels. Indeed, his bicultural background makes him a writer ‘without a home’. Ishiguro points out that seeing he never belonged to any particular country or society, gave him the opportunity to be an ‘international writer’²⁵. What one will later

¹⁷ Sim 2009:6

¹⁸ Sim 2009:6

¹⁹ Sim 2009:6

²⁰ Sim 2009:7

²¹ Sim 2009:8-9

²² Sim 2009:10

²³ Sim 2009:10

²⁴ 2009:13

²⁵ Sim 2009:19-21

discover in this master thesis is that this aspect can also be found in *The Remains of the Day*. The portrayal of Mr Stevens' loyalty towards his master, his cool and aloof manner is strikingly similar to the notion many in the Western countries have in regards to the Japanese. This is quite possibly the reason behind Ishiguro's success behind *The Remains of the Day*; it embraces both societies in which he might call home.

As mentioned earlier, after its publication in 1989, *The Remains of the Day* was not only awarded him a place amongst the most popular authors, it also won the prestigious Booker Prize²⁶. Every year the best novel by a citizen of the Republic of Ireland, the Commonwealth or the United Kingdom is rewarded. Its goal is to highlight, praise and promote the finest works the English speaking work has to offer²⁷. Having won the prize, *The Remains of the Day* has over the years grown in popularity so much that Merchant Ivory Productions chose to convert the novel into a film, starring Anthony Hopkins as lead role Mr Stevens and Emma Thompson as Miss Kenton. Not only was the 1993 film adaption nominated for eight Oscars, six BAFTAs and five Golden Globes, it also went to win numerous awards throughout the world²⁸. The novel, too, continues to grow in popularity. Reviews found online reveal that its prizes and praises hit the nail on the spot; readers seem to have taken the novel to heart. As one reader stated "This is one of the most beautifully mannered, subtle books I've read in a long, long time."²⁹ *The Guardian* stated once that *The Remains of the Day* is one of the books one cannot live without³⁰.

²⁶ Matthews and Groes 2009:XV

²⁷ The Man Booker Prizes 2014

²⁸ Matthews and Groes 2009:XV

²⁹ Good Reads 2014

³⁰ The Guardian 2007

Chapter 2: Plot, Setting, Characters and Narrative Mode

“Storytelling is ultimately a creative act of pattern recognition. Through characters, plot and setting, a writer creates places where previously invisible truths become visible. Or the storyteller posits a series of dots that the reader can connect.”

- Douglas Coupland³¹

2.0.1 Plot in *The Remains of the Day*

In *The Remains of the Day* the narrator and protagonist is Mr Stevens, a narrator which gives his account of affairs from a first person point of view. Mr Stevens is the loyal butler at Darlington Hall, and has been so for many years. Once serving Lord Darlington, to whom he showed great loyalty, he currently serves under the wealthy American Mr Farraday. After receiving a letter from Miss Kenton, former housekeeper at Darlington Hall, stating that she is unhappy in her marriage, Mr Stevens decides to take a journey throughout the English countryside to visit her. The story unfolds as Mr Stevens commence his trip, re-reading the letter over and over again. As Mr Stevens re-reads Miss Kenton’s letter memories from his past re-emerge. This results in Mr Stevens assessing and reviewing his life and his choices. Moreover, it makes Mr Stevens ponder over topics like dignity³², loyalty, bantering³³, what it means to be a great butler³⁴ and greatness³⁵. As the story progresses it becomes evident that Mr Stevens and Miss Kenton developed a close relationship after years of working together. However, it also comes clear that neither party has admitted any feelings they might have harboured for each other. Now married and

³¹ Brainy Quote 2014

³² Ishiguro 2005:43

³³ Ishiguro 2005:14-20

³⁴ Ishiguro 2005: 32

³⁵ Ishiguro 2005: 29

named Mrs Benn, Miss Kenton has had a child and has been married for more than twenty years. Mr Stevens ruminates over his lost opportunities, but in the end Mr Stevens shifts focus on his life as a butler for Mr Farraday when he realises that there is no future with Mrs Benn³⁶.

Through the eyes of Mr Stevens the story unfolds. Whilst driving through the English countryside Mr Stevens recollects and reminisces over events from the past and present. The novel commences in present time as Mr Stevens' current employer, an American by the name of Mr Farraday, suggests that he should take the motorcar to see more of England whilst he is on a five week stay in USA³⁷. Mr Stevens declines at first but has a change of mind due to the arrival of Miss Kenton's letter, the first in almost seven years³⁸. The letter presents Mr Stevens with an idea that Miss Kenton might be the solution to his problems of late. According to Mr Stevens, these problems involve small errors that are a direct consequence of being understaffed. The former staff of Darlington Hall left for other jobs when Mr Farraday took over Darlington Hall. In Stevens' mind these difficulties can only be rectified by a more extended and suited staff plan.³⁹ Mr Stevens thinks Miss Kenton may be a solution to his problems as he learns of her declining marriage with her husband Mr Benn from her letter. Mr Stevens sets out on a journey to the West Country, setting up a meet with Miss Kenton in Cornwall, the place she is currently residing. The trip takes him through small English villages where he spends nights at local bed and breakfast hotels.

Throughout his journey he recalls his days serving Lord Darlington, particularly the time he served alongside Miss Kenton. It becomes a voyage of memories, like keepsakes from the past that is drawn out, despite the fact that he admits he has become a bit too occupied with them⁴⁰. One example is the story, the anecdote that Mr Stevens' father used to tell; "There was a certain story my father was fond of repeating over the years. I recall listening to him

³⁶ Ishiguro 2005

³⁷ Ishiguro 2005:4

³⁸ Ishiguro 2005:5

³⁹ Ishiguro 2005:5

⁴⁰ Ishiguro 2005:70

tell it to visitors when I was a child, and then later, when I was starting out as a footman under his supervision”⁴¹ and he continues;

“The story was an apparently true one concerning a certain butler who had travelled with his employer to India and served there for many years maintain amongst the native staff the same high standards he had commanded in England. One afternoon, evidently, this butler had entered the dining room to make sure all was well for dinner, when he noticed a tiger languishing beneath the dining table. The butler had left the dining room quietly, taking care to close the doors behind him, and proceeded calmly to the drawing room where his employer was taking tea with a number of visitors. There he attracted his employer’s attention with a polite cough, then whispered in the latter’s ear: ‘I’m very sorry, sir, but there appears to be a tiger in the dining room. Perhaps you will permit the twelve-bores to be used?’

And according to legend, a few minutes later, the employer and his guests heard three gun shots. When the butler reappeared in the drawing room some time afterwards to refresh the tea pots, the employer had inquired if all was well.

‘Perfectly fine, thank you, sir’ had come the reply. ‘Dinner will be served at the usual time and I am pleased to say there will be no discernible traces left of the recent occurrence by that time.’⁴²

As the novel progresses, it becomes evident to the reader that Mr Stevens’ journey has not only become that of present experiences and thoughts, but mainly those of his past. He continues to think back on the old days, like the great gatherings at Darlington Hall. These gatherings were filled with prominent guests from all over the world and in which discussions and talks took place. These meetings occurred after the First World War especially. One example is the telling of the 1923 conference which had been planned for a long time, and the visit by Herr Bremann shortly after the Great War. Lord Darlington confides in Mr Stevens, telling him the he found the trip to Berlin in the end of 1920 disturbing and is quite upset by the treatment of ‘a defeated foe’⁴³. And by these accounts the

⁴¹ Ishiguro 2005:36

⁴² Ishiguro 2005:37

⁴³ Ishiguro 2005:74

reader learns more about Mr Stevens' master, which then later becomes the centre of examination regarding his own choices in life, in particular; serving and giving his life to Lord Darlington; 'The fact is, of course,' I said after a while. 'I gave my best to Lord Darlington. I gave him the very best I had to give, and now – well – I find I do not have a great deal more left to give.'⁴⁴

Furthermore, he reflects on working with Miss Kenton and his father, Mr Stevens Senior, like in one of Miss Kenton's and Mr Steven's encounters regarding his own father. Miss Kenton points out to Mr Stevens that his father's responsibilities are far too great for a man of his age, making trivial mistakes, despite what he once were⁴⁵. As it is revealed to the reader, it comes to show that Miss Kenton and Mr Stevens had close working relationship⁴⁶, which then continued to grow and deepen even further.

Mr Stevens finally arrives in Cornwall where he meets up with Miss Kenton, now Mrs Benn, for tea. There they talk about their past, and present, and Mr Stevens quickly discovers that Miss Kenton did not fully mean what she had written in her letter, where she had been complaining about her current situation. Or, as he realises: "I may as well say here that having reread her letter again tonight, I am inclined to believe I may well have read more into certain of her lines than perhaps was wise."⁴⁷ It becomes clear that Miss Kenton will not be able, nor willing, to take up employment at Darlington Hall as she has received news that her daughter Catherine is expecting a baby⁴⁸. Mrs Kenton and Mr Stevens exchange words about the past and in the end they part their ways⁴⁹. In the last moments of *The Remains of the Day* Mr Stevens sits down on a bench at the pier. He is approached by stranger to whom he reveals and admits to his true feelings and thoughts. The novel ends as Mr Stevens looks onward, where he is thinking of his days serving Mr Farraday⁵⁰.

⁴⁴ Ishiguro 2005:255

⁴⁵ Ishiguro 2005:62

⁴⁶ Ishiguro 2005:62

⁴⁷ Ishiguro 2005:189

⁴⁸ Ishiguro 2005:249

⁴⁹ Ishiguro 2005:252

⁵⁰ Ishiguro 2005:253-258

2.0.2 Plot in *Quartermaine's Terms*

The play focuses on the relationship between a principal, Eddie Loomis, and six teachers named St. John Quartermaine, Anita Manchip, Mark Sackling, Derek Meadle, Henry Windscape and Melanie Garth. They teach English to foreign students at Cambridge⁵¹ and the plot unfolds as they meet and interact in the staffroom. It is through the principal's and teachers' interplay and conversations that the audience learn what is going on at in their lives, both professionally and personally. The play is divided into two acts where act one has two scenes and act two has three scenes.

First act, scene one starts Monday morning of spring term, and the new teacher, Derek Meadle, is introduced to the other teachers. They get to know each other better, whilst the others give their accounts of what have happened in their lives since they last met. Melanie Garth's mother has had a stroke; St. John Quartermaine has been babysitting Henry Windscape's children whilst Windscape and his wife have been to the movies. Mark Sackling on the other hand has just learnt that his wife has left him and taken their son, Tom, with her. Anita Manchip has been busy with her husband's new magazine, and she tries to console Mark when she learns of his situation. Eddie Loomis holds a welcome speech and tries to survey his staff to best of his ability.⁵²

In first act, scene two, a few weeks have past and it is Friday afternoon. Loomis learns that Quartermaine is going to the theatre, but that he has let his students go early from class and that there is only a handful of students that attended his class. Furthermore, Loomis is made aware that Quartermaine does not recognise and remember neither their names nor their faces, in which Loomis tells Quartermaine that Thomas will be very disappointed in him, he needs to watch his attendances and keep his class until the bell rings⁵³. Anita, on the other hand, confirms that her boyfriend, Eddie, is in London with his co-editor, Amanda, regarding his new magazine Reports⁵⁴. She decides that she is also going to London in order to surprise Eddie. Sackling reveals to Quartermaine that Nigel, Anita's boyfriend has cheated with at

⁵¹ Gray 1981

⁵² Gray 1981:1-20

⁵³ Gray 1981:21-22

⁵⁴ Gray 1981:22-23

least five other women and that Anita tries to cover it up.⁵⁵ Then he tells Quartermaine he cannot go to the theatre with him and says he will concentrate on his novel. Sackling then gives his thanks to Quartermaine for his companionship seeing he has been miserable since his wife left him⁵⁶. Meadle enters and is clumsy, scraping his knuckles on the door-knob⁵⁷. He reveals that he has been invited out for dinner at a local French restaurant by his students.⁵⁸ Windscape shows the foreign students how to play croquet.⁵⁹ After a match of croquet Windscape goes back into the staffroom to fetch his briefcase only to forget it, forcing him to enter a second time. There he finds Melanie crying and after she tells him about her situation regarding her mother he tries to comfort her.⁶⁰ In this scene Melanie copies a recipe of roasted swan for her students.⁶¹ Later, after she breaks down in front of Windscape, Melanie tells him that her mother hates her.⁶² Through Melanie it is revealed that she had a romantic relationship with Windscape at one time in her life.⁶³

Act two, scene one, is set almost in summer the following year⁶⁴. The teachers meet in the staffroom after the holiday. Windscape finds Quartermaine who relay that he has not been away, he has stayed in the staffroom.⁶⁵ Windscape went on vacation with his family in a caravan.⁶⁶ Meadle has been to his aunt's funeral in Sheffield. On his travel to Sheffield he also met a girl, Daphne, whom he went to university with.⁶⁷ Meadle wishes for a permanent position only to discover they have reduced his hours.⁶⁸ Melanie reveals that her mother is dead because she broke her neck due to fall in a staircase.⁶⁹ Police also interviews Melanie which she just brushes aside with laughter.⁷⁰ Anita exposes her belly, showing that she is

⁵⁵ Gray 1981:25

⁵⁶ Gray 1981:26

⁵⁷ Gray 1981:27

⁵⁸ Gray 1981:28-29

⁵⁹ Gray 1981:23

⁶⁰ Gray 1981:34-39

⁶¹ Gray: 1981:34-35

⁶² Gray 1981:37

⁶³ Gray 1981:39

⁶⁴ Gray 1981:43

⁶⁵ Gray 1981:43

⁶⁶ Gray 1981:44

⁶⁷ Gray 1981:45-46

⁶⁸ Gray 1981:48 & 55

⁶⁹ Gray 1981:56

⁷⁰ Gray 1981:60

clearly pregnant.⁷¹ Sackling starts writing again from scratch.⁷² Loomis discloses that the school is in a slight crisis and he gives Quartermaine another warning.⁷³ Sackling announces that he has finally finished his novel.⁷⁴

Act two, scene two takes place a few months later on a Friday evening. Quartermaine gets invited to several dinner parties which cause confusion seeing he is unable to say no and he also forgets most of the invitations. It starts off with Melanie. Quartermaine sleeps in the staffroom when Melanie walks in.⁷⁵ Melanie asks if he wants to come and meet some of her special friends and he accepts.⁷⁶ Later, Quartermaine gets invited to a dinner with Meadle and his fiancé⁷⁷ and Meadle discloses that the evening Quartermaine has promised to attend to is one of Melanie's evenings where they dance and sing hymns.⁷⁸ Sackling later tells Quartermaine that he has promised to come to dinner with them⁷⁹ and Anita claims that he needs to come to dinner as she needs help in dealing with the situation regarding Neil and Mark.⁸⁰ Windscape also turns up and asks if Quartermaine is able to help with the kids the same evening.⁸¹ He also talks about his daughter Susan, who has had a mental breakdown and is hospitalised.⁸²

In act two, scene three, it is Christmas and Sackling, Quartermaine, Melanie, Anita, Windscape and Meadle gather in the staffroom where Loomis announces that Thomas is dead. He also unveils the he wishes to withdraw, making Henry Windscape the new sole principal of the school. Mark Sackling is disclosed as the new academic tutor.⁸³ Windscape tells Quartermaine that there will be no position at the school for him anymore⁸⁴

⁷¹ Gray 1981:53

⁷² Gray 1981:51

⁷³ Gray 1981:59

⁷⁴ Gray 1981:51

⁷⁵ Gray 1981:60

⁷⁶ Gray 1981:61

⁷⁷ Gray 1981:62

⁷⁸ Gray 1981:63

⁷⁹ Gray 1981:65

⁸⁰ Gray 1981:66

⁸¹ Gray 1981:69

⁸² Gray 1981:69

⁸³ Gray 1981:75

⁸⁴ Gray 1981:78

2.1.1 Setting in *The Remains of the Day*

The Remains of the Day is set on various locations as the narrator, Mr Stevens, drives through the West Country in England.⁸⁵ The novel starts off at Darlington Hall in July 1956⁸⁶ and the journey ends in the seaside town Weymouth on the sixth day of his journey⁸⁷. Throughout the novel Mr Stevens visits various places, such as guest houses and pubs. He makes his stops in Salisbury on the evening of day one⁸⁸, Mortimer's Pond in Dorset in the afternoon of the second day of his journey⁸⁹, Tauton, Somerset in the morning of day three⁹⁰, Moscomb near Tavistock, Devon in the evening of the same day⁹¹ and Little Compton in the afternoon on the fourth day⁹² in addition to Darlington Hall and Weymouth. However, as Mr Stevens often reflects on old times, most of what is happening in *The Remains of the Day* is set at Darlington Hall from the arrival of Miss Kenton in 1922⁹³ to her departure in 1936.⁹⁴

2.1.2 Setting in *Quartermaine's Terms*

Quartermaine's Terms is set in the 1960s for a period of two years; starting off at the beginning of spring term for the two scenes in act one⁹⁵ and then near summer the following year in act two in the first scene.⁹⁶ The second scene of act two is set some months later at a Friday evening⁹⁷ and the last and third scene of act two is set at Christmas eight months

⁸⁵ Ishiguro 2005:3

⁸⁶ Ishiguro 2005:

⁸⁷ Ishiguro 2005:243

⁸⁸ Ishiguro 2005:21

⁸⁹ Ishiguro 2005:117

⁹⁰ Ishiguro 2005:135

⁹¹ Ishiguro 2005:151

⁹² Ishiguro 2005:213

⁹³ Ishiguro 2005:53

⁹⁴ Ishiguro 2005:13

⁹⁵ Gray 1981:1

⁹⁶ Gray 1981:43

⁹⁷ Gray 1981:60

later.⁹⁸ *Quartermaine's Terms* takes place in the staff room at Cull-Loomis School of English for foreigners at Cambridge.

2.2.1 Characters in *The Remains of the Day*

Mr Stevens is not only the protagonist of *The Remains of the Day*, he is also the narrator. Mr Stevens is the head butler of Darlington Hall whose sole task is to maintain and obtain order and control. Like his father, the elder Mr Stevens, he has been a butler all his life. Mr Stevens serves his master, Lord Darlington, with merciful accuracy and great professionalism. As mentioned earlier, the trip through the countryside makes him recollect memories from his past. These reminiscences lead Mr Stevens to immense in several topics and themes that seem to heed him greatly; “greatness”, “dignity” and “professionalism”. According to Mr Stevens’s believes these terms are closely knitted together and thus directly linked to his profession as a butler. As the reader discovers, professionalism is key to Mr Stevens, and it is a matter he likes to talk to himself about. He rarely discusses these matters with other people, except with Harry Smith⁹⁹. There is, however, not only the question of being a butler in itself, but the issue of being regarded as a great butler:

“If one looks at these persons we agree are ‘great’ butlers, if one looks at, say Mr Marshall or Mr Lane, it does seem to be that the factor which distinguishes them from those butlers who are merely extremely competent is most closely captured by this word ‘dignity’¹⁰⁰.”

He looks up to his father as an example of great butlers, a subject on which he often ponders. Throughout the novel the matter of his, and others’, professionalism undergo great scrutiny, examining and debating the definition of ‘greatness’ and ‘dignity’ in regards to what it means to be a truly great butler¹⁰¹. Mr Stevens respects his father and admire him for his work, and Mr Stevens sets an example of this when he tells Miss Kenton not to call his father

⁹⁸ Gray 1981:73

⁹⁹ Ishiguro 1981:195

¹⁰⁰ Ishiguro 2005:33

¹⁰¹ Ishiguro 2005:32

by his first name¹⁰². In order for the reader to fully understand and get hold of Mr Stevens's feelings towards being a 'great' butler, he elaborates on the term 'greatness' itself. He starts off by focusing on the English landscape, claiming that it holds a quality other nations fail to possess. Mr Stevens states;

“It is, I believe, a quality that will mark out the English landscape to any objective observer as the most deeply satisfying in the world, and this quality is probably best summed up by the term ‘greatness’”.¹⁰³

Mr Stevens goes on, defining greatness to be;

“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. It is as though the land knows of its own beauty, of its own greatness, and feels no need to shout it.”¹⁰⁴

In regards to his work as a butler, it becomes clear to the reader that sees a great butler as someone who can not only look back on his work serving gentlemen after many years in service, but someone who has also served and contributed to humanity.¹⁰⁵ It becomes clear that Mr Stevens has something big in mind with great idealistic thoughts for his life;

“For we were, as I say, an idealistic generation for whom the question was not simply one of how well one practised one's skills, but to what end one did so; each of us harboured the desire to make our own worlds, and saw that, as professionals, the surest means of doing so would be to serve the great gentlemen of our times in whose hands civilization has been entrusted.”¹⁰⁶

Furthermore, in Mr Stevens' eyes, as a part of the discussion about being a great butler, he sees it as a matter that comes down to dignity:

¹⁰² Ishiguro 2005:55

¹⁰³ Ishiguro 2005:28

¹⁰⁴ Ishiguro 2005:29

¹⁰⁵ Ishiguro 2005:123

¹⁰⁶ Ishiguro 2005:122

“(..)’dignity has to do crucially with a butler’s ability not to abandon the professional being he inhabits. Lesser butlers will abandon the professional being for the private one at the least provocation. For such persons, being a butler is like playing some pantomime role; a small push, a slight stumble, and the façade will drop to reveal the actor underneath. The great butlers are great by virtue of their ability to inhabit their professional role and inhabit it to the upmost; 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 circumstances 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. It is, as I say, a matter of ‘dignity’¹⁰⁷.”

In other words, Mr Stevens sees dignity as something he *is* rather than just something he puts on from time to time. He sees it as the aptitude to abandon his feelings.¹⁰⁸

Though Mr Stevens looks at his father as the definition of a ‘great butler’, he and his father do not seem to have a close and loving relationship. This becomes evident to the reader after the episode in which Mr Stevens senior has taken a fall serving Lord Darlington. Mr Stevens climbs up to his father’s room, stating: “I had rarely had reason to enter my father’s room prior to this occasion.(..)”¹⁰⁹ This indicates that he does not visit his father, nor does his father invite his son to his room, even though they both live and work under the same roof. Moreover, the formality of their relationship is highlighted when Mr Stevens writes about his recollections regarding his father. Mr Stevens chooses to write “father” with capital letter “F”; “I have come to relate something to you, Father.”¹¹⁰ This shows that Mr Stevens sees “Father” as a title and formal name rather than informal and personal. Additionally, his father does not express any emotion when faced with his son’s message that his duties have been changed; “There was still no trace of emotion discernible in his expression, and his hands on the back of the chair seemed perfectly relaxed.”¹¹¹ When the father of Mr Stevens is taken ill the first thing Mr Stevens senior asks about whether everything is in hand, ignoring

¹⁰⁷ Ishiguro 2005: 43-44

¹⁰⁸ Bay 2009:4

¹⁰⁹ Ishiguro 2005:67

¹¹⁰ Ishiguro 2005:68

¹¹¹ Ishiguro 2005:69

his son's statement; "I hope Father is feeling better now."¹¹² Avoiding personal questions and remarks seem to make Mr Stevens unable to face his own feelings, and when his father states that he hope he has been a good father Mr Stevens fail to reply. His father continues, telling Mr Stevens that he has been a good son and that he is proud of him. Like his father brushed his statement aside earlier, Mr Stevens is unable to utter anything other than "I'm so glad you're feeling better now" and then "I'm afraid we're extremely busy now, but we can talk again in the morning."¹¹³ Like the professional butler that he is Mr Stevens proclaims that the dinner was served efficiently and calmly an hour later¹¹⁴. He holds his posture, even when he is later told by Miss Kenton that his father has become very ill. Miss Kenton urges him to see to his father, but Mr Stevens is bound by his duties and declares that he must wait for the gentlemen that are about to retire into the smoking room. However, Miss Kenton coaxes him into following her to his father's room. It becomes evident that Mr Stevens's father is very ill and when Mrs Mortimer tells him that his father has had a stroke, Mr Stevens says "This is most distressing, I must now return downstairs."¹¹⁵ It is, however, indicated to the reader that Mr Stevens might not be as unaffected as he would want the reader to know. Mr Cardinal asks him; "I say, Stevens, are you all right?"¹¹⁶ This is an indication that Mr Stevens is not able to neglect all of his feelings after all. Mr Stevens's father grows weaker until he dies of a stroke to the heart. Even in such distressing circumstances Mr Stevens carries on with his work, serving the guests of the big meeting which has been taking place at Darlington Hall. Mr Stevens continues to serve drinks and help his master, Lord Darlington. He barely has a moment to see his dead father and says that he has to carry on because that was what his father would have wanted, being a butler himself. After a few moments Mr Stevens is back at work, and without noticing the tears which is running down his face, he continues to be the 'great' butler that he is¹¹⁷. Mr Stevens seems to put himself under great restraint and does not allow himself to display neither emotions nor a reaction of any kind.

¹¹² Ishiguro 2005: 101

¹¹³ Ishiguro 2005:101

¹¹⁴ Ishiguro 2005:102

¹¹⁵ Ishiguro 2005:108

¹¹⁶ Ishiguro 2005:109

¹¹⁷ Ishiguro 2005:110-111

One of the things that may strike the reader is how Mr Stevens seem to withdraw back to old memories in his younger days. He tries not to let his thoughts wanders off, but it seems that he is not able stop it from happening. Mr Stevens is unable to avoid reflecting over his life, both over past and present life. It becomes clear as the story unfolds that Mr Stevens is constantly thinking of what could be, the thoughts of what happened – and what did not. It seems to be recurring on a constant basis. At the same time Mr Stevens is quite unwilling to do so, and does not allow himself to do that:

“But I see I am becoming preoccupied with these memories and this is perhaps a little foolish. This present trip represents, after all, a rare opportunity for me to savour to the full the many splendours of the English countryside, and I know I shall greatly regret it later if I allow myself to become unduly diverted.”¹¹⁸

The reader might ask what Mr Stevens’ thoughts symbolise and what they may signify. It might be his way of finding meaning in his life. Finding and getting the confirmation that most people want. This ensures them that the lives they lead are not meaningless. Most people would regard these thoughts as quite natural. People tend to mull over the great questions in life, questions that regard how content we are, and how proud we are of the lives we have lived and are currently living. Most people try to avoid feeling that one has wasted one’s life, and it seems to be natural to avoid the feeling of being shameful of both past and present. It does not only entail life as a whole, it might involve work, relationships and different parts of life. In fact, Mr Stevens is not only trying to find meaning to his life but also his work. What is even more important, being a butler has been his life; is that work has been everything he has lived for. He served Lord Darlington to the best of his ability and stood by his master throughout all the years that passed. Herein lies the paradox: if he is not regarded a great butler, merely one of mediocre standards, a reader might ask: what then about his life? Has his life also been that of lesser standard? The question undoubtedly has a sad ring to it. Not only that, even though one is to be loyal and act as the stereotype ‘great’ butler, is that even enough? According to the definition by Mr Stevens, one would say that he has been a ‘great’ butler, a dignified one. He has never abandoned his profession, and we do not ever see that he is vexed or disturbed by any event. There are several examples of this

¹¹⁸ Ishiguro 2005:70

in *The Remains of the Day*. One example is the issue of the Jewish girls who were dismissed due to the fact that they were Jews¹¹⁹. Lord Darlington was the one enforcing it, and like always Mr Stevens complied;

“-my every instinct opposed the idea of their dismissal. Nevertheless, my duty in this instance was quite clear, and as I saw it, there was nothing to be gained at all irresponsibly displaying such personal doubt.”¹²⁰

This does not only indicate how Mr Stevens’ sees the importance of his professionalism, it clearly states that he actually sees it as irresponsible if he were to question his duties. Indeed, Mr Stevens firmly reminds Miss Kenton that it is their duty to follow the orders of Lord Darlington and that it is not professional to display anything other than professional manners¹²¹. Miss Kenton on the other hand reacts quite strongly to the event. Miss Kenton then threatens to hand in her resignation¹²². There was nothing to come of it, but unlike Mr Stevens, Miss Kenton is not afraid to speak her mind and show her feelings. Mr Stevens way of dealing with others’ emotions and reactions seem to disable him altogether when he is to correspond or react. It paralyses him into silence, making him unable to respond accordingly, like in the instance with his father telling him that he is proud of his son. This is also displayed in the so-called ‘book scene’ where Miss Kenton enters his parlour with a vase of flowers in his time off. Mr Stevens is reading a book, which makes Miss Kenton ask what kind of book he is reading. He refuses to answer her question, making her curious of the book he is reading. Miss Kenton thrust her way towards him, trying to get hold of the book. Mr Stevens stands up from the chair and as she continues forward he decides to go backwards. It ends with him being forced into a corner, ending in Miss Kenton ripping the fingers from the book. As she discovers, Mr Stevens was only reading a sentimental love story.¹²³

It seems that his inability to act on his feelings somewhat blindfolds him, making him unable to respond accordingly to her indication of emotion, thus creating further

¹¹⁹ Ishiguro 2005:153-154

¹²⁰ Ishiguro 2005:156

¹²¹ Ishiguro 2005:157

¹²² Ishiguro 2005:157

¹²³ Ishiguro 2005:174-176

estrangement between the two. Indeed, he is not even able to admit to Miss Kenton that he was reading a sentimental love story, even though he firmly denies it, stressing that “it was an extremely efficient way to maintain and develop one’s command over the English language.” However, Mr Stevens’s actions show that he is reluctant to admit that he read and enjoyed that kind of novel and seems ashamed of doing so. Granted, he does declare that he is not ashamed of it today¹²⁴. This restraint is displayed in the way he chooses to interact with Miss Kenton. One situation that also illustrates this is when Miss Kenton has been out with Mr Benn, and she confesses to Mr Stevens that she is to accept Mr Benn’s offer of marriage. Mr Stevens congratulates her, but he does not say anything else¹²⁵. Though it is indicated that Miss Kenton would like for Mr Stevens to truly speak his mind, he is unable to do so. It is not necessarily due to lack of feelings he might have on the inside, but he is bound by his professional duties. It is shown in former statements by Mr Stevens that he does indeed feel something, but he does not show them. This is displayed when Miss Kenton tries to ignore him and does not want to speak to him directly. Mr Stevens acknowledges that he does feel something even if he does not act on it; “Irritating as Miss Kenton’s behaviour was, I could not afford to give it much thought, for by then the first guests had arrived.”¹²⁶ Furthermore, as Miss Kenton’s ‘silent treatment’ prolongs Mr Stevens admits it to be “extremely annoying”.¹²⁷ On another occasion, following ‘the book scene’, Mr Stevens grants it to be very disturbing if she had begun to take her contracted days off to meet a suitor. He states that it “would constitute a professional loss of some magnitude, a loss Darlington Hall would have some difficulty recovering from.”¹²⁸

Miss Kenton is the housekeeper of Darlington Hall, whom Mr Stevens is working alongside. She is one of the main supporting characters and the reader learns of her through Mr Stevens and his recollection of her. She was taken on as a housekeeper at Darlington Hall in the spring of 1922, the same time as Mr Stevens’s father. Miss Kenton’s references were unusually good, and Mr Stevens describes her as a dedicated professional that never shirked

¹²⁴ Ishiguro 2005:177

¹²⁵ Ishiguro 2005:225-226

¹²⁶ Ishiguro 2005:84

¹²⁷ Ishiguro 2005:89

¹²⁸ Ishiguro 2005:180

her responsibilities¹²⁹. Through the accounts of Mr Stevens we learn that Miss Kenton is not only strong-willed and a woman that knows her own mind, she is also outspoken. Though always working side by side with professional divergence, a warm, though strictly friendly, attachment grows between them. An example of this is when Mr Stevens is sitting in his pantry and Miss Kenton comes straight in before he is able to give a reply. She enters his parlour with a vase of flowers and without hesitation suggest they might brighten his parlour a little¹³⁰. Miss Kenton, unlike Mr Stevens, is outgoing and is not afraid of crossing boundaries by practically inviting herself into Mr Stevens's room. Tension between the two build up as Miss Kenton is not afraid to say what is on her mind. She continues to express her opinions, like regarding the father of Mr Stevens. Mr Stevens on the other hand is less that pleased by Miss Kenton's behaviour¹³¹;

“I happened to be walking past the kitchen yesterday when I heard you calling to someone called William.”

“Is that so, Mr Stevens?”

“Indeed, Miss Kenton. I did hear you call several times for “William”. May I ask who it was you were addressing by that name?”

“Why, Mr Stevens, I should think I was addressing your father. There are no other Williams in this house, I take it.”

“It's an easy enough error to have made,” I said with a small smile. “May I ask in the future, Miss Kenton, to address my father as “Mr Stevens”? If you are referring to him to a third party, then you may wish to call him “Mr Stevens senior” to distinguish him from myself.”

With that I turned back to my papers. But to my surprise, Miss Kenton did not take her leave. “Excuse me, Mr Stevens,” she said after a moment.

“Yes, Miss Kenton.”

¹²⁹ Ishiguro 2005:53

¹³⁰ Ishiguro 2005:54

¹³¹ Ishiguro 2005: 55

“I am afraid I am not quite clear what you are saying. I have in the past been accustomed to addressing under-servants by their Christian names and saw no reason to do otherwise in this house.”

“A most understandable error, Miss Kenton. However, if you will consider the situation for a moment, you may come to see the inappropriateness of someone as such as yourself talking “down” to one such as my father.”

“I am still not clear what you are getting at, Mr Stevens. You say someone such as myself, but I am as far as I understand the housekeeper of this house, while your father is the under-butler.”

“He is of course in title the under-butler, as you say. But I am surprised your powers of observation have not already made it clear to you that he is in reality more than that. A great deal more.”

“No doubt I have been extremely unobservant, Mr Stevens. I had only observed you’re your father was an able under-butler and addressed him accordingly. It must indeed have been most galling for him to be addressed by one such as I.”

“Miss Kenton, it is clear from your tone you simply have not observed my father. If you had done so, the inappropriateness of someone your age and standing addressing him as “William” should have been self-evident to you.”

“Mr Stevens, I may not have been a housekeeper for long, but I would say that in the time I have been, my abilities have attracted some very generous remarks.”

“I do not doubt your competence for one moment, Miss Kenton. But a hundred things should have indicated to you that my father is a figure of unusual distinction from whom you may learn a wealth of things were you prepared to be observant.”

“I am most indebted to you for your advice, Mr Stevens. So do please tell me, just what marvellous things might I learn observing your father?”

“I would have thought it obvious to anyone with eyes, Miss Kenton.”

“But we have already established have we not, that I am particularly deficient in that respect.”

“Miss Kenton, if you are under the impression you have already perfected yourself, you will never rise to the heights you are no doubt capable of. I might point out, for instance, you are still often unsure of what goes where and which item is which.”

This seemed to take the wind out of Miss Kenton’s sails somewhat. Indeed, for a moment she looked a little upset.

She said:

“I had a little difficulty on first arriving, but that is surely only normal.”

“Ah, there you are, Miss Kenton. If you had observed my father who arrived in this house a week after you did, you will have seen the knowledge is perfect and was so almost from the time he set foot in Darlington Hall.”

Miss Kenton seemed to think about this before saying a little sulkily:

“I am sure Mr Stevens senior is very good at his job, but I can assure you, Mr Stevens, I am very good at mine. I will remember in the future to address your father by his full title in the future. Now, if you would please excuse me.”¹³²

Throughout the novel there is a mixture of tension and light-hearted bantering between Miss Kenton and Mr Stevens. In the beginning, as shown earlier, they quarrel and disagree on a number of subjects. Miss Kenton tries to mark her ground by proving Mr Stevens to be wrong, like illustrated by the case with the misplaced dust-pan out in the hall¹³³ or The Chinamen that were replaced incorrectly¹³⁴. Mr Stevens admits himself; “We did, of course, over the years of working closely together come to have some very frank exchanges.”¹³⁵ In fact, at one point Miss Kenton did not want Mr Stevens to talk to her directly at all, stating that if he had a message he wanted to convey to her she preferred it if he were to do so by a

¹³² Ishiguro 2005:55-56

¹³³ Ishiguro 2005: 57

¹³⁴ Ishiguro 2005:59

¹³⁵ Ishiguro 2005: 62

messenger¹³⁶. However, over the years their relationship grows fonder and they meet quite regularly in Miss Kenton's parlour where they drink cocoa and discuss and evaluate their schedules. Their regular meetings also create a place for both parties to deliberate on current affairs inside and outside of Darlington Hall¹³⁷. Their relationship develops further and they engage in light-hearted bantering. Mr Stevens admits that their cocoa meetings also were a place for talk of harmless nature¹³⁸. An illustration of their pleasantry talk is when Miss Kenton teases Mr Stevens for not liking pretty girls on staff, accusing him of being afraid that it might distract him¹³⁹. Miss Kenton continues:

“Can it be that our Mr Stevens is flesh and blood after all and cannot fully trust himself?”

“Really, Miss Kenton. If I thought there was one modicum of sense in what you are saying I might bother to engage with you in this discussion. As it is, I think I shall simply place my thoughts elsewhere while you chatter away”.

“Ah, but then why is that guilty smile still on your face, Mr Stevens?”

“It is not a guilty smile at all, Miss Kenton. I am slightly amused by your astonishing capacity to talk nonsense, that is all.”

“It *is* a guilty little smile you have on, Mr Stevens. And I've noticed how you can hardly bear look at Lisa. Now it is beginning to become very clear why you objected so strongly to her.”¹⁴⁰

Mr Stevens acknowledges that their relationship changed in 1935 or 1936, but he is not quite sure as to why. According to Mr Stevens, the ‘book scene’, which has been mentioned earlier, became a turning point for them both.¹⁴¹ The matter of Miss Kenton's days off is also a reason that altered their relationship. From only taking two days off every six weeks Miss Kenton started to take her contracted days off. Mr Stevens describes her as being moody. A

¹³⁶ Ishiguro 2005: 83

¹³⁷ Ishiguro 2005:156

¹³⁸ Ishiguro 2005:165

¹³⁹ Ishiguro 2005:165

¹⁴⁰ Ishiguro 2005:164-165

¹⁴¹ Ishiguro 2005: 173

valet-butler suggests to Mr Stevens that she might want a family and children, in which Mr Stevens that she “is a devoted professional”.¹⁴² However, in order to find out more about her evenings off, they discuss their work. Miss Kenton states that he must be content, seeing he is on the top of his profession¹⁴³. Mr Stevens, on the other hand, declares that he will not be fully content until his lordship’s work is complete. Miss Kenton is disappointed by his reply, mood changing and losing their personal tone. Shortly after their cocoa meetings came to an end after Mr Stevens declared they did not need to meet over cocoa again, seeing that Miss Kenton was tired¹⁴⁴. Not long after Miss Kenton accepts Mr Benn’s hand in marriage. Miss Kenton decides to leave with Mr Benn and she settles down in Cornwall where she also has a child called Catherine.

2.2.2 Characters in *Quartermaine’s Terms*

The protagonist of the *Quartermaine’s Terms* is St. John Quartermaine. He has served on the teaching staff since the school was founded.¹⁴⁵ Quartermaine is a bachelor that spends most evenings at the school and does not really have any other friends than his colleagues¹⁴⁶. However, Quartermaine occasionally babysit for Fanny and Henry.

St. John Quartermaine is, like all the other teachers in *Quartermaine’s Term*, teaching English to foreign students. Unlike his colleagues, however, he does not contribute much academically or socially. He is an incompetent teacher that receives complaints from his students¹⁴⁷ and he constantly shirks his duties. A few examples of Quartermaine’s incompetence are when he does not teach his students¹⁴⁸ and lets his class go early.¹⁴⁹ Quartermaine is ignorant and unaware. An illustration of this is in the opening scene of act one where fellow teacher Anita meets him Monday morning in the staff room after spring

¹⁴² Ishiguro 2005:179

¹⁴³ Ishiguro 2005:182

¹⁴⁴ Ishiguro 2005:182

¹⁴⁵ Gray 1981:10

¹⁴⁶ Gray 1981:43

¹⁴⁷ Gray 1981:59

¹⁴⁸ Gray 1981:72

¹⁴⁹ Gray 1981:21

break. They greet and Quartermaine comments Anita's hair. He tells her that her hair looks wonderful and says that "Of course I liked it the other way too, tumbling down your shoulders." Anita then replies: "It hasn't tumbled down my shoulders for three years, St. John."¹⁵⁰ Quartermaine is usually in the midst of everything that happens, but he seems to take little notice of what is actually going on. If Quartermaine does he seems to act inappropriately and his replies are often not in accordance of what is expected. Instead, his answers seem meaningless and out of place. This is illustrated in the first scene of act one after the scene with Quartermaine and Anita. Sackling appears, looking dreadful and unshaved. His behaviour suggests that he is not doing well; barking out a laugh, collapsing into a chair and crying¹⁵¹. Anita tries to comfort him, making Quartermaine ask "What? Oh – oh Lord!". Sackling then answers: "Sorry – sorry – I'll be all right – still – still digesting." Quartermaine takes Sackling's statement literally, giving a rather odd and unseemly response: "Something you had for breakfast, is it? Not kidneys – they can give you terrible heart-burn – especially with mushrooms-".¹⁵² Also, St. John Quartermaine is often the subject of scrutiny between the other teachers and the teachers and the principal. They all take notice his incompetence as a teacher. Quartermaine is only given the opportunity to teach because Eddie and his partner Thomas, is too disconcerted and good-natured;

"I don't know what we're going to do about him in the end, though, if he turned him out where would he go, who else would have him, one does look after one's own, I suppose, when it comes to it I agree with Thomas on that, after all the school's our – our family, the only family Thomas and I have between us, so one has a responsibility for them – but a responsibility for the students too.(.)"¹⁵³

Loomis continues:

“(..)it's so difficult to get the balance right – so difficult – St. John forgetting to teach them.(..)”¹⁵⁴.

¹⁵⁰ Gray 1981:1

¹⁵¹ Gray 1981:3

¹⁵² Gray 1981:4

¹⁵³ Gray 1981:72

¹⁵⁴ Gray 1981:72

Eddie notices Quartermaine's behaviour, but he does not take action and he only notices Quartermaine by giving him a verbal warnings. These warnings seem to have little or no effect on Quartermaine and he goes on like he always has. The other teachers get quite frustrated with him. In the end he is eventually fired due to his incompetence by Henry Windscape, the new principal¹⁵⁵

The headmaster at the school is Eddie Loomis, together with Thomas. Loomis sees the school as a part of his family¹⁵⁶. When Thomas dies he decides to recede, making Henry the new principal of the school¹⁵⁷.

Anita Manchip is also one of the teachers. She is in a relationship with boyfriend Nigel, who is starting a new literary magazine called Reports¹⁵⁸. Nigel cheats notoriously with other women, and even though she tries to pretend it never happens Anita is very unhappy with the situation.¹⁵⁹ However, later in the play she fall pregnant with Nigel¹⁶⁰ and she gives birth to a girl, Ophelia. She later admits that their circumstances have changes, seeing that unlike before where she was the one loving Nigel, Anita no longer loves him, even though he has come to love her.¹⁶¹

The audience meets Mark Sackling, an aspiring novelist, straight after his wife, Camelia, abandons their relationship. She only leaves behind a note, stating that she is not able to be the wife of a writer. They have a son together, Tom whom she takes with her¹⁶². Even so, Camelia and Mark later reconcile. Mark and Nigel, Anita's husband, on the other hand has a falling out. They have been friends for a long time and Mark gets angry at Nigel when he refuses to publish excerpts from his novel¹⁶³. In the end of the play Henry Windscape announces that Sackling is to take his position as the new academic tutor.¹⁶⁴

¹⁵⁵ Gray 1981: 77

¹⁵⁶ Gray 1981:72

¹⁵⁷ Gray 1981:75

¹⁵⁸ Gray 1981:23

¹⁵⁹ Gray 1981:25

¹⁶⁰ Gray 1981:53

¹⁶¹ Gray 1981:67

¹⁶² Gray 1981:4

¹⁶³ Gray 1981:66

¹⁶⁴ Gray 1981:75

The new teacher at the school, Derek Meadle, is known for his clumsiness and manages to rip his trousers on the way to first day of school¹⁶⁵. He is a very dedicated teacher that spends time with his students that are eager to practise and learn English after hours¹⁶⁶. Meadle is well-liked and popular, like his landlady who gives him cheap accommodation, or his students that invites him out for dinner.¹⁶⁷ He only has a position as a part-time teacher, which angers Meadle. He finds it unfair that Quartermaine has a permanent position, seeing he is much more dedicated than Quartermaine that is not a qualified or skilled teacher¹⁶⁸. However, later in act two, in the second scene, Meadle finally gets a permanent position.¹⁶⁹ He also finds a girl, Daphne, whom he marries and she later becomes pregnant with his child¹⁷⁰.

Henry Windscape is also one of the teachers, but Eddie Loomis promotes him to headmaster of the school in the last act of Quartermaine's Terms.¹⁷¹ He is married to Fanny, and together they have three children: Susan, Ben and little Fanny. His eldest daughter, Susan, is a very bright young girl who is doing her O-levels several years in advance¹⁷². Susan, however, stresses a lot with her O-levels¹⁷³ which later make her so ill that she needs to be put in a hospital.¹⁷⁴

Melanie Garth is an Elementary Conversation Specialist at the school that lives with her mother. Her mother has had a stroke and she was the first lady of philology at Cambridge¹⁷⁵. Nevertheless, Melanie admits to Henry that her mother hates her and she said she never wanted Melanie to be there. Instead, Melanie's mother dotes on her nurse, Nurse Grimes and gives her nurse things that once belonged to Melanie.¹⁷⁶ Additionally, the audience learn that Melanie and Henry once had an affair in which he asked her to marry him and she turned

¹⁶⁵ Gray 1981:12

¹⁶⁶ Gray 1981:27

¹⁶⁷ Gray 1981:29

¹⁶⁸ Gray 1981:55

¹⁶⁹ Gray 1981:62

¹⁷⁰ Gray 1981:74

¹⁷¹ Gray 1981:75

¹⁷² Gray 1981:2

¹⁷³ Gray 1981:36

¹⁷⁴ Gray 1981:69

¹⁷⁵ Gray 1981:16

¹⁷⁶ Gray 1981:37-38

him down after taking her mother's advice.¹⁷⁷ In the first scene of act two Melanie's mother has died. She died from breaking her neck after a fall down a flight of stairs. This leads to two policemen coming to question Melanie¹⁷⁸, which she dismisses as being nothing more than a misunderstanding. Henry, on the other hand, seems to have doubts regarding her story as Melanie admitted to him that she was hated by her mother.¹⁷⁹

2.2.3 Similarities and dissimilarities between protagonists in *The Remains of the Day* and *Quartermaine's Terms*

There are several similarities and dissimilarities between the two protagonists of *The Remains of the Day* and *Quartermaine's Terms*. However, it can be argued that there are more similarities than dissimilarities between Mr Stevens and St John Quartermaine due to the undertone and outcome which are portrayed in both the novel and the play. If we look closely at the two, we will find that there are some distinct differences which separate them and make them into two very different creatures.

In both the novel *The Remains of the Day* and the play *Quartermaine's Terms* the protagonists are male that live in their own separate spheres; Mr Stevens as head butler maintains order and control within Darlington Hall and St. John Quartermaine as the indifferent and incompetent teacher for foreign students. Both of them are detached mentally from the outside world. Mr Stevens never allows himself to display emotions of any kind, and condemns it as a necessity to maintain his professionalism at all cost. Mr Stevens sees displays of emotion and being outspoken as highly unprofessional, furthermore he states;

“Miss Kenton, I am surprised to find you reacting in such manner. Surely I don't have to remind you that our professional duty is not to our own foibles and sentiments, but to the wishes of our employer.”

¹⁷⁷ Gray 1981:39

¹⁷⁸ Gray 1981:56-57

¹⁷⁹ Gray 1981:60

Like Mr Stevens, St. John Quartermaine rarely displays his feelings. Unlike Mr Stevens, however, Quartermaine does so because he is more or less indifferent to the people around him. He does not seem to take notice of what goes on and he carelessly goes on about his day. An illustration of Quartermaine's indifference is when he tells the story about when he was babysitting for Henry Windscape;

“(..). - and then the boy – my word, what a little devil, full of mischief, told me little Fanny had drowned in the bath and when I ran in I stood there thinking, you know, (He laughs) Lord, what am I going to say to Henry and Fanny particularly when they get back, especially after seeing a film like that – but it turned out it was only an enormous Raggidy Anne doll, and little Fanny was hiding under her bed - .(..)”¹⁸⁰

It shows that Quartermaine lives in his own bubble caring more about what to say to the girl's parents rather than responding to the situation. Most people would probably try to save the girl who is lying there in the bath. Later it is revealed that Quartermaine did not tell Henry Windscape and his wife about the doll, and he did not even bother to pick it up as Windscape tells;

“(..). – I didn't get Susan to bed until midnight of course (TO MEADLE) she's studying for her 'O' levels – a couple of years in advance – and – and Fanny had rather a bad moment when she when into the lavatory because of Raggidy Anne sitting there – and dripping – she thought it was little Fanny, you see – (Laughing).¹⁸¹

Unlike St John Quartermaine, Mr Stevens is a very professional man who takes his duties seriously and strives to be the best servant he can be. He elaborates about being a 'great butler'¹⁸², and being a good professional.¹⁸³ This is also one of the main differences between Quartermaine and Mr Stevens; Quartermaine does not particularly care about his work. Unlike Mr Stevens he does not seem to possess a strong feeling of pride regarding his job. He does

¹⁸⁰ Gray 1981:3

¹⁸¹ Gray 1981:14

¹⁸² Ishiguro 2005: 119-120

¹⁸³ Ishiguro 2005:43

not talk about work other than when he lies when he is forced to do so. When Loomis asks him why he has let his student go early¹⁸⁴, Quartermaine answers;

“Well, it was the special Life and Institutions lecture, you see, and I chose Oxford Colleges with slides – to give them the other point of view, for once (He laughs.) but of course the old projector broke-”¹⁸⁵

Loomis comments that it was the newest model¹⁸⁶, and Quartermaine continues;

“Yes, I think that’s the trouble, all those extra bits to master – anyway one of the colleges went in upside down and wouldn’t come out so I had to – to abandon technology and do it all off my own bat – you know, reminiscences of my time at the House and – and anecdotes – and you know – that sort of thing. The personal touch. But of course I ran out of steam a little, towards the end. I’m afraid. (Laughs).¹⁸⁷

Furthermore, Quartermaine is doing such a wretched job that he receives several warnings and in the end he is fired.¹⁸⁸ At the same time, he stays on as a teacher. All Quartermaine has left is work, just like Mr Stevens, but unlike him Quartermaine does it out of mere necessity. Quartermaine does not do it because of professionalism or duty. He does it because he has nowhere else to go. Quartermaine admits this being the case when Henry Windscape asks him whether he has had a good half-term. Quartermaine the replies that he has stayed there, in the staffroom at school.¹⁸⁹

A common trait that Quartermaine and Mr Stevens both share is that there are both unable to change and adjust. It becomes an inability, and this incapacity becomes their way of life. Though Quartermaine receives several warnings regarding his work, he does not seem to catch up or even recognise that he is being criticized. In contrast to Mr Stevens, his inability

¹⁸⁴ Gray 1981:21

¹⁸⁵ Gray 1981:21

¹⁸⁶ Gray 1981:21

¹⁸⁷ Gray 1981:21

¹⁸⁸ Gray 1981:78

¹⁸⁹ Gray 1981:43

to act has more to do with laziness rather than pride, or as Mark Sackling states: “St. John, you have an amazing ability to let the world impinge on you.”¹⁹⁰

Their unwillingness to change and move forward seem to make them unable to find and make friends with others. Though Mr Stevens seems to appreciate his dealings and exchange of words with Miss Kenton, he is rarely able to express his feelings. First of all he is restrained by his duty and professionalism, and secondly he would not know what to do. Friends have not been a part of his domain for a long time. Though he does invite the occasional fellow butler over to his pantry, he appreciates being alone. Even the simplest banter of social interaction, like the bantering with his employer Mr Farraday seems to stress Mr Stevens somewhat. Indeed he confesses:

“Embarrassing as those moments were for me, I would not wish to imply that I in any way blame Mr Farraday, who is in no sense an unkind person; he was, I am sure, merely enjoying the sort of bantering which in the United States, no doubt, is a sign of good, friendly understanding between employer and employee, indulged in as a kind of affectionate sport. Indeed, to put things into a proper prospective, I should point out that just such bantering on my new employer’s part has characterized much of our relationship over these months – though I must confess, I remain rather unsure as to how I should respond. In fact, during the first days under Mr Farraday, I was once or twice quite astounded by some of the things he would say to me.”¹⁹¹

Though all of them experience some degree of loneliness, Quartermaine’s life comes across as the most dysfunctional of all the other teachers. Though likeable and pleasant, as Mr Stevens, he goes through life without protest, and is unable to take a stand when needed.

¹⁹⁰ Gray 1981:25

¹⁹¹ Ishiguro 2005:15

2.3.1 Narrative Mode in *The Remains of the Day*

The Remains of the Day is a first-person narrative where Mr Stevens is both the protagonist and the narrator¹⁹². The story is revealed through Mr Stevens, referring to himself as “I”; “In the end, I decided the most prudent moment in the day would be as I served afternoon tea in the drawing room.”¹⁹³ This way his unspoken internal feelings and thoughts are conveyed to the reader. The narrator, Mr Stevens, is what could be called a conscious narrator, and through a stream of consciousness he shares his story to an audience, namely himself.¹⁹⁴ Mr Stevens conveys his story as it were a diary. Albeit at the same time it seems to the reader that he does not want to give away more than absolutely necessary. He does not lay out his feelings to the reader in the open, there are only hints. Mr Stevens conveys his story in a matter of fact-manner. An argument of that is that he is telling the story to himself and it would seem unnecessary for him to embellish further. Yet, it seems that by trying to simplify the truth he exposes himself¹⁹⁵ and it underestimates his readers. To the reader Mr Stevens appears imperfect in that he is minimalistic in his descriptions, and it is up to them to find the true meaning which lies behind what he is telling to the reader. Moreover, we only see one side of the story and Stevens’s narration becomes imperfect because the story is not objective. The story is solely told through the point of view of Mr Stevens by the events from his past and present. As Bay¹⁹⁶ comments

“His comments on, and interpretation of, past events in his life and his portrayal of himself and others in his tale expose him as an unreliable narrator. However, his attempts to deceive himself and others are possibly the most interesting and tell-tale aspect of the narrative.”

Mr Stevens’s narration draws emphasis on the psychology of his character.¹⁹⁷ What makes Mr Stevens unreliable is the incoherence of his story and the contradictions that takes place

¹⁹² Hawthorn 2005:97

¹⁹³ Ishiguro 2005:13

¹⁹⁴ Hawthorn 2005:97

¹⁹⁵ Bay 2009:1

¹⁹⁶ 2009:1

¹⁹⁷ Bay 2009:1

internally. There is a mismatch between his actions and what he conveys to the reader.¹⁹⁸ For instance, as one point Mr Stevens says to Miss Kenton that they have a professional duty to his lordship and there is not room for emotions or personal weaknesses regarding the dismissal of the Jewish maids. Miss Kenton gets angry and speaks against his lordship's actions. Mr Stevens, on the other hand, is surprised that Miss Kenton allows herself to even express these feelings.¹⁹⁹ However, sometime later Mr Stevens conveys an exchange he has had with Lord Darlington, where his lordship admits in being wrong when he fired the Jewish girls.²⁰⁰ Mr Stevens propounds:

“What’s done can hardly be undone. But it is at least a great comfort to hear his lordship declare so unequivocally that it was all a terrible misunderstanding. I just thought you’d like to know, Miss Kenton, since I recall you were as distressed by the episode as I was.”²⁰¹

Miss Kenton reacts to what she has been told by Mr Stevens and she notices his unreliableness;

“I’m sorry, Mr Stevens,” Miss Kenton said behind me in an entirely new voice, as though she had just been jolted from a dream, “I don’t understand you,” Then I turned to her, she went on: “As I recall, you thought it was only right and proper that Ruth and Sarah be sent packing. You were positively cheerful about it.”²⁰²

Furthermore, earlier in *The Remains of the Day* Mr Stevens declares that Lord Darlington desired to end injustice and suffering, and that such standards were “ingrained in his nature”.²⁰³ There is a conflict between what Mr Stevens makes Lord Darlington to be and the person that is later revealed to the reader. It is hard to say whether or not Mr Stevens chooses to do so deliberately. Mr Stevens seems to be in conflict over respect and duty towards his lordship and true feelings. The fact that the reader is never able to make out Mr Stevens makes him difficult to trust. This causes the reader to explore further into the meaning

¹⁹⁸ Bay 2009:1

¹⁹⁹ Ishiguro 2005:157

²⁰⁰ Ishiguro 2005:159

²⁰¹ Ishiguro 2005:161

²⁰² Ishiguro 2005:162

²⁰³ Ishiguro 2005:77

behind Mr Stevens's words, which places him under greater scrutiny than if he was sincere and honest. As Bay²⁰⁴ also points out there are a number of other examples that show how unstable he is a narrator. Bay²⁰⁵ draws attention to the 'the book scene' in which he on one hand claims that he "was not engaged in professional matters"²⁰⁶. Yet, later, when Miss Kenton extracts the book from his hand and discovers what he has been reading, he stresses that the reasons for reading the book, or any book for that matter, are entirely professional. He claims that he read the book in order to acquire a satisfactory command of the English language.²⁰⁷ However, it does not stop there as Mr Stevens later proclaims that there was nothing to be really ashamed of. He admits that he did in fact enjoy the romantic novel that he was reading²⁰⁸, which indicates that his reading was not merely for professional purposes even though he was adamant that it was the case. Another matter Bay²⁰⁹ points to is Lord Darlington. Mr Stevens displays his inconsistencies when he at one hand praises his lordship by stating;

"Whatever may be said about his lordship these days – and the great majority of it is, as I say, utter nonsense – I can declare that he was a truly good man at heart, a gentleman through and through, and one I am today proud to have given my best years of service to."²¹⁰

On the other hand, Mr Stevens lies openly when asked if he has worked for Lord Darlington in the past, stressing that he is employed by Mr Farraday, his current employer.²¹¹ He continues to deny his association with Lord Darlington several times, like the time when an American couple asks Mr Stevens if he did in fact work for his lordship once. Mr Stevens excuses himself by claiming it is in respect for his previous employer.²¹² He strongly denies

²⁰⁴ Ishiguro 2005:2

²⁰⁵ 2009:2

²⁰⁶ Ishiguro 2005:174

²⁰⁷ Ishiguro 2005:177

²⁰⁸ Ishiguro 2005:177

²⁰⁹ 2009:2

²¹⁰ Ishiguro 2005:64

²¹¹ Ishiguro 2005:128

²¹² Ishiguro 2005:131

that he is embarrassed by Lord Darlington and dismisses his untruthfulness as simple white lies in order to avoid being put in an unpleasant situation.²¹³

Even with the examples that are mentioned, what truly makes Mr Stevens into an unreliable character is how he exhibits his values. To the reader these values seem normal but the meanings which Mr Stevens attributes to them come across as something entirely foreign.²¹⁴ We see this in the way Mr Stevens chooses to define greatness.²¹⁵ To most readers the term ‘greatness’ would mean something ‘spectacular’ and ‘grand’, something so big that it would make the reader impressed. Instead, Mr Stevens alters the definition of ‘greatness’ and he transforms the word into a whole different meaning altogether. In Mr Stevens’s eyes, it seems that ‘greatness’ is, as Bay underscores, related to restraint²¹⁶ and decency. He tries to make the terms validated for ‘greatness’ so that it can be applicable at his profession as a butler.²¹⁷ As Ishiguro declares in *Conversations with Kazuo Ishiguro* he has been exploring the subject of self-deception in language in which it can be used to not only deceive other people but also one’s self.²¹⁸ Like mentioned earlier, Mr Stevens lies to his reader even though he brushes it aside as nothing more than white lies. On the contrary, the reader perceives Mr Stevens’s as someone who is bearing false witness. Cynthia F. Wong proclaims that “*The Remains of the Day* demonstrates what care Ishiguro has taken to reveal how people simultaneously deceive and protect themselves in the language they use.”²¹⁹

The consequence of Mr Stevens’s elaborations is that the reader begins to doubt him altogether. Mr Stevens’s behaviour makes him elusive seeing that;

“Stevens’s story is a human story about loss and fear of that loss. He has told it to elicit sympathy and understanding, and, despite the overwhelming evidence against his own misperceptions, Stevens emerges as a somewhat compassionate character.”²²⁰

²¹³ Ishiguro 2005:132

²¹⁴ Ishiguro 2005:2

²¹⁵ Ishiguro 2005:29

²¹⁶ 2009:3

²¹⁷ Bay 2009:3

²¹⁸ 2008:51

²¹⁹ 2005:65

²²⁰ Wong 2005:65

Even if it is almost impossible to take Mr Stevens seriously by his rationalisations and excuses, one should not be fooled.²²¹ Indeed, as Parkes²²² states;

“Ishiguro doesn’t expect his readers to be fooled, precisely because at some level Stevens himself isn’t fooled either. Stevens has barely begun his narrative before he has given us all the information we need in order to draw conclusions at odds with his own.”

Mr Stevens continues to alter the meaning of terms such as ‘dignity’. ‘Dignity’ is, however, defined as “the quality or state of being worthy, honoured and esteemed.”²²³, Mr Stevens on the other hand sees it differently. Instead, Mr Stevens regards ‘dignity’ as repressing feelings. Not only that, it seems to be his ideal and goal in life.²²⁴ Nevertheless, is that very few people would regard Mr Stevens’s actions as ‘dignified’. Again, Bay²²⁵ draws attention to the dismissal of the Jewish maids, in which Mr Stevens defends Lord Darlington and scolds Miss Kenton for not showing personal restraint. In the general public’s eye, and that of Miss Kenton’s, Mr Stevens’s action, or lack thereof, is abhorred.

2.3.2 Narrative Mode in *Quartermaine’s Terms*

Quartermaine’s Terms is a play where the story is told in a third-person narrative mode as every character is referred to by names or “he” or “she”²²⁶. However, seeing that *Quartermaine’s Terms* is a play, the narrative mode is not as clear as if one were to read it as a novel. Whilst watching the play the actor becomes the narrator for his or her character. However, for the sake of this thesis the play is read, and then the narrative of the third-person perspective applies.

The third-person narrative tells the story from an outsider’s standpoint, which in turn gives the most accurate and objective description of what happens in the play. There are no

²²¹ Parkes 2001:33

²²² 2001:33

²²³ Merriam Webster 2014

²²⁴ Bay 2009:4

²²⁵ 2009:4

²²⁶ Hawthorn 2005:82

internal dialogues which may disturb the reader; the reader does not know what is going on inside the head of the protagonist nor the other characters.

2.2.3 Similarities and Differences of Narrative Mode in *The Remains of the Day* and *Quartermaine's Terms*

As *The Remains of the Day* is a first-person narrative and *Quartermaine's Terms* is a third-person narrative, there are no real similarities between the two. In *Quartermaine's Terms* the narrative mode is told by a neutral third party whom the reader does not know. The reader is only informed by what is told on the page, but the character's thoughts and feelings are never revealed, we can only know them through their actions. It is up to the reader to interpret what happens on the page.

The Remains of the Day, on the other hand, is as mentioned a first-person narrative. The positive thing about that is that the reader is exposed to the feelings and emotions that are relayed by the narrator. However, it can be a bit one-sided as the reader is only told the story by one narrative, this case Mr Stevens. It is through his eyes that the reader gets to know the plot and other characters. Problem with this though is that we do not learn of how the other characters may feel or think. In *The Remains of the Day* the narrator Mr Stevens is also hard to understand because he comes across as rather unstable. He has a tendency to say one thing and do something entirely the next. Furthermore, the reader is only exposed to the things that the narrator wants him or her to see, not necessarily what the reader should have seen. The first-person narrative is by no means an objective voice, and it can be used to twist and turn the reader's perception. What is more, the reader cannot choose his or her focus. With a third-person narrative the reader can in way choose the character that he or she wants to focus on. All of the characters are all part of the story, of course, but the third-person narrative gives room to concentrate on one character instead of the one chosen by the first-person narrative. Seeing that a first-person narrative can be unstable and unreliable, the reader is safer to get the whole and true story from a third-person narrative. It can be argued, however, that a first-person narrative will at least be able to provide the feelings of the

narrator. Being sure what the characters in a third-person narrative feel is not exposed to the reader, and then it can be questioned whether or not the reader is truly conveyed the whole story. Interactions between people, in fiction or not, do not take place without any display of emotions. People, or characters in a novel, will always be feeling something, even if they are not able to convey it to the bystander. It should be remembered though, that in a novel like *The Remains of the Day* where there is only one narrator, the reader will only be told the story by that narrator, no one else.

By that one note *The Remains of the Day* and *Quartermaine's Terms* are two different stories altogether when it comes to the narratives that are conveyed to the reader.

Chapter 3: Isolation - Tragedy in *The Remains of the Day*

“The tragedy of life is in what dies inside a man while he lives - the death of genuine feeling, the death of inspired response, the awareness that makes it possible to feel the pain or the glory of other men in yourself.”

- Norman Cousins²²⁷

3.0 Tragedy in *The Remains of the Day*

In the introduction tragedy was defined as what would befall human beings, often being disasters and misfortunes.²²⁸ Ultimately, this often leads to social isolation and which also is the basis of this thesis. This is also what can be said to be the common denominator between a modern and ancient tragedy; they both focus on the downfall of their protagonists. As stated in the introduction, in modern tragedy there is often an anti-hero, an ordinary person, someone with little or no importance that is the protagonist. In ancient tragedy, on the other hand, the main character would be someone with a lot at stake, making his fall into tragedy even greater.

Thus, it can be said that the protagonist of *The Remains of the Day* does not fit into the classical ancient tragedy. Mr Stevens is a man with little or no importance other than to his employers. Being a butler is Mr Stevens's life, and his job is to serve other people, namely Lord Darlington and then later Mr Farraday. As Mr Stevens does not lose a fortune or his life, it could seem that *The Remains of the Day* is not really a tragedy at all. However, it depends on what is the focal point when assessing the novel. Mr Stevens does not lose a fortune or his life in a literal sense; however, he does seem to have 'lost' his life. It is no longer his to live; instead he lives for other people.

As stated before in one of the former paragraphs regarding the narrative mode in *The Remains of the Day*, Mr Stevens tries to make terms like 'greatness', 'dignity' and

²²⁷ Brainy Quote 2014

²²⁸ Cuddon 1999:927

'professionalism' become applicable to his work. Mr Stevens distorts the meaning behind the terms in such a manner that they form a new and different meaning to suit his purpose. As Bay²²⁹ points out, it is hard for the reader to take it seriously, making it both comical and absurd. At one point the reader witnesses this in regards to the word 'dignity'. In the case of the Jewish girls, Mr Stevens is surprised that Miss Kenton speaks against Lord Darlington and his way of handling the matter, or that it has become a matter at all. People, and Miss Kenton, become abhorred by Mr Stevens's actions, who continue to support his lordship, even if excuses himself and says that it is not for him to judge. However, from an outsider's viewpoint, Mr Stevens way of carrying out his work speaks volumes though not directly. To other people it seems that he does support his lordship even if he does not initially. To the reader it becomes obvious that Mr Stevens has lost his compass, he is not able to see right from wrong. Or, he is not willing to do so in the risk of losing his 'professionalism'. Moreover, it makes Mr Stevens look like a fool. Mr Stevens becomes a pawn in a game, someone that can be used, like a slave to his master.²³⁰ The worst part is that he agrees with the situation, or to be clear; Mr Stevens welcomes it in the sense that in his eyes his job is to be professional, not displaying any emotions. Therefore, it does not matter what he would think and feel, that does not count. In a sense, it seems that Mr Stevens has gone blind. In the end he also confesses to a stranger that it is in fact the case:

“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, 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?”²³¹

It can be claimed that the tragedy in *The Remains of the Day* is not in the fact the Mr Stevens has chosen to dedicate his life to be a butler. Many people feel a strong urge or calling for some kind of activity or profession. Most people do so because it would be worth their while

²²⁹ 2009:4

²³⁰ Bay 2009:5

²³¹ Ishiguro 2005:256

and it gives them meaning in life, something to hold on to. Seemingly, the tragedy lies in that Mr Stevens has reduced himself to a dismal character that regrets the outcome of his life. Or, it might have started as a choice he once took, but that choice seems to have burrowed itself inside of him with such a force that it paralyses him altogether. In a desperate attempt to make his life feel and look more worthy than that it actually is, Mr Stevens distorts the meaning of words so that they can fit into the reality he ultimately must face. As Bay²³² points out, Mr Stevens's warped sense of 'dignity', and the other words for that matter, is a way for him to hide a strong feeling of 'waste'. The alternations in the meaning of the words also give Mr Stevens a tool so that he can repress himself. By twisting the words in such a way he cannot be held accountable for his actions²³³. Like he says in regards to the Jewish girls, he has duty. Stripping all this away and Mr Stevens is next to nothing. He is like a small child without the power to do as what he wants, a grown man that is not able to make his own choices. He is trapped inside his own illusion and image of 'the great butler'. The way he has chosen to live does not give Mr Stevens any alternatives; he must do as he is told. What is worse, though, is that he is not even a slave, but pretends to be. Mr Stevens was never forced into being a butler; in fact he had great ambitions at one point in his life²³⁴, but that seem to have withered away. In the end it becomes clear that

"The Remains of the Day is one of the most profound novelistic representations of repression masquerading as professionalism.(..)"²³⁵

What is more, tragedy also lies in that Mr Stevens seems to have lost all of the qualities that would make him a full-bodied human being; the ability to speak, showing of emotions, ability to speak his mind and the chance to what he would truly like to do. It comes to show in regards to his father, Mr Stevens is not able to acknowledge or respond when his father tells him that he is proud of him.²³⁶ In the end of *The Remains of the Day* Mr Stevens meets Mrs Benn, former Miss Kenton and that is one of the few times that the reader learns about Mr Stevens's feelings. Mr Stevens learns that Miss Kenton that she on occasion regrets her

²³² 2009:6

²³³ Bay 2009:6

²³⁴ Ishiguro 2005:122

²³⁵ Shaffer 2008:87

²³⁶ Ishiguro 2005:101

life and wonders what it would have been like spending it with Mr Stevens.²³⁷ Indeed, Mr Stevens feels quite strongly, it seems, stating that;

“I do not think I responded immediately, for it took me a moment or two to fully digest these words of Miss Kenton. Moreover, as you might appreciate, their implications were such as to provoke a certain degree of sorrow within me. Indeed – why should I not admit it? – at that moment my heart was breaking.”²³⁸

But even then, when Mr Stevens is faced with his own feelings, admitting to them whilst Miss Kenton confesses, he is still not able to express himself openly. For the first time the reader is gets to know Mr Stevens’s genuine feelings towards Miss Kenton. However he is too restrained to say it out loud and he just smiles at her and says that it’s too late to look back.²³⁹ Thus making the tragedy greater because even if is helped he is not able to make use of it. Had Mr Stevens disclosed his true feelings it probably would not have caused him any great embarrassment seeing that Miss Kenton confessed feeling the same time. To the reader it seems that Mr Steven has just given up, and when departing he shifts from calling her Miss Kenton to Mrs Benn.²⁴⁰ It is as Mr Stevens becomes aware of the situation at last, or at chooses to acknowledge what is happening. It is like the puff has run out of him and there is really nothing left. Furthermore, he does not seem to even care when talking to stranger on the pier. Mr Stevens freely admits that he has indeed worked as a butler at Darlington Hall, talking about the old days.²⁴¹ In the end Mr Stevens faces disillusionment, though with a sense of truth;

“After all, what can we ever gain in forever looking back and blaming ourselves of our lives have not turned out quite as we might 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 servies.”²⁴²

²³⁷ Ishiguro 2005:251

²³⁸ Ishiguro 2005:251-252

²³⁹ Ishiguro 2005:252

²⁴⁰ Ishiguro 2005:252

²⁴¹ Ishiguro 2005:254

²⁴² Ishiguro 2005:257

3.1 Comparing Tragedy in *The Remains of the Day* and *Quartermaine's Terms*

There are several similarities between *The Remains of the Day* and *Quartermaine's Terms* when it comes to the question of tragedy. In both the novel and the play the reader is faced with a protagonist that ends up isolated. In both instances the tragedy is not in their actions as such, but rather the lack of it. They become isolated because they are not able to change and move with time.

However, *The Remains of the Day* seems to stand out in the sense that whereas Quartermaine does not seem to care for his existence at all, Mr Stevens on the other hand is very much present. Granted, Mr Stevens is stuck in his old ways, there is a sense of fragility and humanity in him. In *Quartermaine*, on the other hand the reader does not really register any kind of emotion. Quartermaine does not really do anything, he merely exist. One could ask: is that not tragic? Yet, Mr Stevens, at least, is aware of his existence and sees what is happening around him. That way one might conclude that *The Remains of the Day* is indeed more tragic than *Quartermaine's Terms*.

3.2 *The Remains of the Day* – A Comedy?

Aristotle separates the comedy from the tragedy “deals in an amusing way with ordinary characters in rather everyday situations.”²⁴³ Dante also states that the difference between a comedy and a tragedy is “that comedy begins with harshness but ends happily.”²⁴⁴ There are one trait in particular that *The Remains of the Day* does share with a comedy; the focus on ordinary characters in rather everyday situations. Though the reader gets to know Lord Darlington and Mr Farraday, neither of them are the protagonists in the novel. Indeed, the protagonist in *The Remains of the Day* is Mr Stevens, an ordinary man. He is ordinary in the sense that he does work like every other man, he has a duty to full-fill and he does so with an utmost diligence. He does not have a high-ranking position other than as a butler; he is

²⁴³ Cuddon 1999:149

²⁴⁴ Cuddon 1999:149

neither rich nor famous. Mr Stevens has chosen a life serving other men, and his 'professionalism' has made him bound to continue as servant. Over the years Mr Stevens seems to have lost the ability to act other than a slave or mere robot. He does not allow himself to speak his own mind, he follows the orders which he has been given and has no other ambition than to be a 'great butler'. With the excuses and twisting of words in order to make them fit better into his life, Mr Stevens might look like quite the comical character. Indeed, it is not easy to take him seriously; in fact he comes across as quite a ridiculous individual.

However, there are more tragic elements to *The Remains of the Day* than comical ones, making it to be a tragedy. The novel might not fit right in with the ancient tragedies, but it does fit into the category of modern tragedy.

Chapter 4: Social and Cultural Change

“It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent that survives. It is the one that is the most adaptable to change.”

- Charles Darwin²⁴⁵

Throughout *The Remains of the Day* and *Quartermaine's Terms* social and cultural change - or their protagonists' lack thereof, become the main underlying theme. Both protagonists display unwillingness and/or ability to change in accordance with time. It ultimately pins the two stories together despite the difference in time, characters, setting and plot. Their unwillingness or ability to change eventually conceals their fates and lead to their confinement in isolation.

In order to move with the times people are destined to move with the times. If they do not, they will be left behind. Unfortunately for Mr Stevens and St. John Quartermaine, time does not stand still. Years pass, so do their lives and nothing changes. Mr Stevens even admits openly that he does not like changes, stating;

“Now normally, like many of us, I have a reluctance to change too much of the old ways. But there is not virtue at all in clinging as some do to tradition merely for its own sake. In this age of electricity and modern heating systems, there is no need at all to employ all sorts of numbers necessary even a generation ago. Indeed, it has actually been an idea of mine for tradition's sake- resulting in employees having an unhealthy amount of time on their hands – has been an important factor in the sharp decline of professional standards.”²⁴⁶

It is somewhat ironic, however, that Mr Stevens were to make such a comment. As the reader would know, Mr Stevens is the one that is the least willing to move with the times. After all,

²⁴⁵ Brainy Quote 2013

²⁴⁶ Ishiguro 2005:7-8

he continues to cling onto his theories on what makes a ‘great butler’²⁴⁷, and what has been discussed earlier in this thesis, Mr Stevens even gives new meaning to words so that they would fit into his world and reality. Indeed, that can be said to be the best evidence of Mr Stevens not wanting to move with the times.

Furthermore, Mr Stevens still clings to his memories and tales of his father, and he enjoys re-telling them. He looks at his father as the mere prototype of a ‘great butler’, even though Mr Stevens grants that there is no need for the same staff like in the old times. It can also be seen in *Quartermaine’s Terms*, though quite on a different note altogether. In it St. John Quartermaine is not stuck in isolation due to his stubbornness or believes like Mr Stevens. Quartermaine, the protagonist is seemingly in isolation due to the lack of commitment and involvement. As the years pass Quartermaine is stuck in the staffroom, going about, never engaging in his work, and after several notices he is finally fired from his job.

In modern culture there are several good examples on how the world and the people in it forced to move on with the times. One example of this is the tv-series *Downton Abbey*, which focuses on the day to day life inside a mansion, focusing both on the staff ‘downstairs’ and the people living ‘upstairs’²⁴⁸. Viewers of the show meet Carson; one of the butlers that serves at *Downton Abbey*. Carson is not in a very different position from Mr Stevens, they both have great responsibilities regarding the house, and he is also the one his lordship often turns to. Like Mr Stevens, Carson is also rather reluctant to change. Carson, too, takes his responsibilities with the greatest sincerity. However, there is one major difference between the two butlers: Mr Carson moves with the time, however reluctant, as his duty bounds him to do so. Unlike Mr Stevens, Mr Carson sees it as his responsibility to be prepared for whatever might happen and he cannot be that if he does not follow with time. Even if he seems old-fashioned, he is also the first one to acknowledge that changes must be set to life.

By that it can be argued that Mr Stevens in fact is not following up to the standard as a great butler that he strives to be. Mr Stevens seems both out of place and unprepared in regards to his new employer Mr Farraday. Mr Farraday is an outgoing and social man that

²⁴⁷ Ishiguro 2005:119

²⁴⁸ Fellows, J. & Percival 2010-

likes light-hearted banter. Though Mr Stevens tries to understand and learn the ways of banter, he is quite unable to step out from the restraint which has a firm hold on him²⁴⁹;

“As it happened, I had that same morning been giving thought to the dilemma of whether or not I was expected to reciprocate my employer’s bantering, and had be seriously worried at how he might be viewing my repeated failure to respond to such openings. I there set about thinking of some witty reply; some statement which would still be safely inoffensive in the event of my having misjudged the situation.”²⁵⁰

For instance, he is not able to abandon his true emotions, even though he claims to know have them. He continues to be ashamed of his former employer Lord Darlington. So much so that when Mr Stevens takes friends of Mr Farraday around the estate he manages to both embarrass his employer and put him under scrutiny as he denies having worked under Lord Darlington.²⁵¹ Mr Farraday is not happy with such behaviour and becomes worried that Mr Stevens is not the ‘real thing’ after all.²⁵² Actually, it shows how ashamed Mr Stevens truly is, seeing that he is not a character that would put him in such a position lightly. That would allow him to be questioned and doubted, and Mr Stevens does, after all, take great pride in the fact that he is a butler. One thing is to deny being a butler under Lord Darlington to strangers that perhaps only knew his lordship by his name and actions, an another matter is to lie to the friends of your current employer. To the reader Mr Stevens’s actions speaks volumes. And it shows how reluctant Mr Stevens is to truly move on, to finish off and stop dwelling with what cannot be changed.

It can be said that Mr Stevens has become a prisoner of his time, of his values and of his perception. Quartermaine on the other hand is held captive by his apathy, his laziness and indifference to those in his surroundings.

²⁴⁹ Ishiguro 2005:17

²⁵⁰ Ishiguro 2005:17

²⁵¹ Ishiguro 2005:131

²⁵² Ishiguro 2005:130

Chapter 5: Conclusion

In this assignment I have learnt that even though there are elements of the ridiculous in the character of Mr Stevens, *The Remains of the Day* is what I would call a tragedy proper. It displays all the elements of a modern tragedy, and does also contain several characteristics from the ancient tragedies as well. There are one aspect in particular that makes the novel stand out as a tragedy; the fall of the protagonist Mr Stevens. He lives by a notion that greatness can be obtained through his profession as a butler. In his younger days he displayed enthusiasm and ambition, which now have been replaced by an overly sense of duty towards his profession. Mr Stevens admires his father's work and he has become the ideal Mr Stevens tries to follow.

Furthermore, Mr Stevens has created this world, in which words like 'greatness', 'dignity' and 'professionalism' have been altered into such a state that they are not recognisable to the reader. By doing so he is able to obtain achieve his biggest goal, namely to be a 'great butler'. Mr Stevens has created such an illusion he has not only trying to fool his readers, but also himself. At the same time one cannot fail to recognise Mr Stevens's problems, even if he is not able to recognise it himself. It seems as though Mr Stevens does indeed understands what is really going on, but he is too ashamed admit it. It would mean that everything that he has lived and strived for have been a lie. If he has not become the great butler he has dreamt of, what more will there be left? After all, Mr Stevens has sacrificed everything for his former employer Lord Darlington. Moreover, Mr Stevens has chosen isolation by serving his master, but in doing so he must keep up appearances so that it seems like he has been successful.

Assessments of *Quartermaine's Terms* have also been made, comparing it to *The Remains of the Day*. It shows that it too is a tragedy; however their tragedies are somewhat different. Both Mr Stevens and St. John Quartermaine are lone characters that have fallen into isolation. At one hand they have chosen their isolation, seeing that neither is able to change. Mr Stevens has chosen to dedicate his life to his job as a butler, and by some disillusion he thinks that he cannot display emotions in order to be a great professional. However, at the same time, he seems caught in his own isolation; it has rendered him completely paralysed

when dealing with other people. St. John Quartermaine on the other hand does is isolated, but not because of his sense of duty. He is isolated because he is to indifferent to do anything with his situation. However, both Mr Stevens and Quartermaine seem to display one common trait: they are too comfortable in their current situation they are not able to take action. If they do not choose to deal with their lives, life will ultimately go on, and there is nothing they will have to do about it. The fright for change seems to have strong hold on both of them. Indeed, as stated in the chapter regarding social and cultural change; Mr Stevens is a prisoner of his own time; his own ideals and he own perception. The same can be said for Quartermaine, in the sense that he has become a prisoner of his own laziness.

In the end there is only one thing that Mr Stevens can do is recognise his own life. The end of *The Remains of the Day*, when Mr Stevens was talking to the stranger at the pair, it seemed that there was a change in his character. He was honest.

After all; it was the butler that did it!²⁵³

²⁵³ The Free Dictionary 2014

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