

## Interface of Community and Environment in Kazuo Ishiguro's Novel *The Remains of the Day*

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### **Abstract:**

*The Remains of the Day*, the Booker Prize winner book, written by Kazuo Ishiguro, is regarded as one of the most highly post-war British novels. Ishiguro has chosen the post Second World War background for this novel where domestic service played a major role in Britain and continued to employ a large number of domestic servants until the Second World War. Here the author describes a personal life of the protagonist named Stevens. He is a butler in profession, and works at present under his master, Mr. Farraday who is a rich man from upper economic stratum. Through Stevens as well as some characters connected with him, the novelist portrays different communities with the surrounding atmosphere of that existing contemporary society. In that society, the high-class people reside at the center, and the rest of the society, who are from the middle and low class, have to fight hard continuously to get near to the center without crossing the boundary. This article attempts to show how different characters of both the upper class and the lower-class interface with each other professionally as well as personally through their community and environment in the novel *The Remains of the Day*.

**Keywords:** Environment, Community, Interface, High-Class, Butler, Poor-Class

### **Interface of Community and Environment in Kazuo Ishiguro's Novel *The Remains of the Day***

In the novel *The Remains of the Day*, Ishiguro presents his radiant story-telling talent by describing a butler who is the main character of this book. Stevens, the protagonist of the novel, continuously struggles during his whole life in order to become satisfied and happy both personally and professionally. At the time of narrating his life, Ishiguro visualizes the communities of the society. In these communities, the former master Lord Darlington, present master Mr. Farraday, people from high class who always visit Darlington Hall, his old sick father and some of his coworkers both male and female are focused specifically. At the same time, the novelist depicts the atmosphere of that

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contemporary society by bringing the high class and poor class which is one of the important subject matters of this novel.

According to Wikipedia, a butler is originally a middle-ranking member of the staff of a lucrative and majestic household in Britain. In the 17th and 18th centuries, the butler gradually became the most senior in rank, and generally male member of a household's staff in the very outstanding families. At the same time, there was sometimes a steward or estate manager who was senior to the butler in social status into the 19th century. His work was to run the outside estate and economic affairs rather than the domestic part of the families. Beginning around the early 1920s following Second World War, employment in domestic service professions began a complete deterioration in America and in western European countries. But still there were around 30,000 butlers employed in Britain by the Second World War. Barry Higman, a social historian argues that a high number of domestic workers within a society correlates with a high level of socio-economic inequality. Conversely, as a society endures levelling among its communal classes, there is a declination of a good number of employees who worked in domestic and household service.

The idea of a class or a community is generally a classification of a social group. In this regard, Karl Marx comments about class in his theory:

Classes are groups of men and women with a similar position in a social division of labor, with a common relation to the means of production. Classes are not just relations of production; they also have ideological and political dimensions. It is an inherently social activity...One works for others and by means of others, either in direct association with others, or by means of the conceptual and material tools other have transmitted to the worker. (Marx, *Das Capital*)

Following the comment of Marx, Ishiguro describes some characters of the society who keep ideological and political dimensions among two classes in this novel: high class or master class and servant class. Contemporary society has some unwritten rules about maintaining and continuing the life styles of people of these two classes. One of the rules is that, the high-class people keep several butlers and maids for household affairs. Since married life of the working-class people is portrayed as conflicting in the question of loyalty to one's master, butlers and servants who wish to get married and have children at once, find themselves out of job. In other words, they are not allowed to maintain a family life. Thus, servants and butlers who become interested to have their own family life, at first quit from their work, and then do whatever they like. As inferior beings, they are expected only to exist solely to serve the household where they work.

It is mentioned in the story that, during the years between 1920 to 1930, there was a society named The Hayes Society. It was a leading society of butlers who used to claim that any butler applying for membership to the society must possess a dignity in keeping with his position:

The Hayes Society claimed to admit butlers of 'only the very first rank'. Much of the power and prestige it went on to gain derived from the fact that unlike other such organizations which have come and gone, it managed to keep its numbers extremely low, thus giving this claim some credibility...This, and the fact that the Hayes Society tended to be a rather secretive body, lent it much mystique for a time, ensuring that the pronouncements it occasionally issued on professional matters were received as though hewn on tables of stone. (Ishiguro, *The Remains of the Day*, 1989, pg. 32)

The butler profession is a miniature of the contemporary society. The idea of the butler bears a culturally symbolic meaning. Ishiguro comments in his novel *The Remains of the Day* through the speech of Stevens about butler class:

It is sometimes said that butlers only truly exist in England. Other countries, whatever title is actually used, have only manservants...Continentalers are unable to be butlers because they are as a breed incapable of the emotional restraint which only the English race is capable of.' (Ishiguro, 1989, pg. 44)

In the novel, Ishiguro introduces some butlers who represent the poor class of the contemporary society. Stevens, his father, Miss Kenton and Mr. Graham are some characters in this regard. Stevens is the great example of a butler who represents the butlers of the Hayes society. He is an exceptional and serious employee who is very much determined to do his work sincerely. Rob Atikson, a critic of Ishiguro's novel *The Remains of the Day*, describes Stevens as well as the setting of the story by his own words in his essay named "How the Butler Was Made to Do It: The Perverved Professionalism of *The Remains of the Day*" by following ways:

His (Stevens) retrospective is set in 1956, when the great era of the country house is over, and with it the age of the classic English butler. The Labor Government's wealth transfer taxes have begun to break up the ancestral estates of people like Lord Darlington. Members of the aristocracy are now opening their houses to throngs of tourists or, worse still, conveying them to the National Trust or, worst of all,

selling them to foreign, even American, millionaires. (Atikson, pg. 179)

In this novel, Ishiguro portrays the character of Stevens as a butler of Lord Darlington, his first master, and later Mr. Farraday, his present master. Both of his masters are from aristocratic class. According to the demand of Hayes society, aristocratic people like Lord Darlington and Mr. Farraday keep a number of working people for maintaining household works well. Butler, who work for the aristocratic family, must be a member of a distinguished family. Stevens keeps an idealistic view about the word 'distinguished'. To him, a distinguished man always thinks and tries to make a fruitful career and thus contributes to the progress of humanity by seeking the moral and decent causes. He further believes that in his generation, other butlers are willing to leave not just over wages, but also over the moral worth of one's employers. To Stevens, his job is so important that he never gives priority to his personal life during his working hour. This becomes very clear when Miss Kenton, his coworker, wants to express her love to him many times in many ways. But he never responses or gives any positive sign about her emotion to him. Even at the time of her departure from Darlington Hall never makes him sad. He becomes very calm during the death of his father. He knows that his father is going to die at any moment and his presence is expected there. Instead of staying beside his father at that time, he becomes busy fulfilling his duty by serving the guests who are from high class society. From Miss Kenton, he gets the news of his father's death. But he continues to keep calm and carry on, never sharing how he feels, even to himself. This is how he continues to play his role as a sincere professional butler.

Stevens is the ideal of the perfect butler who demolishes all traces of his own personality and all individual dreams in the service of his master. He never regrets about his work, about his devotion to work and about his single life because of his profession. Without a hint of self-awareness or irony, he expresses the typical Englishness of butlers:

It is sometimes said that butlers only truly exist in England. Other countries, whatever title is used, have only man servants. I tend to believe this is true. Continentals are unable to be butlers because they are a breed incapable of the emotional restraint which only the English race are capable of ... when you think of a great butler, he is bound, almost by definition, to be an Englishman. (Ishiguro, *The Remains of the Day*, 1989, pg. 43)

There is no doubt that, butlers of Stevens's father's generation are mercifully free about the confusions of such professional values. As a butler, his father had limited general knowledge and limited command of English. But with

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these limited knowledges, he successfully completed his work, as he believed that; "Dignity in keeping with his position, as the Hayes Society puts it." (Ishiguro, *The Remains of the Day*, 1989, pg. 36) According to the author, to the butlers of Stevens's father's time, the present world looks like a ladder. Thus, a distinguished household often represents the houses of royalty or the houses of lords. Any butler in his father's generation, then, uses the ladder for climbing purpose as high as possible. The higher he reaches, the more professional prestige he gathers. The Hayes Society makes this point more familiar. But later, the new generation, that means during the time of Stevens, the butler class stop loving to imagine the world as a ladder. To them, it resembles a wheel which means that they care about who they serve, and they want to serve those to whom development is assigned.

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As Stevens looks back over his career, he prides himself on coming through many problematic personal and professional situations with that all-important dignity: "And let me now posit that 'dignity' has to do crucially with a butler's ability not to abandon the professional being he inhabits." (Ishiguro, *The Remains of the Day*, 1989, pg.55) In other words, he never thinks about taking off his butler suit even during any critical time. When his present master Mr. Farraday offers him to take a holiday trip for six days, at that time he gets the chance to think about his personal life. When he starts his holiday journey towards the countryside areas by riding his own car, he enjoys the greenery sights of the surrounding places. That is the perfect time for him to think about his personal life. He realizes that he misses so many things to do during his working time which, at present, is not possible to do. Yet he tries to think about Miss Kenton and wants to readjust his relation with her. But it is too late as Miss Kenton is already a married woman who loves her husband and happy with her present family life. Stevens, after being refused by Miss Kenton, with a broken heart, returns at his master's place and starts to work like before.

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Throughout the book, Stevens is confused between past and present by changing his mind about certain topics several times. By portraying the character of Stevens, the writer makes everyone realize that Stevens always keeps a complicated mind. The professional dignity that he has possessed in his full life, shows an objectionable look at a man without any emotion and feeling. Later, it becomes clear that it is not the absence of emotion, but rather the masking of it. Behind the mask is a man with a complicated sentiment, obscured feelings and a chosen duty to put work before all else.

Through the novel, the author explores how an apparently decent and good attachment to Englishness and English values can be associated with fascism and patriotism, and anti-Semitism. Once, Stevens' former master Lord Darlington calls Stevens and asks whether there are any Jews among the permanent house staffs. When he comes to know that there are two Jewish

housemaids, Lord Darlington tells Stevens to inform those two maids to quit their job as early as possible. Stevens shows his surprise in this issue and tells his master that it is not a wise decision at all. Then Lord Darlington explains: "It's regrettable, Stevens, but we have no choice. There's the safety and well-being of my guests to consider. Let me assure you, I've looked into this matter and thought it through thoroughly. It's in all our best interests." (Ishiguro, *The Remains of the Day*, 1989, pg. 155) These two maids are under Miss Kenton's direct supervision as housekeepers for last six years. As Miss Kenton keeps a soft corner in her heart for them, that's why Stevens thinks it appropriate to inform Miss Kenton first about the dismissal of Ruth and Sarah. Stevens offers Miss Kenton the opportunity to speak with the maids herself along to his pantry before their dismissal the next morning. Miss Kenton expresses outrage and warns Stevens that if the maids are dismissed, she will leave as well. Finally, Stevens carries out the order, and Miss Kenton does not leave. From this segment, it becomes clear that Miss Kenton fails to leave the Hall though she wants to leave. She needs the job seriously and that is why, after her declaration to quit the job with her two staffs, she stays and continues her job. She shows her anger in her behavior, yet she has to listen to Stevens, as he is senior to her. This incident is the proof that Lord Darlington, on behalf of the master class, maintains the restriction about keeping Jewish maids at his place. At the same time, through Miss Kenton, the importance and craziness of the servant class for continuing their job is also focused here.

At the end of his holiday trip across England, Stevens realizes a devastating truth about his former master: "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 mistake." (Ishiguro, *The Remains of the Day*, 1989, pg. 243) Stevens is the true example of a butler at that time representing the butler class in the novel. Through Stevens, Ishiguro depicts the community of butler class of the contemporary society. The butler class are very loyal to their masters. More than their personal life, happiness and satisfaction, they give priority to the service towards their master. Both his former and present masters are very much satisfied with Stevens for his loyalty and sincerity.

Mr. Graham is a butler who works for Lord Darlington with Stevens at Darlington Hall. Like Stevens, Graham is also very committed and sincere about his work. Though Graham is very close to Stevens and they become bosom friends to each other, Stevens is senior to him as a butler. Thus, butler class also maintains a division. Because of their busy working life, they hardly get the scope to share personal conversation between each other. Yet they never feel sorry or upset as both of them always become crazy to show their seriousness and sincerity through their work towards their masters. Most of the regular household works are done by Graham. On the other hand, Stevens always manages to look after the parties, programs and political gatherings held at Darlington Hall during his former master Lord Darlington's time. Lord

Darlington prefers Stevens to maintain these parties and political gatherings as Stevens has a sharp idea about his language and manners. Miss Kenton also works with Graham. Her soft corner for Stevens and desire to propose Stevens is revealed by Graham. He also understands the attraction of Miss Kenton that she keeps for Stevens, and her longing for marriage. In fact, it is Graham who discloses Stevens about Miss Kenton's feeling and emotion to Stevens. Unfortunately, Stevens always ignores to listen this. To him, giving priority to the personal life more than professional work is a serious crime. In this way Stevens always avoids Miss Kenton.

In the novel, the author describes another characteristic of servant class. It is the strict rule that a butler or a worker who works familial works, is not allowed to marry and settle his or her life until he or she quits or retires from the work. If we analyze the characters of Stevens, Miss Kenton and Graham, we can find that all of them remain single during their professional life. Miss Kenton later leaves the house because of marriage purpose. When Stevens gets a letter from her, there he finds writing to him that Miss Kenton wants to return to the hall and join her work like before. She adds in that letter that she will divorce her husband first and then other things to do. But later, Miss Kenton expresses her happiness living with her husband. She neither keeps interest to divorce her husband, nor she becomes interested to get the job back. Thus, in this novel, Stevens, Mr. Graham and Miss Kenton are the true examples of their class and community.

Ishiguro describes not only the servant class in details while narrating the story, he describes high class also and later, he brings the connection between these two communities. Among the high-class people, Lord Darlington is a shining example in this regard. Stevens comments about his former master Lord Darlington in this way: "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." (Ishiguro, *The Remains of the Day*, 1989, pg. 105) Stevens praises that Lord Darlington is not only a gentleman by birth, but also by virtue of his character. A true and gentle Englishman, he leads his life with a sense of moral duty and responsibility. There is no presence of personal desire and passion in his life and thus he is very serious and sincere while passing his regular life.

Lord Darlington carries a number of good qualities; like immensity, seriousness, nobleness, professionalism, good judgement, self-respect, religious mentality, dignity and real aristocracy. A man from high class society, he is very cordial, humble and friendly towards his guests who join and enjoy the regular parties organized by Lord Darlington regularly at his living place, Darlington Hall. He engages himself by discussing on serious topics and present condition about politics and war. He is initially motivated

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to become involved in politics not by any sympathy with Nazism, but by his very English sense of fairness toward the Germans following their defeat in the First World War. Later he is blamed for treachery against his own country.

On the other hand, the present American master of Stevens, Mr. Farraday is a modern and jolly minded man. Stevens, after having served Lord Darlington for thirty-five years, has to adjust himself to Mr. Farraday, his present master. Mr. Farraday determines to buy the great Darlington Hall because he is always crazy to buy a large house: "a genuine grand old English house" and "a genuine old fashioned English butler" (Ishiguro, *The Remains of the Day*, 1989, pg.124) to go with it. For this reason, when he buys the house, with household furniture and other initial things, he gets all the butlers and servants of that house in order to serve him. Mr. Farraday is a sophisticated and aristocratic character from high class society with different characteristics. He keeps a cheerful sense on typically American humor who loves to talk about different types of topics like regular football match and other different outdoor games, current affairs and live making. He is quite dissimilar to Lord Darlington. Mr. Farraday does not keep any interest in political issues. Moreover, he never looks at life and its different parts very seriously. He knows how to enjoy the present life. This modern sense and ideology of Mr. Farraday comes out in the later parts of the novel when he offers Stevens to go for a holiday week so that he can be refreshed. This is also possible because of changing the time and atmosphere.

After analyzing both masters of Stevens, another example of community and environment in between master's group is focused clearly. Though both the former and present masters of Stevens are from the same class, they have many dissimilarities in them. Being a prestigious and caring master, Lord Darlington never thinks about giving Stevens a holiday week as a break. As he himself is always a serious character, he maintains a serious and punctual life where humor and enjoying the present life through fun and happiness are fully absent. That is why, there is no holiday week for any butler during the working period of Lord Darlington. The atmosphere and surrounding situation never allow a butler or a servant to pass a relaxed time for few days. Stevens himself is so used to about the routine life and that is why he never imagines or think about getting vacation and holiday week. When he is asked by his present master to pass a holiday week, at first, he refuses. Later he agrees and grabs the opportunity.

In the full novel, Darlington Hall is the center of all the characters from both high class and servant class. From the master down to the housekeeper, all lead their lives actively in the performance of their own duties and responsibilities. Lord Darlington continues his life without having any intimate relationship with anyone else. More than the personal and familial

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life, he likes to engage himself with international socio-political issues. Stevens remains always busy to do his work with perfection. Both Lord Darlington and Stevens represent the two opposite classes of that contemporary society. In this novel Ishiguro puts his genius by bringing the two communities with their current atmospheres, which are professionally and personally connected to each other.

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