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**POLITICS IN KAZUO ISHIGURO'S
*THE REMAINS OF THE DAY***

20TH CENTURY POLITICAL THEORIES AND LITERATURE

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Narrated by the butler of Darlington Hall, Kazuo Ishiguro's novel *The Remains of the Day* is a moving portrayal of the evening of a life based upon a collapsing ideology, the evening that should be 'the best part of the day' for working people. However, just as year 1956 is flavoured with the post-war bitterness, so are Mr Stevens's reminiscences tinted with regret he would not acknowledge. As conservative values of aristocracy are being swept aside by the coming age of liberalism, Mr Stevens finds himself lost and baffled.

For generations, his family has served the great lords. His father, old Mr Stevens, has excelled as a butler at Darlington Hall. Now, it has been his turn to carry on this dignified role: a mirror of traditional values, an example to his fellow servants. Strict, yet clear hierarchy and codes mark the social borders. The grandeur of the estate embodies historical success and incites a wish to belong, to partake in its story, devote his life to Darlington – the sense of honour, the greatness and established customs Mr Stevens holds so dear. Being a butler, Mr Stevens feels respected, integrated in the aristocratic world. Being a butler means to him being part of the conservative system, never questioning it for to question would mean to step aside, out of the well-trained role, the butler.

But then Miss Kenton arrives and with her – a grain of doubt. The rule is family first, i.e. the aristocratic family, and thus – profession to all serving it. Should one of the staff enter into marriage with another, this order would be endangered. With two families first, there would arise a question as to which should be favoured. Already upon meeting Miss Kenton, Mr Stevens loses his certainty. Though he accepts her as a housekeeper, from then on, Mr Stevens becomes alert. He has to watch her, catch the reason for her seeming incompatibility with the world he has known. Yet Miss Kenton is as excellent a housekeeper as he – a butler, in spite of her more liberal views of life and lack of restraint where emotions are concerned. Gradually, this interest in her morphs into attachment Mr Stevens is too proud to admit for to do so would imply treason – the only person he must be attached to is Lord Darlington.

However, Lord Darlington fails Mr Stevens as his ideology fails his life. Though, faithful to the end, the butler describes his lord as 'a good man' and 'a gentleman through and through', the war and its consequences reveal Lord Darlington as entangled in conservative values as his butler. Voting for peace and dignity, he entertains the Nazis and dismisses his Jewish maids, only to be declared a Nazi himself by his nation and tried for treason. Ironically, Lord Darlington turns for advice to Mr Stevens, his shadow whose principle is only to serve instead of having an opinion of his own. Even the accusation of Lord Darlington as a Nazi pawn by his godson, does not shift Mr Stevens's rigid compliance with Lord Darlington's views he is to mirror as a model butler.

The sadness of Mr Stevens's story is enhanced by symbols that signify stages of the coming ideological change. As a mark of dilapidation of aristocracy and its propagated conservatism, old Mr Stevens stumbles and falls failing to fill his role. His death foretells the coming downfall of old values, but Mr Stevens, his son who might yet have a future, does not heed the hint and remains as restrained as ever, letting nothing, not even his own father's passing away, hinder him from waiting upon the prominent society he glorifies.

Even Miss Kenton's engagement with another man, a co-servant Mr Benn, does not shake him. Mr Benn's daring to embrace an individual path and dreaming of his own enterprise to foster is a different route that though fearful might be more rewarding in offering freedom of choice and a chance to discover one's individual value stripped from historical roles and servitude. But Mr Stevens still clings to his illusions of greatness, never considering fighting for the woman he would have married himself had he not been a butler. He rather keeps supporting the decaying conservatism than helps strengthen the emerging ideas of liberalism.

Having travelled a long way, passing vast sceneries of nothing in particular to admire, Mr Stevens finally meets Miss Kenton, now Mrs Benn, only to hear her decline his offer to return to Darlington Hall. Twenty years have elapsed since their parting. Yet, although it is evident that life has not been easy outside the sheltered walls of Darlington Hall, Miss Kenton declares she has something a lot more precious to guard and attend to – her daughter is with child. There is future for Miss Kenton, a future brought by liberalism, which Mr Stevens has not. All he has is Darlington Hall. And even that is changing.

With Lord Darlington having passed away and his godson shot during the war, the Hall has now passed on to an American with liberal views on both politics and interpersonal relationship. The war has emptied the manor, leaving it bare of former splendour. A table tennis occupies space where bookshelves and snug armchairs used to welcome visitors. Mr Stevens is left to refill his life with new values just as he has to help refurnish the old manor. He has been trapped in the Darlington Hall like the pigeon that comes through the hearth empty of warmth at the end of the story. But Mr Stevens still has hope – the remains of the day. As he helps free the bird, he still has time to free his soul from the *ancien régime* and to discover meaning in his own life as an individual being, perhaps in his unique experience of the blend of the best of old traditions with those of liberal future.

Kazuo Ishiguro has depicted a tale of contrasts – the greatness in serving a system at the cost of individual value and the greatness in finding courage to defy the system in hope of gaining it. The life stories of the two protagonists, the butler and the housekeeper, are thus as two parallel paths that might and yet never merge. Without being much concerned with politics, the destinies of Mr Stevens and Miss Kenton are yet shaped by political ideologies.