The Functions of the Narratee in Kazuo Ishiguro’s *The Remains of the Day*
Abstract

Since its publication in 1989, Kazuo Ishiguro’s third novel, *The Remains of the Day*, has received a great deal of attention. It has been the object of criticism as well as acclaim and even been turned into film. It is the purpose of this essay to explore reader communication and characterisation *The Remains of the Day* by analysing its narratee, i.e. the receiver of the narrator’s story within the text. This entails the application of a reader response approach on the level of the narrative. More precisely, the investigation focuses on the functions of the narratee in the areas of reader communication and characterisation of the narrator and main character of the novel, Stevens.

I argue that the narratee, as an agent of the narrative, has two prominent functions in the novel: the first is as a tool for the author in the characterisation of the narrator of the story, and the second is as a device for achieving communication between author and reader. My thesis is that the narratee is not utilised in a mere supportive capacity in the novel, but as a primary way of achieving reader communication and characterisation of the narrator. Thus, methodologically this investigation is performed in part by reconstructing the narratee, and in part by analysing the communicative situation contained in the narrative.

The investigation yields ample evidence to support that the narratee, as a device of the narrative, is utilised as a primary way of achieving reader communication and characterisation of the narrator in the novel. The narratee’s indirect influence in the novel is surprisingly tangible and the narratee is revealed as a major mover of the narrative. In addition to this, the analysis shows that the narrator can also be his own narratee. In this regard Stevens’s role in the narrative is twofold: he is both the narrator, who tells his story, and the narratee, who receives the story. The duality serves to highlight and reconcile the complexities and idiosyncrasies of his conflicted character, as well as make the narrative more accessible to the reader.
Since its publication in 1989, Kazuo Ishiguro’s third novel, *The Remains of the Day*, has received a great deal of attention. It has been the object of criticism as well as acclaim. Having won the Booker prize and even been turned into film, this novel has certainly not passed by unnoticed.

The question of why the book has received so much attention is not easily answered. On the surface it seems to be a rather straightforward and simple piece of reading. Taking place in the mid 1950s, *The Remains of the Day* tells the seemingly unassuming tale of an ageing butler on a motoring trip through rural England. Through flashbacks and the reminiscences of its main character, however, the novel, which takes the form of a travel journal, reveals a more involved story, which stretches over a far greater time span than the actual motoring trip. Portraying both the inner and the outer journey of the main character, the novel explores and reveals the emotional landscape of the old manservant Stevens and, to a lesser degree, the socio-political structures surrounding him at different stages of his life. There appears to be nothing fantastical or revolutionary about it, but *The Remains of the Day* continues to draw the interest of readers and critics all the same. In the words of James McPherson:” This is an extraordinarily readable book” (282).

*The Remains of the Day* is highly engaging not only because the story is conveyed as a seemingly easily accessible first person narrative, but also because of the very obvious discrepancies between the narrator’s intended story and the story actually communicated. One cannot help but wonder how the reader communication is achieved in the novel. What sort of strategic devices or mechanisms are utilised in the text in order to convey the story and the message to the reader?

The critical discourse connected to *The Remains of the Day* is multifaceted, yet there seems to be one common starting-point: the main character Stevens. Due to the fact that Stevens is also the narrator of the narrative, the criticism has, not surprisingly, been focused rather exclusively on him. Thus, most attempts to understand the reader communication in the novel have had their focus on the character of Stevens, usually designating him as the primary narrative agent and means of communication. Two illuminating examples of this, which will be further referenced in this essay, are the articles “Stunts” and “The Year in Fiction”, by Richard Alleva and Valerie Martin. Within narratology, however, attempts have been made to analyse another narrative agent in literature, namely the narratee. The narratee is a narrative agent on the same level as the narrator and can be defined as the receiver of the narrator’s story within the text. As a tool of literary analysis, the narratee’s value lies in its investigative properties concerning the structures and devices of narrative texts. Gerald Prince claims that
the study of the narratee and the communicative situation in which he or she is involved can lead to further understanding of the mechanisms of the narrative, as well as "a better understanding not only of the narrative genre but of all acts of communication" (201). Peter Rabinowitz adds that: "The narratee is important not so much because 'he' is intrinsically interesting but rather because he is useful as a concept to help analyze the structure of texts" (83).

It is the purpose of this essay to explore reader communication and characterisation in the novel The Remains of the Day by analysing its narratee. This entails the application of a reader response approach on the level of the narrative. More precisely, the investigation will be focused on the functions of the narratee in the areas of reader communication and characterisation of the narrator and main character of the novel, Stevens. I will argue that the narratee, as an agent of the narrative, has two prominent functions in the novel: the first is as a tool for the author in the characterisation of the narrator and the second is as a device for achieving communication between author and reader. My thesis is that the narratee is not utilised in a mere supportive capacity in the novel, but as a primary way of achieving reader communication and characterisation of the narrator.

The theoretical basis for this essay is the loose compilation of ideas known as reader oriented theories. As the name suggests, these theories deal mainly with the reader, though in quite diverse ways. The appeal of this approach is the tangibility and seemingly practical application of its principal concept: “the reader must act upon the textual material in order to produce meaning” (Selden, Widdowson and Brooker 50). Thus, when utilising the reader oriented theories in literary analysis, one inevitably deals with communication with the reader on some level and in some form.

Over time reader oriented theories have developed in many directions, spanning from Wolfgang Iser’s concretization to Stanley Fish’s interpretative communities. Central to all, however, is the reader and his or her communicative situation. The highly intriguing addition to the reader oriented approach made by Prince draws attention to the addressee within the narrative. He shows that narratives generate their own readers or addressees, irrespective of the actual readers. Prince designates these addressees as the narratees. On the level of the narrative, the communicative situation thusly contains the agents of narrator and narratee. The narratee can be defined as "the receiver of the narrator’s narrative as found in the text" (Lorentzon 65). Thus, the narratee is not a real person, but a phenomenon of the text and its

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1 In Prince’s discussions the narratee is always assumed to be male unless specified as female. In order to avoid ambiguity I will do the same in the following analysis.
communicative context. Other terms used for this agent are the “inscribed reader”, the “encoded reader” or the “postulated reader”. However, in order to avoid confusion I will restrict myself exclusively to the term narratee throughout the rest of the essay.

Of particular interest for this essay are the various functions which a narratee, according to Prince, can exercise in a narrative: mediator between author and reader, designator of themes in the narrative, means of characterising the narrator, help in establishing the narrative framework and contributor to the development of the plot (198-201).

Methodologically the investigation will be performed in part by reconstructing the narratee, and in part by analysing the communicative situation contained in the narrative. Reconstructing the narratee is necessary in order to investigate how he is utilised in the narrative. The characteristics of the narratees are defined by their specific uses in the narrative, their specific functions. For example, only before a certain type of narratee would the narrator bring up certain topics or make certain admissions. In short, a certain type of narratee can be expected to produce a certain response from, or highlight certain features of, the narrator. Similarly, it is also possible to reconstruct the narratee from the statements and responses of the narrator.

Prince explains how we can come to grips with the narratee from an analytical point of view. The reconstruction or, perhaps more correctly, characterisation of the narratee is performed by employing what he terms a “zero-degree narratee” (192-94). The zero-degree narratee is a basic investigative construct, from which the narratee of a specific narrative can be “built”. In fact, the zero-degree narratee is in itself little more than a completely neutral image of an ideal addressee for the narrator’s message. As such, he has no distinguishing traits or characteristics whatsoever, and understands all communication from the narrator perfectly. He has a complete grasp of the rules of language and narrative, as well as a perfect memory of events in the narrative about which it has already been informed. Beyond these formal skills of communication, however, he has no frames of reference, or knowledge of its own. The zero-degree narratee possesses no knowledge of characters or events other than what is supplied by the narrator, and has no ability to interpret or anticipate the novelistic action without the assistance of the narrator.

Prince’s idea builds on the presumption that “[e]very narratee possesses the characteristics enumerated except when an indication to the contrary is supplied in the narration intended for him…” (194). The initial task, then, is to detect indications of this type of contrariety in the text. Prince elaborates by pointing out that “it is on the basis of these deviations from the characteristics of the zero-degree narratee that the portrait of a specific narratee is gradually
constituted” (194). That is, the deviations contain information about the specific narratee and set him apart from the zero-degree narratee and provide him with his defining characteristics.

In detecting the deviations which define the specific narratee, Prince offers further assistance:

If we consider that any narration is composed of a series of signals directed to the narratee, two major categories of signals can be distinguished. On the one hand there are those signals that contain no reference to the narratee or, more precisely, no reference differentiating him from the zero-degree narratee. On the other hand, there are those signals that, on the contrary, define him as a specific narratee and make him deviate from the established norms. (194)

Thus, reconstructing the narratee is in part a matter of identifying the narratee signals in the novel, and in part a matter of analysing them using the zero-degree narratee. Prince suggests that the different types of signals that define the narratee can be categorised as follows: direct and explicit references to the narratee, implicit and descriptive references to the narratee, questions and pseudo-questions, negations, extra-textual experience references known to both narrator and narratee, and finally over-justifications (194-97). As these different narratee signals cover a large variety of types of narratives and modes of narration, not all of these will be relevant for the present investigation. Only those narratee signals which are prevalent in the novel will be included, that is, those that can be analysed for patterns and regularities. The categories of narratee signals that will be included are direct and explicit references, indirect and implicit references, questions and pseudo-questions, and over-justifications.

Once the reconstruction of the narratee is complete, it is possible to establish the narratee’s functions in the narrative. However, for practical reasons, the functions of the narratee will be investigated right alongside the reconstruction of the narratee. It is important to keep in mind that one does not have the full picture yet, and that any conclusions drawn about the narratee’s functions in the narrative during this part of the investigation are tentative.

The second part of the investigation involves defining and determining the communicative context surrounding the narratee signals, taking into account the narrator and narrative environment as well as the narratee. This requires treating the communicative context which surrounds the narratee signals as the object of investigation, not the signals themselves. The goal is to determine how the communicative context surrounding the narratee signals works. This understanding of the narrative framework will then provide a more encompassing overall description of the narratee and its functions in the narrative.

The novel is written as a first person narrative, and the main character of the story, Stevens, is thus also the narrator. The narrator is telling his own story and he may quite possibly have
strong motives for wanting to present the subject matter in a certain manner. Like in all first
person narratives, he is telling his side of the story and this makes the narration more overtly
subjective.

The narratee, on the other hand, is not a character in the novel and so cannot be considered
a concrete part of the narrative. However, the narratee affects the narration indirectly. The
narratee, in his role as the narrator’s addressee, is actually in a unique position to have an
effect on Stevens’s narration. That is, the narrator must always take his narratee into account
in his narration, which means that his implied pressure influences the narration. The
importance of this is that the supposedly inactive and invisible narratee in The Remains of the
Day nevertheless influences the shaping of the narrator’s narration and thereby also the
narrative.

To begin with, the structural framework of the communicative situation surrounding the
narrator and the narratee will be established. It is important to look at the immediate
fundamentals of the narrative agents in the novel, because they determine the circumstances
for all textual communication. Both the inter-narrative circumstances surrounding the
communication between the narrator and the narratee, and the relationship between the
narrator and the narratee, will then be explored in succession.

In terms of practical application on the text, this part of the investigation will be conducted
by examining the text for patterns, regularities or significant phenomena in the
communication, and analysing the results. The areas of communication to be investigated are:

- the structural framework of the narrative. For example, what is the mode of narration, first
  or second hand? Is the narratee a concrete part of the narrative, a character?
- the immediate circumstances surrounding the communication between narrator-character
  and narratee. For example, what types of topics motivate the narrator to produce narratee
  signals? Does the emotional state of the narrator have any bearing on the communication?
  Are there any regularities to be observed in connection to these circumstances?
- the relationship between the narrator and the narratee. For example, what is the nature of
  the relationship between the narrator and narratee, in terms of power, dependence and
  candour?

The information gathered from an analysis of the communicative context allows for a more
comprehensive description of the narratee and its functions in the narrative. Furthermore, the

2 By significant phenomena is meant such occurrences in the communicative situation surrounding the narratee
signals which markedly determine, or designate the relationship between the agents of communication in the
narrative.
information gathered in the reconstructive part of the investigation needs to be put into context and given a frame of reference in order to be interpreted as accurately as possible.

When reconstructing the narratee in *The Remains of the Day*, one can quickly establish a few facts. Firstly, the narratee is not a character per se and he has no directly active part in the story. The communication within the narrative is constructed around the fact that Stevens is writing a journal to be read by the narratee, which means that, unlike in the case of an oral exchange, the mode of communication is indirect. However, he is still quite frequently referred to in a direct and explicit manner from an early stage in the novel. Secondly, due to the fact that the narrator addresses the narratee directly on several occasions it is obvious that the narratee’s role in the narrative communication is an important one. The narratee is thus a vital, but not prominent feature within the pages of Ishiguro’s novel.

As mentioned before, there are a number of different narratee signals. In order to focus this part of the investigation, the different narratee signals will be dealt with systematically and one at a time. This will not only serve to organise the investigation, but it will also provide clues to the relationship between the narrator and the narratee. For example, it will be possible to determine what types of circumstances surrounds the conveying of a certain type of narratee signal. This, in turn, will provide vital information about the narratee’s functions in the novel, especially in terms of reader communication and the characterisation of Stevens.

Beginning with the type of narratee signal which Prince designates as direct and explicit, it is important to specify that these narratee signals are, as the name suggests, those instances when the narrator turns directly to the narratee. According to Prince, we should consider all “statements in which the narrator designates the narratee by words such as ‘reader’ or ‘listener’ and by such expressions as ‘my dear’ or ‘my friend’” as part of this category (195). Furthermore, passages where the narratee is designated by second-person pronouns and verb forms are also to be considered direct and explicit. In most cases these instances of direct communication are easily detected, for example “you would no doubt agree” (Ishiguro 8). The direct and explicit narratee signals can reveal much about the values and prejudices of the narratee, the character of the narrator and relationship between the narrator and narratee.

The first example of an explicit narratee signal to be dealt with in this essay takes place when Stevens relates how his new employer offers his car for Stevens to take the motoring trip which is the theme of the story. Stevens addresses the narratee, saying: “As you might expect, I did not take Mr Farraday’s suggestion at all seriously that afternoon, regarding it as just another instance of an American gentleman’s unfamiliarity with what was and what was not commonly done in England” (Ishiguro 4). Looking at this reference to the narratee and the
context surrounding it, it is obvious that the narratee fulfils certain important functions in the narrative. Through the use of the narratee, Ishiguro is able to communicate something of the character of the narrator Stevens to the reader. That is, as the narrator ‘feels’ the need to address his narratee directly in order explain his behaviour, he also reveals much about his opinions, work ethics, and sense of propriety to the reader. According to Fred D’Aguiar, this is typical: “Kazuo Ishiguro’s technique has always been to focus on the life of one person, to the extent of showing the world as seen by that character, and then to reveal his or her idiosyncrasies through what others say to or about them, as they recount themselves…” (216). Thus, in this example the narratee functions both as a mediator between the author and reader and as a means of achieving the characterisation of Stevens.

Regarding the reconstruction of the narratee, this particular passage is informative in terms of his sense of propriety. Due to the context of this reference to narratee, it is apparent that the narrator expects the narratee to agree with him. This suggests that the narratee, unlike an “American gentleman”, would know of the codes of English etiquette to which Stevens refers. It is further implied that beyond mere knowledge of this etiquette, the narratee himself adheres to and agrees with it. Furthermore, the quotation also illuminates this code of etiquette. It is suggested that the relationship between employer and employee is different in England than in America. It would seem that it is not considered appropriate for an employee in England to borrow his employer’s car, nor for an employer to offer it. This is further commented on by Susie O’Brien, who goes as far as to claim that the narrative as a whole is “thematically constructed around an opposition between what are commonly regarded as Victorian values-- formality, repression and self-effacement, summed up under the general heading of “dignity”--and those associated with an idea of “America” that has expanded, literally into a New World--freedom, nature and individualism…” (787).

Another telling example of when the narrator addresses the narratee directly can be found when Stevens elaborates on his preparations for the trip. Having bought a new suit, he feels the need to comment on this: “I hope you do not think me unduly vain with regard to this last matter; it is just that one never knows when one might be obliged to give out that one is from Darlington Hall, and it is important that one be attired at such times in a manner worthy of one’s position” (Ishiguro 11). It is notable in the quotation to what a high degree the narrator is conscious of his narratee. Not only does Stevens worry that the narratee may find his actions “unduly vain” (11), but he also seems anxious to provide a solid professional motive for his actions in order to justify them. In this, the passage conveys information about Stevens’s sense of suitability. He seems to feel that he needs a professional reason to justify
purchasing a suit. Stevens simply does not consider it appropriate for him to spend money on new garments. Here the narratee functions to highlight this characteristic of the narrator.

At times in the novel the narrator is preoccupied with pondering the nature of dignity. On some of these occasions the narrator addresses the narratee directly, and this is immensely significant from my investigative point of view. Superficially, the text seems to reflect the ponderings of the narrator, but on closer inspection these passages provide insights into areas never intended by him. The following example is revelatory:

> You will not dispute, I presume, that Mr Marshall of Charleville House and Mr Lane of Bridewood have been the two great butlers of recent times. Perhaps you might be persuaded that Mr Henderson of Branbury Castle also falls into this rare category. But you may think me merely biased if I say that my own father could be considered to rank with such men, and that his career is the one I have always scrutinised for a definition of ‘dignity’. (Ishiguro 34)

In all three sentences the narrator addresses the narratee directly, which indicates that the subject is one that matters greatly to him. The passage provides information about the narratee’s conception of the world, and thereby also his profession. Not only is he expected to possess considerable knowledge about the men recounted and the particulars of being a butler, but he is also expected to be able to make assessments as to their professional excellence. The passage reveals that the narrator even considers it possible that the narratee’s assessments may differ from his own in some cases, such as about Mr Henderson of Branbury Castle and Stevens’s father. The very specific requirements of this discourse demand that the narratee has an extensive knowledge and understanding of the profession. It would seem very plausible that the narratee is a butler himself, or at the very least some type of manservant. This is supported throughout the novel. It is, in fact, quite common that the narrator addresses the narratee directly on such matters and in such a way as to suggest that he is speaking to a fellow professional. One such example can be found in the early pages of the novel. Here Stevens brings up the topic of a faulty staff plan: “But you will no doubt agree that the very best staff plans are those which give clear margins of error to allow for those days when an employee is ill or for one reason or another below par” (Ishiguro 8).

In addition to the information regarding reconstruction of the narratee, the passage also provides fundamental insights into how the narratee is employed to achieve the characterisation of Stevens. In this case it is the narrator’s relationship to his father which is highlighted through the use of the narratee. Stevens reveals to the narratee that he views his father as being one of the great butlers, an almost unattainable and revered position to his mind. He even goes as far as to use his father’s career as a standard and an example for his
own career: “But you may think me merely biased if I say that … his career is the one I have always scrutinised for a definition of ‘dignity’” (Ishiguro 34). It is thus made apparent that Stevens has great respect and admiration for his father, viewing him as an exemplary butler whom he must emulate.

Jack Slay comments on this quality to the relationship between Stevens and his father, arguing that the characterisation of Stevens is achieved through the means of the analogy between father and son, and that their “shared name emphasises that Stevens is the analogy of his father in both service and dignity” (180). It is, however, through the narratee references that this analogy is foregrounded and communicated to the reader. Also, the characterisation of Stevens is not, as the investigation will show, limited to analogy but encompasses a variety of devices. The common underlying denominator is the narratee.

As on most occasions when Stevens’s father is mentioned, the context of the narration concerns matters of a professional nature, of butlering. The narratee, and thereby also the reader, is told next to nothing of the narrator’s father, outside of his professional role. Even the death of Stevens’s father is related to the narratee in the context of professional achievement, in an explicit comment to the narratee concerning Stevens’s own coming of age as a butler:

   Even so if you consider the pressures contingent on me that night [great professional challenges and the death of Stevens senior], you may not think I delude myself unduly if I go so far as to suggest that I did perhaps display, in the face of everything, at least at some modest degree a ‘dignity’ worthy of someone like Mr Marshall – or come to that, my father. (Ishiguro 110)

This suggests that the relationship between the narrator and his father is very businesslike and emotionally repressed. The explicit references to the narratee serve to foreground and enhance this quality to the reader.

The use of the narratee, however, also reveals to the reader that there is indeed an emotional side to Stevens’s relationship to his father. This is made apparent in both examples above as the narrator addresses the narratee directly in order to relate his father’s greatness as a butler. Because of the emphasis given to the matter by the narrator when he chooses to address the narratee directly, it becomes obvious to the reader that there is emotional content in Stevens’s relationship to his father. The quotations show that Stevens idolises his father, both as a great and almost perfect butler and as a man. It could, further, be argued that Stevens is using the only means of expression available or acceptable to him, the terms of professional accomplishment.
We shall next see how the narratee is used to emphasise certain features of the narrator, casting into sharp relief Stevens’s inability to interact socially with other people, and the extent to which he defines himself through his professional persona. The immediate background is a failed attempt to join a humorous exchange among the customers of a bar at an inn called the Coach and Horses. The day after, while reflecting on his failure, Stevens makes a direct comment to the narratee on his frustration: “You will perhaps appreciate then my disappointment concerning my witticism yesterday evening” (Ishiguro 131). In itself this comment may not seem very significant, but when seen in the light of Stevens’s view of bantering as a duty or professional function it takes on a whole new meaning. Stevens informs his narratee that he has even “been endeavouring to add this skill to my professional armoury so as to fulfil with confidence all Mr Farraday’s expectations with respect to bantering” (Ishiguro 130). In this context the communication explicitly directed to the narratee becomes very revealing. Having practised bantering as a professional skill, Stevens is thus extremely disappointed at having failed when put to the test in a real life situation. To him it means that he is not fulfilling his professional role, and the narratee is employed to emphasise this to the reader.

Furthermore, by the context surrounding the narrator’s direct reference to the narratee we are given to understand that Stevens’s disappointment is almost exclusively derived not from failing socially but from his failing to perform a new professional function. It seems that he is hardly aware of the situation’s social dimension. This is underlined by the fact that Stevens makes the direct comment about his disappointment to the narratee only after having told him of his endeavour to acquire the skill of bantering. To participate in the common everyday social interaction of ordinary people as just Stevens, not the butler of Darlington Hall, appears not to be an alternative. O’Brien remarks on this tendency of Stevens’s; contending that the novel “constructs bantering as a form of exchange that is both natural and worldly, in contrast to Stevens’s repressed provincialism. One could alternatively read Stevens’s inability to participate successfully in this kind of exchange as a function of his lack of a particular kind of cultural currency…” (790).

Another example is indicative of how the narratee is used to convey to the reader the true nature of Stevens’s relationship with Miss Kenton, the former head housekeeper of Darlington Hall.

Now of course, you must understand we would never have carried on in such a vein within the hearing of staff member. But just around that time, our cocoa evenings, while maintaining their essentially professional character, often tended to allow room for a
The comment to the narratee serves to highlight the very intimate nature of Stevens’s relationship with Miss Kenton. It suggests that their conversation is somehow unsuitable for others to hear, as if too familiar and intimate in tone to be acceptable. That is, the narrator and Miss Kenton share something which is private, something seemingly beyond the professional. This is emphasised by the sentence immediately following, where the narrator seems to feel the need to justify the conversation he has just commented on by stressing the professional intent behind the cocoa evenings, to relieve tensions through small talk.

Again the narratee functions as a device for the author to communicate the ‘true’ message to the reader. By directly addressing the narratee in order to explain and justify his behaviour, the narrator draws extra attention to his discourse. Thus, without intending it, the narrator reveals a lot to the reader about his feelings for Miss Kenton. The whole passage makes the reader suspicious of the narrator’s story: why make such a fuss over something “harmless”? The contrariness of the narrator’s intended narration and the ‘true’ message is brought out and made apparent through the device of the narratee. And so, by use of the narratee the narrative is made to transcend the intent of its unreliable narrator.

It should be mentioned that it is possible to make alternative interpretations of Stevens’s unreliability as narrator and use of contrary of language which do not include the narratee. An example of this is put forth by Richard Alleva, who claims that: “his [Stevens’s] interior monologue is the substance of the book and it is couched in a language that demands the reader’s mistrust. … If Stevens tells you that his feelings for Miss Kenton were entirely professional, then you must suspect suppressed sexual longings” (14). To Alleva, this example is typical of how reader communication works in the novel. Instead of the narratee, Alleva designates contrary language as the means by which the true message is communicated to the reader. However, as shown above, it is through the narratee references which the contrary language is highlighted and emphasised to the reader. Furthermore, the narratee facilitates numerous other instances of reader communication in the novel where the device of contrary language is not employed.

One instance is more revealing than any other in terms of the characterisation of the narrator. Rather late in the novel, the narrator relates an incident involving him, Miss Kenton and a certain book containing a love story. During the course of narration the narrator poses several pseudo-questions to the narratee, as well as addressing him directly. All in all, the
numerous narratee signals in this relatively short section of the novel invite the reader to scrutinise both narrator and narration closely.

The incident in question arises when, according to the narrator, Miss Kenton on one occasion comes unbidden into his private quarters. Stevens is at the time engaged in reading a book and believes himself to be alone and off duty. As Miss Kenton remains in the room, pressing him to show her the book, Stevens becomes increasingly uncomfortable and agitated. Upon finally having discovered that the book is in fact “simply a sentimental love story” (Ishiguro 167), Miss Kenton is firmly and unequivocally shown out of the room. When relating this memory the narrator seems to feel obliged to explain why he reacted the way he did to Miss Kenton’s ‘intrusion’:

But when I say this, I do not mean to imply the stance I took over the matter of the book that evening was somehow unwarranted. For you must understand there was an important principle at issue. The fact was, I had been ‘off duty’ at that moment Miss Kenton had come marching into my pantry. And of course, any butler who regards his vocation with pride, any butler who aspires at all to a ‘dignity in keeping with his position’, as the Hayes Society once put it, should never allow himself to be ‘off duty’ in the presence of others. It really was immaterial whether it was Miss Kenton or a complete stranger who had walked in at that moment. A butler of any quality must be seen to inhabit [italics in original] his role, utterly and fully; he cannot be seen casting it aside one moment simply to don it again the next as though it were nothing more than a pantomime costume. There is one situation and one situation only in which a butler who cares about his dignity may feel free to unburden himself of his role; that is to say, when he is entirely alone. You will appreciate then that in the event of Miss Kenton bursting in at a time when I had presumed, not unreasonably, that I was to be alone, it came to be a crucial matter of principal, a matter indeed of dignity, that I did not appear in anything less than my full and proper role. (Ishiguro 168-69; italics added)

This passage has pivotal value for the argument of this essay. It contains two direct references to the narratee, and they both serve the purpose of exposing the narrator’s underlying motives and suppressed emotions. The full context and message of the paragraph are made accessible through these references to the narratee. They are the means by which the reader is lead to examine the narrative discourse beyond the immediate and obvious.

On the surface it appears that the narrator is trying to convey what it takes to be a butler of stature, something which he himself aspires to be. At the heart of his argument there seems to be an issue of professional role and private space. According to the narrator, a butler of quality can never appear out of his butler’s role, except when alone. However, through the direct references to the narratee, the author reveals that there is more to it. There are other reasons for Stevens’s behaviour as well. This does not mean that the reasons given at surface
level are false or untrue. On the contrary, there is no reason to disbelieve or mistrust Stevens’s account; he does indeed adhere to what O’Brien calls his self-imposed “principle of self-abnegation” (790) because of his almost inhuman professional standards. It is just not the whole story. At the beginning of the paragraph Stevens says that: “I do not mean to imply that the stance I took over the matter of the book was somehow unwarranted” (Ishiguro 168), then he continues by addressing the narratee directly, almost imploringly: “For you must understand, there was an important principle at issue” (Ishiguro 168). His addressing the narratee in this manner comes across to the reader as a bit desperate, and casts doubt on the previous sentence, making it appear as though he was indeed overreacting. Furthermore, “the important principle” is made to seem like an inadequate explanation. Indeed, this first reference to the narratee makes the narrator’s entire line of reasoning seem inadequate. It emphasises the paragraph’s argumentative quality, making it appear as though the narrator is trying to conceal an underlying motive. Thus the reader is invited to question the narrator’s narration and go beyond the surface level. In this light, Stevens’s claim that it “was immaterial whether it was Miss Kenton or a complete stranger who had walked in at that moment” (Ishiguro 169) becomes very suspect. The reader is lead to believe the exact opposite, that it is indeed Miss Kenton’s presence which makes the episode so provocative to Stevens. The narrator’s feelings for Miss Kenton make her presence a direct challenge to his ability to maintain his professional persona and cool distance.

At the end of the paragraph the narrator turns directly to the narratee once more, something which can only serve to enhance the reader’s distrust of his narration. Stevens sums up his lengthy discourse on the importance of inhabiting his butler’s role: “You will appreciate then that in the event of Miss Kenton bursting in at a time when I had presumed, not unreasonably, that I was to be alone, it came to be a crucial matter of principle, a matter indeed of dignity, that I did not appear in anything other than my full and proper role” (Ishiguro 169). The reader is lead to question the narrator’s motives; he is working too hard at convincing the narratee about them. In fact, the whole episode makes Stevens appear unreliable as a narrator.

The use of the narratee in this example is manifold, ranging from supporting and reinforcing the thematic framework to achieving reader communication and the characterisation of the narrator. By helping to expose the contradictory nature of the narrator’s narration, the device of the narratee gives the reader access to information beyond what is intended by the narrator.

The next type of narratee signals to be investigated is the category which, according to Prince, “imply a narratee and describe him” (195). In this essay they will be referred to as
implicit or indirect narratee signals. These narratee signals are easily detected in the text because they contain a designator such as “we”, “us” or “our”. That is, the implicit narratee references are those references to the narratee where the narrator implies his existence by including him indirectly in his narration. Although the implicit narratee signals are not as numerous in the novel as the explicit ones, they are quite frequent nonetheless. Furthermore, it is not uncommon for them to occur in the same passages as the explicit ones, lending added emphasis to the text. Much like the explicit narratee signals, the implicit narratee signals can offer valuable insights into the character of the narratee.

The first indirect reference to the narratee to be analysed here can be found about halfway through the book. The reference in question is, in fact, an entire string of implicit references to the narratee, scattered over a span of about a page. In the passage the narrator is preoccupied with the issues of the morality of potential employers and the differences in attitude between different generations of butlers (the designated pronouns have been emphasised):

In fact, a comparison of how I might interpret ‘a distinguished household’ with what the Hayes Society understood by that term illuminates sharply, I believe, the fundamental difference between the values of our generation of butlers and those of the previous generation. When I say this, I am not merely drawing attention to the fact that our generation had a less snobbish attitude as regards which employers were landed gentry and which were ‘business’. What I am trying to say – and I do not think this an unfair comment – is that we were a more idealistic generation. Where our elders might have been concerned with whether or not an employer was titled, or otherwise from one of the ‘old’ families, we tended to concern ourselves much more with the moral status of an employer. I do not mean by this that we were preoccupied with our employers’ private behaviour. What I mean is that we were ambitious in a way that would have been unusual a generation before, to serve gentlemen who were, so to speak furthering the progress of humanity. (Ishiguro 113-14)

Beginning with the reconstructive value of the passage, it is worthy of note that the narrator includes the narratee in the first sentence of the passage. In fact, when Stevens speaks of “our generation of butlers” (Ishiguro 113) he, by implication, designates the narratee as a fellow butler of the same generation. Apart from further evidence about the narratee’s profession, this reference also indicates that the narratee is of approximately the same age as Stevens.

The functions of the narratee in this passage are connected to both reader communication and characterisation of the narrator. The narratee’s role of relay between author and reader may take a slightly different form when the references to him are implicit, but it is there
nonetheless. On the surface, the topic of this particular part of the narration may seem uninteresting. Nevertheless, the topic and the narrator’s opinions about it are very important in terms of the characterisation of the narrator. The narrator’s reflections on his generation’s preoccupation with the morality of potential employers provide information about his attitude towards his job and bring to light much of his motives and sense of values. In order to communicate these important character traits the author employs the narratee as a means of achieving reader communication.

The next example of the narrator implicitly referring to the narratee centres around a topic closely related to the one in the example above. The narrator is once again preoccupied with the relationship between a butler and his employer. This time, however, the emphasis is on the nature of a butler’s professional aspirations and on moral scrutinising, rather than on a potential employer’s morality, or lack thereof. In light of reflections concerning Lord Darlington’s moral and political shortcomings in the years leading up to the Second World War, Stevens is forced to confront his own moral failure. He did not in any way speak up, no matter what fascist or even racist motives governed his employer’s reasoning or actions. In the following passage the narrator attempts to defend his attitude of silence during the period in question:

Let us establish this quite clearly: a butler’s duty is to provide good service. It is not to meddle in the great affairs of the nation. The fact is, such great affairs will always be beyond the understanding of those such as you and I, and those of us who wish to make our mark must realise that we best do so by concentrating on what is within our realm; that is to say, by devoting our attention to providing the best possible service to those great gentlemen in whose hands the destiny of civilisation truly lies. (Ishiguro 199-200; italics added)

The generous use of narratee signals in the quotation indicates that the subject matter is of immense significance to the narrator and that he is greatly concerned about the narratee’s opinions. Stevens seems anxious to include the narratee in his narration and thereby also to win him over to his team, so to speak. In fact, this appears to be an overt attempt to manipulate the narratee’s sympathies and opinions. “Let us establish” is a phrase which brooks no opposition and at the same time includes the narratee in the sentiment, forcing his sympathy and opinions. However, this type of coercive dialogue from the narrator immediately sets off warning signals in the mind of the reader and makes him or her distrust the narrator. The implicit narratee references make the narrator’s attempts at forced sympathy too overt and forceful to be acceptable to the reader. Instead of agreeing to being coerced by the narrator and accepting his version of the truth, the reader is made to doubt the narrator and his narration. In this way the narratee functions as mediator between the author and the reader,
highlighting important and significant nuances of the narrative, as well as revealing contradictions in the narration. Thus, the use of the narratee becomes a means to reveal the underlying message of the text and to make the narration transcend the narrator’s intent and purpose. The passage is an illuminating example of how reader communication is achieved by use of the narratee through implicit narratee signals.

In terms of the characterisation of the narrator, this passage shows a person on the defensive. The sympathy-seeking narration makes the narrator come across as insecure. The narratee signals become suggestive of a narrator who seems to be trying to convince himself, as well as the narratee. The stronger he advocates his case to the narratee, the less convinced he appears himself. The reader becomes less inclined to agree with Stevens and is given the impression that he is quite uncertain of his behaviour during the time period discussed in the passage. This is, of course, contrary to the image Stevens is so ostensibly trying to present in his narration. Revealing an uncertainty which the narrator prefers to keep hidden from all, including himself, the narratee is thus used to foreground the contradictory nature of the narration, and highlight certain characteristics of the narrator’s.

Another informative instance, where implicit narratee signals are employed extensively, is when the narrator quite early on muses upon the subject of professional greatness and dignity within the ranks of butlers. During the course of a little more than ten pages, Stevens tries to convey his opinions on this. The subject matter having to do with profession and ethics, the narrator once again implies his narratee indirectly in his narration a number of times. Incidentally, the narrator also chooses to address the narratee directly on several occasions during these pages, something which also contributes to emphasise the passage and the subject to the reader.

This part of the novel contains further corroborative evidence about the narratee’s age. On several occasions the narrator remarks on “his” generation and he often includes the narratee in those remarks. A good example of this occurs when Stevens discusses what he considers a shortcoming on part of his generation: “It is my view that our generation has been much too preoccupied with the ’trimmings’” (Ishiguro 34-5). The narratee is clearly included in the remark and the narration is carried on in such a tone as to suggest that the narrator is certain that the narratee will understand what he means and agree with his estimation of their common generation. The use of the pronoun “our” is both an implicit reference to the narratee and a generalisation of the narrator’s generation. This is supported by the surrounding text. Due to the many direct references to the narratee, the passage shows that the narrator is not only aware of his narratee but directs his narration quite consciously to him.
In addition to the information about the narratee’s age and profession, this passage gives insight into the traits and skills prized among the generation of butlers to which the narratee by implication belongs. The passage is quite revelatory of both the character of the narrator and of the character of the narratee. According to Stevens, butlers of the narrator’s and narratee’s generation are, among other things, “accustomed to discussing and analysing” (Ishiguro 36). He remarks almost derisively on the phenomenon of “the ‘trimmings’”: “goodness knows how much time and energy has gone into the practising of accent and command of language, how many hours spent studying encyclopedias and volumes of ‘Test Your knowledge’, when the time should have been spent mastering the basic fundamentals” (Ishiguro 35). As can be deduced from the quotation, the narrator seems rather less than enthusiastic about this obsession with the finer points of his profession, but he also appears to have been caught up in the pursuit of attaining said “‘trimmings’” all the same.

The narratee signals to be investigated next belong to a group referred to as questions and pseudo-questions. These narratee signals are very illuminating and reveal much about the narratee’s functions in the narrative. Prince distinguishes between two chief categories: those questions that originate from the narrator and those that originate from the narratee (195). However, in *The Remains of the Day* all questions considered narratee signals originate from the narrator. Nothing else is possible due to the specific form the narration takes in the book, namely written correspondence in a travelling log. This means that the narratee is not in direct communication with the narrator and can therefore not be the originator of any questions asked during the course of the narration. The questions may not be as informative in terms of the character of the narratee as those which originate from the narratee, but they are nevertheless very interesting in terms of the characterisation of the narrator and the function of the narratee in that regard.

The first instance of a narratee signal in the form of a question to be dealt with here occurs quite early on in the novel, and revolves around the phenomenon of bantering:

> It is all very well, in these changing times, to adapt one’s work to take in duties not traditionally within one’s realm; but bantering is of another dimension altogether. For one thing, how would one know for sure that at any given moment a response of the bantering sort is truly what is expected? One need hardly dwell on the catastrophic possibility of uttering a bantering remark only to discover it wholly inappropriate. (Ishiguro 16)

This particular question is put to the narratee as an illustration of how difficult and potentially precarious a practice bantering is. Moreover, it is clear that Stevens actually desires an answer to his question, which makes the question an honest query, as opposed to a rhetorical
technique. While almost all other questions put by the narrator to the narratee are in the form of pseudo-questions, this particular instance seems to be a genuine question. This does of course lend weight to the subject matter of the question, as well as the narrator’s mental state when asking it, especially his anxieties and worries: he does not quite know how to deal with the situation. Furthermore, it can be deduced from the quotation that Stevens considers bantering to be a both difficult and important new duty towards his most recent employer.

In this example the two functions of narrator characterisation and reader communication are very closely tied together, especially since the characteristics and viewpoints of the narrator make up a large part of the message to the reader. In order to describe the narrator more closely the author makes him pose a direct question to the narratee, in which he reveals and draws extra attention to his inability to decipher the social code inherent in bantering. The question “works” on the reader, emphasising the message of the passage to him or her, and it helps highlight the narrator’s characteristics and perceptions.

The next example to be dealt with has to do with Stevens’s relationship to Miss Kenton. The episode is the one where Miss Kenton enters unbidden into Stevens’s pantry and finds the narrator reading a romance novel. Stevens feels the need to elaborate on the fact:

I rarely had the time or the desire to read any of these romances cover to cover, but so far as I could tell, their plots were invariably absurd – indeed, sentimental – and I would not have wasted one moment on them were it not for these aforementioned benefits. Having said that, however, I do not mind confessing today – and I see nothing to be ashamed of in this – that I did at times gain a sort of incidental enjoyment from these stories. I did not perhaps acknowledge this to myself at the time, but as I say, what shame is there in it? Why should one not enjoy in a light-hearted sort of way stories of ladies and gentlemen who fall in love and express their feelings for each other, often in the most elegant phrases? (Ishiguro 168)

The passage demonstrates beautifully the narratee’s functions in the novel, manifesting the mechanics of the characterisation of the narrator. It is quite telling that the two sentences formed as rhetorical pseudo-questions contain so much personal information about the narrator. He admits actually enjoying the romance novels, but also confesses to his own unwillingness to accept this fact about himself. The revelatory facts about the narrator are highlighted by being connected to clear and attention-drawing narratee signals, the questions directed to the narratee.

A question or a rhetorical question not only draws attention to the topic of the question, but also provokes a certain type of response, for example distrust. In the passage in question, the type of response provoked would be suspicion. When the narrator says: “what shame is there
in that?”, the reader is really lead to wonder whether Stevens actually feels that there is some
shame in enjoying reading romance novels. This use of contrary language, framed as a
narratee signal, becomes very conspicuous. In the words of Alleva, “If Stevens says white,
then you must think black” (14). When Stevens, in the form of a rhetorical question,
advocates taking pleasure in the harmless entertainment of romance novels, the reader is
really made to wonder if Stevens is not merely excusing his own behaviour. These
ambiguities in the text need not be cemented or proven in any way; it is the very nuances of
doubt and complexity themselves which provide the reader with the fuller portrait of Stevens.
Also, the use of rhetorical questions engages the reader, who by association easily identifies
with the narratee. As a way of achieving reader communication the reader’s predilection for
identifying with narratee is particularly effective, and in this example it is utilised to full
effect.

The following narratee signals are actually a set of instances occurring within the space of
about four pages, and they all deal with Stevens’s missed chance at a life together with Miss
Kenton. Looking back, the narrator attempts to understand why events unfolded as they did in
regards to his relationship with her. He brings up various instances for examination, and the
relationship is revealed as being of far greater complexity than Stevens has previously been
willing to admit. For the first time the narrator seems completely and genuinely honest with
his narratee, at least in terms of what he felt and still feels for Miss Kenton.

In the first of these instances Stevens puts his thoughts very openly in a rhetorical question
to the narratee: “What would have transpired, one may ask, had one responded slightly
differently that evening she came in with her vase of flowers?” (Ishiguro 176). Although the
narratee of course cannot provide the narrator with an answer to his speculation, the question
appears asked in a far more serious mode than the average rhetorical question. It is in fact a
quite significant opening for the narrator and the reader to examine Stevens’s previous
actions, all the more important since it connects directly to the main plot of the novel, the
motoring trip to see Miss Kenton, or Mrs Benn as she is actually named at the time of the trip.
Through the question he puts to the narratee he admits to realising that there may indeed have
been chances for him to form a romantic relationship with Miss Kenton which he failed to
take advantage of at the time. The narratee signal itself helps characterize the narrator,
because a question of this type projects sincerity and vulnerability. These qualities then lend
emphasis to the subject brought up by the narrator and thereby show that he has strong
feelings about it. It should also be added that, as in previous examples, a narratee signal in the
form of a rhetorical but not sarcastic question gives the impression that the information given by the narrator is the truth, at least as far as the narrator is concerned.

This next instance can be seen as Stevens’s attempt to close the subject:

But what is the sense in forever speculating what might have happened had such and such a moment turned out differently? One could presumably drive oneself to distraction in this way. In any case, while it is all very well to talk of ‘turning points’, one can surely only recognize such moments in retrospect. Naturally, when one looks back to such instances today, they may indeed take the appearance of being crucial, precious moments in one’s life; but of course, at the time, this was not the impression one had. Rather, it was as though one had available a never-ending number of days, months, years in which to sort out the vagaries of one’s relationship with Miss Kenton; an infinite number of opportunities in which to remedy the effect of this or that misunderstanding. There was surely nothing to indicate at the time that such evidently small incidents would render whole dreams forever irredeemable. (Ishiguro 179)

The question which opens this passage not only sets the tone, but it is also the key to understanding the passage. As far as narratee signals go, this one is particularly telling in how it affects the content of the text around it. Stevens’s feelings are communicated very clearly because he displays his no nonsense attitude in the form of a question to his narratee. And so, while Stevens outwardly rejects the whole notion of retrospection as a waste of time, the reader understands that it nevertheless is something which to him is indeed worth dwelling upon, and that the following information should be understood in that light.

The narratee’s function in terms characterisation of the narrator works on many levels in this passage. On the one hand there is the immediate information about Stevens’s emotional state and his view of retrospection. On the other hand there is the effect of the narratee signal on all the information provided thereafter in the passage. As such the narratee signal contributes to a critical and suspicious state of mind in the reader. For example, when Stevens talks about the pivotal moments in his relationship with Miss Kenton he claims that “one can surely only recognize such moments in retrospect” (Ishiguro 179). Having the narrator address his narratee in such a manner as to suggest that he is not entirely certain of his claim, makes the assertion look suspect. It appears that it may indeed have been possible for Stevens to recognize those moments when they occurred had he only looked for them. In this light the entire passage following the narratee signal becomes, in part, an attempt by the narrator to rationalise his failure to act on the chance of having a romantic relationship to Miss Kenton. He comes across to the reader as being voluntarily repressed and emotionally passive.
There is, on the other hand, room in the text for a different interpretation of this instance, and it makes for an alternative understanding of how reader communication functions in this example and in the narrative as a whole. It could be argued that Stevens did not in fact realise his mistake at the time and that only retrospection provides him with the insight, and that this is actually part of a narrative device of communication. This type of interpretation is advocated by Valerie Martin, who argues that Stevens’s inability to recognise what goes on can be seen as a means of reader communication: “His blind spot, which we [the readers of the novel] cannot miss, is nearly maddening” (262). However, it is noteworthy that it is the narratee signal which alerts the reader to what is really being said, and what is important in the narration. Indeed, it is through the medium of the narratee signal, the direct question in the text, that the full importance of the subject matter is communicated to the reader.

All instances related in this part of the investigation have conveyed something about Stevens’s relationship to Miss Kenton, and in each of them the narrator has demonstrated his own shortcomings and failings. Even without the deeper revelations facilitated by the narratee, the image Stevens has projected of himself in relating these instances is not flattering at all. Additionally, the content of the narration is very emotional and full of personal admissions. Thus, it is possible to ascertain that the narratee is someone the narrator trusts enough to confide in, even when it comes to deeply personal thoughts about love and personal failure. As this sort of behaviour is quite out of character for Stevens, the question of the narratee’s identity is brought to light. With whom would the narrator have this type of relationship? One answer could be that he is writing for his own sake, and that the reader is merely witness to an inner dialogue.

The last type of narratee signals to be investigated are over-justifications, where the narrator addresses the narratee on issues of his own narration, for example apologising for disrupting his narration or being incapable of describing something properly. In short, over-justifications are all the instances in the narration where the narrator provides explanations and motivations on a meta-level. The value of investigating these narratee references lies in what they divulge indirectly about the narratee’s personality. According to Prince, “in overcoming the narratee’s defences, in prevailing over his prejudices, in allaying his apprehensions” (196) the over-justifications reveal them.

3 The concept of meta-level can be understood, in this case, as the level of discourse dedicated to an object’s own category or form. For example, a meta-novel would be a novel about a novel. In terms of this essay, the meta-level will be investigated by examining the narratee signals called over-justifications, where the narrator addresses the narratee on matters of his own narration.
The first instance of a narratee signal in the form of an over-justification to be investigated occurs in connection to the narrator ruminating over the subject of the letter from Miss Kenton. The letter in question is really what triggers Stevens’s motoring trip, the thematic framework for the narrative, and it is as such of great significance in the novel. The narrator finds that he has to interrupt his narration and address his narratee on a very particular subject connected to the author of the letter:

   Incidentally, I should have before now have explained myself as regards my referring to ‘Miss Kenton’. ‘Miss Kenton’ is properly speaking ‘Mrs Benn’ and has been for twenty years. However, because I knew her at close quarters only during her maiden years and have not seen her since she went to the West Country to become ‘Mrs Benn’, you will perhaps excuse my impropriety in referring to her as I knew her, and in my mind have continued to call her throughout these years. (Ishiguro 47)

It is obvious that Stevens feels that this is something he should have made clear earlier. He appears quite keen to explain himself and so amend his earlier narration in terms of his references to Miss Kenton.

This reference conveys something about the narratee’s supposed moral standards and perceptions on what is and is not ethical. Because the narrator addresses his narratee in this way and on this subject, it appears as if Stevens feels obliged to set the record straight and show that there is nothing untoward going on. It is the sense of the untoward, however, which is interesting for this analysis and in particular what the narrator expects the narratee to consider untoward. The narrator seems to think that the narratee would consider it somehow inappropriate for him to call a married woman by her maiden name. Thus, it is possible to make the assumption that the narratee, in the eyes of the narrator, considers the wrong form of address improper.

In terms of the functions of the narratee, in this example the narratee is used as a means to achieve the characterisation of the narrator. This becomes apparent when the content and surrounding context of the quotation are taken into consideration. The fact that Stevens feels the need to come clean with the narratee indicates that he too considers his continued use of Mrs Benn’s maiden name as questionable. It may be that the perceived apprehensions of the narratee about the misnaming of Miss Kenton are in fact shared by the narrator. The narratee then becomes a vehicle for the narrator to bring it up and deal with it. Indeed, it is possible to view this meta-comment to the narratee as a way for Stevens to address his own internal conflict between his sense of propriety and his feelings for Mrs Benn. In this light, the narrator could be considered to be writing for his own sake as much as for the narratee’s,
effectively becoming his own narratee. In short, the role of the narratee becomes a means for
the narrator to sort out and come to terms with his own contrary and conflicting emotions.

Furthermore, in this case the function of reader communication facilitates a deeper
understanding of the character of Stevens. That is, the explanation offered does not come
across as entirely satisfactory or wholly honest. This is communicated involuntarily by the
narrator in the narratee signal when he tries to downplay the seriousness of his 'offence' by
starting off his explanation with the word “incidentally”, which seems like an attempt to
marginalise the whole issue. A distance between the narrator’s intended narration and what is
actually communicated is thus created. Bringing up the issue at a meta-level clashes with the
narrator’s attempt to minimize the weight of his admission by couching it in marginalising
language. Ishiguro makes the narrative transcend the intent of the narrator in order to provide
the reader with a more complete picture. The narratee signal, then, becomes indicative of the
narrator’s unreliability.

The setting for the final narratee signal to be explored centres on the narrator’s relationship
with Miss Kenton. The aforementioned situation when Stevens is interrupted by Miss Kenton
while reading a romantic novel is also cause for the narrator to address the narratee on the
meta-level. He does this by commenting on his inability to clearly describe what had
happened between him and Miss Kenton: “I am afraid it is not easy to describe clearly what I
mean here. All I can say is that everything around us suddenly became very still; it was my
impression that Miss Kenton’s manner also underwent a sudden change; there was a strange
seriousness in her expression, and it struck me she seemed almost frightened” (Ishiguro 167).
This instance is greatly emphasised for the reader by the reference to the narratee and the
meta-content of that reference, which makes it very illuminating in terms of the analysis. The
reference to the narratee is revelatory about the narrator’s emotional characteristics. That
which Stevens feels incapable of describing, as he tells his narratee, is the romantic game
playing which may precede an amorous relationship. Stevens’s meta-level admission to the
narratee about his inability to describe the situation foregrounds his emotional confusion to
the reader. As Miss Kenton pushes the narrator for a response to her romantic advances,
Stevens feels quite out of his depth and not only behaves strangely at the time, but has
problems understanding and describing what happened in retrospect. This suggests to the
reader that Stevens has so limited personal experience and understanding of the romantic
interaction between men and women that he is incapable of partaking in it. As William
Hutchings comments, “[Stevens] never allowed himself to forsake his cherished professional
“dignity” even momentarily, thus preventing himself from ever achieving more intimate human relationships” (463).

The role of the narratee in this instance is connected to the implied pressure he puts on the narrator. The pressure stems from the fact that Stevens always has to reckon with the narratee in his narration. This prompts him to explain and make sense of the events to the narratee, and in doing so relive and re-examine the past himself. In this, the narratee functions on two different levels: on the level of the narrative he becomes a tool for the narrator to revisit his past, and on the level of the reader he helps highlight and expose more of Stevens’s complex character.

As far as reader communication goes, this example appears to be rather straightforward: the act of bringing the situation to the meta-level draws the reader’s attention, providing a focus on what is important. There is, however, more to it. As the narratee’s function of mediator between author and reader is employed, the content of the narratee signal provides the reader with insights into the narrator’s emotional state. The characterisation is, in part, achieved through the use of the narratee as mediator between the reader and the author. This becomes apparent when Stevens, who elsewhere in the novel boasts a very keen eye for observation and retelling, chooses to address the narratee on the meta-level only to admit to being unable to describe something. The reader is made aware of a discrepancy that both draws attention to the passage and underlines Stevens’s unfamiliarity with and distance to the subject of romance. Here Martin’s concept of reader communication by way of Stevens’s “blind spot” (262) works quite well with the function of the narratee, the one supplementing the other. As for the reconstruction of the narratee, this passage shows that the narratee is held in great trust, and is privy to the narrator’s inner thoughts.

The first part of my investigation is now concluded, and the results can be put into context. All the four different types of narratee signals investigated in this essay have their own emphasis on the information they supply about the narratee, and bringing this reconstructive information together generates a more comprehensive image of the narratee. The emerging portrait of the narratee suggests that he is a fellow Englishman of a similar age to the narrator and that he is quite probably employed in the same line of work, and possibly a butler. The narratee and the narrator share the general systems of values and beliefs, as well as those more specifically pertaining to their work. However, it is also clear that the narrator at times expects disagreement from his narratee. These areas of disagreement are usually connected to the instances where Stevens appears uncertain, and where the impression is conveyed that he himself may well be struggling with the virtue of his position on a particular subject. The
subject of such disagreements is repeatedly the morality, or merit, of Stevens’s actions or inaction in the past. The most surprising observation about the narratee, this far, is the extent to which he appears to resemble the narrator. He often comes across as almost indistinguishable from Stevens, and the distinguishing features that do exist are predominantly connected to possible differences of opinion, rather than any substantial differences such as gender, occupation or age. Furthermore, these potential differences of opinion only occur, as mentioned above, when the narrator appears at odds with himself, which means that there may in actuality be very small differences, if any at all.

A commonly occurring mode of reader communication is the narrative’s tendency to transcend the intent and purpose of its narrator. In *The Remains of the Day* this is chiefly achieved through the use of the narratee, who is there to highlight and foreground any and all discrepancies and inconsistencies in the narration. By bringing out and emphasising these elements of contrariness the narratee contributes to reveal and unmask the narrator’s true motivations for his narration. Further, this hidden information then provides the reader with the keys to decipher the actual message of the narrative by putting the narrator’s narration in a new light. The result is frequently that the information made available to the reader is far more revealing than the narrator, Stevens, intends. Sometimes the information decoded is even in complete contradiction with his intent. This conclusion about reader communication has much in common with ideas put forth by Martin and Alleva, but I would add that the narratee is the key, or catalyst, in making these devices accessible to the reader. The narratee is, in this context, almost like a ´vehicle` of communication on a narratological level, and as such fulfils his function of mediator between author and reader exceedingly well. He is there to get the reader emotionally committed and to help the reader decipher the ´true` message, no matter what the intent of the narrator is. The narratee is instrumental in sharpening blurry edges and filling out the character. The narrator’s own description of himself is often quite one-sided, frugal and sometimes self-deceptive, so this function of the narratee becomes an important feature in the make-up of the novel. The narrator is shown as a more complete and complex character because he is forced to relate to and reckon with the narratee in his all narration.

We also need to investigate the circumstances surrounding the communication between the narrator and the narratee. The emotional states and the topics may change, and the amount of narratee signals vary from one time to another, yet there are regularities and patterns in these circumstances and through these it is possible gain an understanding of the general conditions and prerequisites of the communication between the two agents of the narrative. The
emotional states which most often provoke Stevens to address the narratee in his journal is when he feels like he could be somehow reproached about the actions or inactions he relates. The comments made by the narrator to his narratee are usually made for gaining support or to explain himself. Stevens’s need to set the record straight and vindicate himself is massive and it is the narratee who helps him satisfy it. This creates a situation where the narrator is dependent upon his narratee for validation and acceptance. This affects the narrative in the sense that the narrator adapts his narration to appease his narratee or to manipulate the narratee’s sympathies. The balance is of course a very fine one. The struggle to sway the narratee’s feelings or opinions can easily tip over and give the power of defining the narrative to a narratee, because of the narrator’s position of need. It is important to note that since the narratee is not a character in the narrative, this influence is indirect. That is, the narratee’s influence stems from the narrator’s knowledge and expectations about the narratee’s perceptions, and not from an actual narratee character’s direct and active involvement.

The narratee signals generally abound when Stevens talks about something which lies close to his heart, or when he makes more or less conscious admissions. The effect of this in the narrative is very obvious when it comes to the narratee’s function as mediator between author and reader; as the narratee signals increase the reader is alerted to the fact that something of importance to the narrator is communicated. The specific topics which most often provoke the narrator to address his narratee concern the nature of dignity, moral responsibility and Miss Kenton. The reason for this is that these are areas where Stevens feels that much is at stake. In the case of Miss Kenton he remarks that his failure to realise that he was missing an opportunity at a having a relationship with her was such as to “render whole dreams forever irredeemable” (Ishiguro 179). As certain topics are emphasised by the narratee signals they generate, the narrator is made to reveal more than he intends. In fact, the narrator’s control of the narrative is shown to be virtually non-existent, and the effect is that the narrative very conspicuously transcends its narrator in these instances. The circumstances surrounding the communication between the narrator and the narratee thus amplify the effect of the narratee’s function of relay between author and reader, and the underlying message of the text is made more easily accessible to the reader.

The relationship between the narrator and his narratee is one of continuous manipulation: Stevens often tries to establish a right of interpretation over the narratee, often trying to sway and control the opinions of his narratee. He most often does so in order to win acceptance for a certain type of behaviour or decision in the past. His reasons for manipulating his narratee, of which he is not always conscious, are not of a malign sort, but rather stem from a desire to
appear in a less poor light. For the reader this leads to a distrust of some parts of the narration, in particular when the narrator seems to be overtly forcing the narratee’s opinions. In these instances the device of an unreliable narrator and unintentional irony on his part make the narrative transcend his intent. Textually this is brought about by both the narratee signals, and the relationship between the narrator and the narratee.

The narrator’s dishonesty towards his narratee is particularly apparent when he does not want to accept a bitter truth about himself. Examples of this can be found throughout the novel, but a most obvious instance is Stevens’s longwinded and transparent attempt at misdirection when he relates his reasons for making the trip, the “professional matters here at Darlington Hall” (Ishiguro 5). His real reason for going is of course to meet Miss Kenton. However, while being less than truthful, he does not do it well and the narratee reveals the narrative ‘truth’ rather than functioning as an unwitting confident who simply accepts the narrator’s version of things. This dishonesty may not be entirely a matter of Stevens consciously trying to deceive his narratee; he may actually believe his own subterfuge. According to Gregory O’Dea, Stevens “believes … that he makes his trip for ”professional” reasons … But through deftly managed flashbacks and Stevens’s naïve admissions, the reader sees instead that the matter is highly personal: Stevens had loved Miss Kenton but let her marry another man; he now wishes to make up for lost time, to correct the mistakes of his past” (1). This subterfuge, whether intentional or unintentional, is nonetheless exposed. The relationship between the two narrative agents supplies the reader with the means to uncover the true message, and decode Stevens’s unreliable narration.

The instances when the narrator expects disagreement are almost exclusively the instances when he seems to be uncertain himself. The narrator is often fighting an inner battle with himself when these episodes occur, and the effect of this in the narrative is that the inner conflicts and insecurities of the narrator are highlighted and emphasised to the reader by the narratee signals. The narrative is made to transcend its narrator and in the process he becomes a more complete character.

By studying the narratee signals in the novel, one can discern a development of the relationship between the narrator and the narratee as the story progresses. The most significant tendency in the relationship concerns the narrator’s honesty. The closer the story comes to its climax, specifically the meeting between Stevens and Miss Kenton, the lesser the importance of appearance seems to become to the narrator. As O’Dea comments on this narrator evolution, “the journey motif is a deceptively simple structural device; the farther Stevens travels from Darlington Hall, it seems the closer he comes to understanding his life
“there” (1). Instead of holding on to his façade, it appears as though Stevens wishes to come completely clean with his narratee. At the end of the novel, when recounting the meeting with Mrs Benn, Stevens has become almost entirely honest, even when it comes to relating information of an emotional sort. He remarks on the great emotional failure and anticlimax of not winning Miss Kenton back to Darlington hall, and on the possible chance at the romance that was never allowed to blossom in their youth: “these words of Miss Kenton … as you might appreciate, their implication were such as to provoke a degree of sorrow within me … at that moment my heart was breaking” (Ishiguro 239). The effect of this is that the reader, through the narratee, is persuaded to suspend his disbelief and distrust of the narrator. This increased honesty on part of the narrator stands in contrast to his earlier behaviour in the novel and the significance of the events related in this part of the text is therefore magnified.

When considering all information obtained through this investigation, it is possible to view the whole narrative in a new light, creating an alternative interpretation of the relationship between the narrator and his narratee, namely that the narrator is his own narratee. Who else can be expected to read the travel log where Stevens puts down his innermost thoughts and fears, where he reasons, pleads and discusses issues of an extremely personal nature? Stevens is not writing a letter; his travelling log, which at times bears a striking resemblance to a diary or an autobiography, is far too lengthy and involved for anyone to read as a mere travel account. Also, having gotten to know the character of Stevens, it seems next to impossible that he would share anything that intimate and personal (i.e. unprofessional and emotional) with anyone. No, Stevens is really writing to himself, and he makes for an ultimately lonely figure. His heartbreaking losses and missed opportunities are made to stand out to the reader, and this is conveyed through the very specific narration generated by Stevens being both narrator and narratee.

The differences and specific idiosyncrasies that appear to separate Stevens the narrator from Stevens the narratee are not problematic, but rather the basis for this interpretation, propelling the underlying story and giving the narration its depth. These differences and seeming contradictions between narrator and narratee are indicative of Stevens’s own ambivalence; they embody the realities about himself and his past with which he is not at peace. The whole experience, all the writing and all the second guessing and reliving of his past life, is all about reconciling his two selves and his past. The two selves, the narrator who tries to explain himself and the narratee who by his mere existence questions these explanations, symbolise the wound which lie at the core of Stevens’s inner most self. They are the reason why he has not married, and why he is such a sad, lonely old man. All in all, he
has not been in contact with himself and his emotions and that has cost him everything. The motoring trip at the end of his life becomes the last, desperate attempt at healing what is almost dead, the redemption of his two selves. This is symbolised by him being both narrator and narratee, the one tries to win over the other to his way of seeing things, or, if that fails, perhaps find forgiveness and peace for a life wasted.

To conclude, the purpose of this essay has been to explore the functions of the narratee in the novel *The Remains of the Day*. The investigation has shown that the narratee, as a device of the narrative, is utilised as a primary means of achieving reader communication and characterisation of the narrator in the novel. The narratee does not serve in a mere supportive capacity in this novel, but rather as a major mover of the narrative. The implied pressure of the narratee makes the narrator take the narratee into account in his narration, and thereby the narratee indirectly influences the shaping of the narration.

By investigating the narratee signals and the communicative context, the narratee’s function as relay between the author and the reader has been explored. Most significantly, the effect of the narratee in his role of mediator between author and reader is most obvious when the narrative transcends the intent and purpose of its narrator. The narratee serves to expose and reveal the idiosyncrasies and inconsistencies of the narration, thereby exposing the unreliability of its narrator and direct the reader to the real message of the text. Thus, the presence of the narratee is crucial for the conveying of the story and message of the novel. It is clear that the narratee influences the shape and form of the narrative, as well as contributes significantly to the reader communication.

The function of the narratee in connection to the characterisation of Stevens is to expose and highlight those characteristics which Stevens wishes to hide, or are unaware of. Through the device of the narratee the reader is thus provided with access to a fuller portrait of Stevens.

In the matter of the reconstruction of the narratee, the results of the investigation show that the narratee shares nearly all of the narrator’s characteristics, like a mirror image. The differences which can found are mainly to do with differing, or possibly differing, perceptions and judgements about past actions, or inaction on behalf of the narrator. In fact, an alternative interpretation of the identity of the narratee is to see him as a version of the narrator. In this light, the novel, framed as Stevens’s travel log, takes on new dimensions. The implications of Stevens writing to himself facilitate a new and complementary dimension to earlier research. Rather than constitute an obstacle for this interpretation, the possible differences of opinion which divide the narrator and the narratee become indicative of Stevens’s conflicted
personality. It could even be argued that it is through the tension created through this narrative device, that Stevens’s dual roles as both narrator and narratee are communicated to the reader.

When viewed this way, *The Remains of the Day* contains a very raw and open study of a person’s inner landscape. The novel becomes an exploration of and a testament to, the contrariness of one man’s nature and his struggle to resolve his inner confusion. Stevens’s triumphs are revealed as hollow and his failures as devastating. The trip and the log he keeps help bring this to light and give him a chance to reconcile his true self with his deceptive self image. This pits Stevens the narrator against Stevens the narratee. It is intimated in the novel that a reconciliation of sorts does occur. Towards the end the relationship between narrator and narratee seems more candid and less deceptive than in the beginning. The position of the narrator and that of the narratee are far closer, and there is little or no contrariness left between them.

This investigation serves as an example of how the narratee can be successfully utilised as a tool of literary analysis. By treating the addressee as the object of investigation, this study has provided a complementary reading of the novel and generated much information about the mechanics of the narrative.
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