Leaving Darlington Hall Behind: A Foucauldian Analysis of Power in Kazuo Ishiguro’s The Remains of the Day

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1 Introduction

We all spend a significant proportion of our lives in workplaces, schools and various institutions. There are many positives. We build relationships with our peers, we find security in the everyday routines and there is often the opportunity of building a career by climbing the hierarchy. It is not surprising that sometimes a sense of loyalty can be built over time to such places. There can also be negatives. Work can encroach on our private lives and effect our personal relationships with family and friends, we often have to accept decisions from above of which we have little control over and there is the pressure to be increasingly efficient which can take it’s toll mentally. All of these themes, which are all related to power, are explored in Kazoo Ishiguro’s *The Remains of the Day*.

The Remains of the Day is narrated in the first-person by Stevens, Head Butler at Darlington Hall in England. Darlington Hall was owned for two centuries by the Darlington family, an aristocratic English family, but it has recently changed ownership to an American owner, Mr. Farraday, who wants a “genuine grand old English house” as a holiday home (Ishiguro 131). For much of the novel, the reader learns about how Stevens served Lord Darlington with a high degree of loyalty and dedication.

The novel follows Stevens as he embarks upon upon a rare holiday away from his workplace, which is suggested by Mr. Farraday in order for Stevens to “take a break” and “get out of this house for a few days” (Ishiguro 4). It is during this road trip that Stevens reflects on a number of significant events in his life. This includes his relationship with Miss Kenton, the love of his life, and his father. He also looks back to a number of key events at the house, such as a number of social occasions between the two World Wars that brought together international delegates to discuss the harshness of the Treaty of Versailles. There are times of pride, such as Stevens’ management of twenty eight staff members at the conference of 1923, and moments that he appears to regret, such as the sacking of the Jewish housemaids and the death of his father.
Darlington Hall has a strong power over Stevens, which is evident in his reluctance to depart, even for a short holiday. He delays leaving, “wandering around the house many times”, and feels almost a sense of guilt in the fact the house would “stand empty for probably the first time this century” (Ishiguro 23). He further explains this feeling as he is driving away from Darlington Hall:

I have heard people describe the moment, when setting sail in a ship, when one finally loses site of the land… I imagine the experience of unease mixed with exhilaration often described in connection with this moment is very similar to what I felt in the Ford as the surroundings grew strange around me… the feeling swept over me that I had truly left Darlington Hall behind, and I must confess I did feel a slight sense of alarm - a sense aggravated by the feeling that I was perhaps not on the correct road at all, but speeding off in totally the wrong direction into a wilderness. (Ishiguro 24).

Stevens describes his departure from Darlington Hall as if setting out to sea. He feels a sweeping sense of panic and uncertainty when leaving the security of what he knows, to such an extent that he questions whether he has made the right decision and he is on the ‘correct road’ at all. Why does Stevens experience such a sense of ‘unease’ and ‘alarm’ at leaving Darlington Hall? How is Darlington Hall such a place of security for Stevens? Why does Darlington Hall hold such a power over him? What lies behind the power of Darlington Hall?

In order to try and understand further why Stevens finds it so difficult to leave Darlington Hall, in this essay I will analyse how power functions at Darlington Hall and it’s effects on Stevens. I will argue that it is through discipline that power is exercised and maintained at Darlington Hall. I will outline what Foucault means by discipline and then apply these concepts to the novel in order
to find evidence for these claims. First, however, I will examine further what has already been written on The Remains of the Day by other scholars.

1.1 Literature Review

Kazuo Ishiguro is a much-celebrated British novelist. He was born in Nagasaki, Japan, in 1956 and moved to England with his family in 1960. Ishiguro has had seven novels published to-date, including An Artist of the Floating World, Never Let Me Go and The Buried Giant. He has been nominated for the Booker Prize four times. The Remains of the Day is Ishiguro’s third published novel, it has sold over one million copies and won the Man Booker Prize in 1989.

At the time of its publication, The Remains of the Day was described by in a New York Times review as “a dream of a book” and a “strikingly original novel” (Graver). There have been a substantial number of scholarly studies about the novel, from the time of it’s publication up until the present day. There are generally three theoretical areas of interest in the scholarship to date on the novel. The first concentrates on the way the novel is narrated, using the literary device of an unreliable narrator. The second is concerned with the historical and political significance of the novel and how it portrays both pre-war and post-war Britain society. The third focuses on the identity of the author Ishiguro and the relevance of the novel to post-colonial literature.

The conflict between Steven’s version of events and that which is not narrated directly by him is what makes Stevens an unreliable narrator, according to Fonioková in The butler's suspicious dignity: Unreliable narration in Kazuo Ishiguro's The Remains of the Day. Stevens is not lying to or trying to deceive the reader however. Stevens is deceiving himself. The novel follows Stevens trying to justify his past acts and behaviour and attempting to create a “new”, “more acceptable” account of his past life (Fonioková 89). His professionalism, his idea of what a great butler entails and the notion of dignity has shaped every decision he has made in his life. He has hidden behind these ideas and used them as an excuse for a “life-long passivity” as a servant, where he has not had
to make his own decisions and offer his own opinions (Fonioková 96). Fonioková claims it is people such as Stevens, those who repress their own identity and are both unquestioning and loyal, whom totalitarian regimes need to pursue their goals.

Guth in *Submerged narratives in Kazuo Ishiguro's The Remains of the Day* also questions Steven’s reliability as a narrator. She points out that the reader, in order to work out what is really happening, has to look beyond Steven’s narration to find the hidden, ‘submerged’ narratives. One example of a ‘submerged’ narrative is Steven’s love for Miss Kenton, which is never explicitly admitted by Stevens. A second example is Steven’s concept of dignity. At first, the reader learns what Stevens means by dignity through a number of long explanations. Later on in the novel, when the reader knows more about Stevens, it is shown that dignity in fact means to not “show any emotion, in fact not to feel; not to respond, never to question one's employer, not to have an opinion” rather than a lofty aspiration (Guth 130). Guth writes that the novel is in fact “a major act of cultural ventriloquism” in that the character Stevens is a metaphor for British society (136). By this, Guth means that Stevens obedience to his master is a ‘reflection of the Great Chain of Being’ of the ‘superior aristocrat and faithful acolyte’ (135).

Terestchenko in *Servility and Destructiveness in Kazuo Ishiguro's the Remains of the Day* also notes Stevens unquestioning obedience and believes that his behaviour is demonstrative of a “destructive obedience” (78). Terestchenko defines this as “a person’s withdrawal into the function (“bad faith”), combined with the justication of that withdrawal (the ideological alienation), can lead to an obedience that is socially destructive” (84). Stevens is unable to separate his identity from his professional function as butler and, at the same time, has a strong ideological idea of what it means to be a ‘great’ butler. Yet, according to Terestchenko, all he has done is to internalise an idea of social domination from the dominating classes. Stevens has therefore been deceiving himself throughout his life.
Stewart in *Second World War in Contemporary British Fiction* points out a number of areas of significance in terms of British society both before and after World War II. The novel is successful in doing this because there is “a historical distance between the events narrated and the act of narration”, so that Stevens is “forced to reflect on, and attempt to justify, choices that may, at a temporal distance, appear to be morally dubious” (Stewart 107). An example of this is when Stevens has to look back on and reflect over his actions regarding the sacking of the Jewish housemaids. In terms of the novels significance to World War II, Stewart highlights four further areas of interest. The first is how important political decisions can be made in “mundane circumstances’ away from the “front line of war” (Stewart 107). The second point is that there are similarities between Lord Darlington and other historical figures of the time such as Lord Lothian or Lord Londonderry. So, despite being a work of fiction there are, to an extent, certain historical accuracies. The third point is the danger of an unquestioning respect for hierarchies. The fourth is that every individual, even those “at the margins” of what is happening, are historical subjects and should therefore take responsibility for their actions (Stewart 108). Stewart writes that “the blind devotion that Stevens asserts is not merely the adherence to a quaint and outdated sense of servility, but replicates the logic of unquestioning loyalty to political causes” (109). Stewart also discusses the idea of “mediated action” (113). This is when those that issue orders blame the consequences on those that carry out the orders and those carrying out the orders blame those that issued them. This results in neither taking responsibility for their actions.

Holmes in *Contemporary British Novel* also highlights the effect of war on the main character and notes that Steven’s behaviour is typical of the “personal and collective damage when people internalise a national ideal that entails the denial of their own emotional needs” (14). Stevens is an individual full of regret, angst and sadness, yet he has spent most of his life attempting to suppress these feelings. These feelings were caused by the psychological impact of World War II and the “historical trauma” of the involvement and events both before and after the war (Holmes
12). Stevens is a “metaphor” for the subordinate position in a relation to power (Holmes 13). He represents the ordinary individual in contemporary society.

Öztabek-Avcı in An 'Ideological Servant'? A Study of the Servant Figure in Kazuo Ishiguro's the Remains of the Day examines the novel from a slightly different angle but comes to similar conclusions about Stevens’ absolute devotion to his master. Öztabek-Avcı believes that the butler in British fiction is more representative of ‘Englishness’ than any other occupation (93). Butlers are a sign of status, represent hierarchy and discretion. They are the “masters eye policing the goings-on of the house below stairs” (Öztabek-Avcı 94). Öztabek-Avcı compares Stevens to two other well known butlers/servants in English fiction - Sam Weller and Jeeves. Öztabek-Avcı claims that Stevens breaks the pattern in English fiction as previous Butlers have had a much more active role. Stevens “selfless devotion to his master” is different and he is therefore “tangential in the empowerment of the master and complicit in his crimes” (94). Stevens’ complicity in his master’s Naziism is because of the paternalistic view that the common person has little knowledge of politics and therefore should not be involved.

Despite few studies concentrating solely on why Darlington Hall has such power over Stevens, many insights can be drawn from this literature review. The first general area is to do with Stevens himself. He has repressed his own feelings and has deceived himself over his lifetime. He has immersed himself in his professional being and spends the novel trying to justify his past actions or failures because of his aspiration to lofty ideals on ideas such as dignity. He has lived a passive life and has only now noticed what a failure it has been. The second area is to do with his position in the hierarchy at Darlington Hall. He has been part part of a hierarchy that he has not questioned. He has shown a blind loyalty to his master Lord Darlington. Despite having grand ideals in how he should behave as a ‘great’ butler and how he should act with dignity, these internalised ideas are in fact the ideology of the ruling class that serve to maintain the current status quo.
1.2 Michel Foucault and Power

This essay argues that the ideas of French philosopher Michel Foucault can offer insights and possible explanations as to why Darlington Hall exerts such a strong power over Stevens. Despite the difficulties involved in trying to formulate a Foucauldian analysis per se, including falling into the trap of reductionism (Graham 2), this essay will use some of the concepts and ideas in Foucault’s historical analysis to try and shed light on how power is created and maintained within Darlington Hall, that is to say, to “reveal… what is most invisible” about Darlington Hall (Graham 4). Overall, there are four key reasons why I believe Foucault’s ideas on power are useful.

Firstly, Foucault views power as not only negative and constraining, but as a force that is also creative. Power can produce things, induce pleasure, form knowledge and produce discourse (Rabinow 61). As Foucault writes,

> We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it ‘excludes’, it ‘represses’, it ‘censors’, it ‘abstracts’, it ‘masks’, it ‘conceals’. In fact, power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth (Foucault 1977: 194).

Power is responsible for creating our social world (Jorgenson & Philipps 5) and it ‘structures the way that we perceive reality’ (Mills 55). This “conceptual environment” both “determines and limits… in ways of which (one) cannot be aware” (Gutting 33). Power is not simply a tool of repression at Darlington Hall, it is a creative force that produces Stevens reality and consequently shapes his identity. As Taylor points out, “we can learn something about how power functions to create certain kinds of individuals” (Taylor 166).

Secondly, power is exercised by individuals and these individuals are both “objects and… instruments of its exercise” (Foucault 1977: 170). As Mills points out, power has to be “constantly
performed” rather than “achieved” (35). Stevens is clearly not passive in his role in the system of power at Darlington Hall. He is an active agent who is both a subject and object of power. Power does not belong to a particular agent, such as Lord Darlington as employer. Rather, “power is spread across different social practices” (Jorgansson & Philipps 13) and is the “relation between different individuals and groups and only exists when it is being exercised” (O’Farrell 99).

Thirdly, power is “a system of relations spread throughout the society, rather than simply a set of relations between the oppressed and the oppressor” (Mills 35). It is also one exercised by free subjects. Stevens is not kept at Darlington Hall as a slave through force or violence, as he is free to leave at any time. It is instead the interactions between him and the rest of the staff that regulates his utility as an employee.

Finally, Foucault describes a range of instruments of discipline, that can be applied to Darlington Hall. I will describe this in more detail in the next section.

1.3 Discipline

In Discipline and Punish, Foucault analyses how various disciplinary techniques have been used in different eras within the penal system. He then goes on to illustrate how these techniques have been transferred to other modern sites of control, such as military training facilities, hospitals and schools. He highlights a shift from a sovereign power, commanded from above, to a power that is instead exercised within the social body. As Guttting notes,

Premodern punishment violently assaults the criminal body, but is satisfied with retribution through pain; modern punishment demands an inner transformation, a conversion of the heart to a new way of life. But this modern control of the soul is
itself a means to a more subtle and pervasive control of the body, since the point of changing psychological attitudes and tendencies is to control bodily behaviour. (81)

Discipline is concerned with the micro-management of individuals - a set of individuals who are all part of a multi-segmentary machine - within an enclosed space. It is “a set of strategies, procedures and ways of behaving which are associated with certain institutional contexts and which then permeate ways of thinking and behaving in general” (Mills 33). The ultimate goal is to maximise utility in the everyday.

Deacon points out that “power relations become more effective the more they infiltrate into everyday life” (149). Behaviour, body movements and norms are all continuously refined and perfected to create docile individuals and to improve performance. Self-regulation of one’s-self and the observation of others are key in discipline. As Mills explains,

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\text{discipline consists of a concern with control which is internalised by each individual: it consists of a concern with time-keeping, self-control over one’s posture and bodily functions, concentration, sublimation of immediate desires and emotions…which come from outside of themselves but whose aim is disciplining of the self by the self. (43)}
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In an interview, Ishiguro declares, “to some extent we are all butlers, we don’t stand outside of our milieu and evaluate it” (Matthew et al 2010). In the novel, Miss Kenton states, when speaking to Stevens, “You just let all this go on before you and you never think to look at it for what it is” (Ishiguro 234). This essay will attempt to stand outside Stevens’ ‘milieu’ and to analyse Darlington Hall for ‘what it is’. It will examine how discipline is exercised on a daily basis, with a focus on everyday life, to try and understand why Darlington Hall has such a power over Stevens.
2 Analysis

This essay will now examine the following tools of discipline from Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish* and apply this to Darlington Hall: the distribution of individuals in space, the control of activities, the composition of forces, hierarchical observation and normalising judgement.

2.1 The Distribution of Individuals in Space

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault describes how discipline proceeds initially from “the distribution of individuals in space” (Foucault 1977:141). This means that space should be “organised in a particular way… which meant that people were locked away into institutional spaces” (O’Farrell 104). This is fundamentally, as Marcelo Hoffman points out, “the division of individuals from others” (29). Darlington Hall is a self-contained building, separated from others, which is comprised of a number of functional spaces within. Within the building itself, individuals are separated by their connection to certain rooms, their role and their rank.

Darlington Hall is a place of “enclosure”, a “place heterogeneous to all others and closed in upon itself. It is the place of disciplinary monotony” (Foucault 1977:141). Darlington Hall is a building that is closed in ‘upon itself’, where a set of individuals are physically separated from other individuals and where discipline can operate in a singular and uniform manner. As Terestchenko notes, Stevens is “trapped in is habits and shut off from whatever could turn him from his function” (79). The new American owner of Darlington Hall, Mr. Farraday, when suggesting the road trip, says to Stevens, “You fellows, you're always locked up in these big houses” (Ishiguro 4). When Stevens reflects over leaving Darlington Hall, saying that he has “gone beyond all previous boundaries”, as if setting sail on a ship and seeing the land drifting away (Ishiguro 24), the reader gets a sense of Stevens leaving the physicality of the building itself behind. The reader gets a further sense of the isolation of Darlington Hall from the outside world when Stevens only
knowledge of life outside the house is through reading the volumes of Mrs Symon’s writings (Ishiguro 12).

In addition to this, space within Darlington Hall is separated according to its function. The term “functional sites” refers to the coding of space in order to make it serve one function and make it useful (Foucault 1977:143-144). As Taylor notes, this essentially “codes a space with specific functions to make it as useful as possible” (29). Each servant has their own space to sleep, as well as being able to be monitored by others and to be easily contacted. All other spaces are defined by their use - the laundry room, the guest rooms, the billiard room, the banqueting room, the smoking room, the study. It is noticeable during the downsizing of Darlington Hall under Mr. Farraday that Stevens strives to create a plan so that “all the attractive parts of the house… remain operative” (Ishiguro 8). Those spaces that no longer serve a function are covered up with dust cloths and closed off.

In order to distribute individuals in space there needs to be ‘partitioning’ where individuals are separated from one another: “Each individual has his own place, and each place its individual” (Foucault 1977:143). So within a separate and enclosed space, individuals need to know their position within the space. There is a real sense of each worker having set tasks within certain rooms and that each person can always be located and their presence (or absence) monitored. The rooms of both Stevens and his father give the impressions of being cell-like (a resemblance to the monastic cell Foucault describes (1977:143)). Steven’s room is “dark and cold”, “bereft of colour” and when Miss Kenton tries to brighten the place up with flowers this is rejected (Ishiguro 54). Stevens states that his room is not for “entertainment” and wants “distractions kept to a minimum” (Ishiguro 55). However, Stevens himself is taken aback when he visits his father’s similarly small and stark room and compares stepping into it to stepping into a prison cell (Ishiguro 67).
There is the avoidance of “distributions in groups” (Foucault 1977:143). There seems to be few spaces to socialise as staff members, apart from the professional discussions with other butlers during visits (Ishiguro 18) and Miss Kenton’s visits to Stevens in the evenings, which are eventually cancelled as deemed professionally inappropriate by Stevens (Ishiguro 178). To further separate individuals from one another there is a clear classification of rank among those at Darlington Hall. The different occupations have a title and are neatly placed in a hierarchy, which includes occupations such as butler, under-butler, house maid, housekeeper and footman. All staff are aware of their place in this line of classification. This is demonstrated when there is a disagreement between Miss Kenton and Stevens in relation to Miss Kenton addressing Stevens’ father by his first name rather than last name. When asked to refer to his father by his last name, Miss Kenton retorts, “I have in the past been accustomed to addressing under-servants by their Christian names and saw no reason to do otherwise in this house” (Ishiguro 55). There is little questioning of the validity of the hierarchy itself, all staff accept the hierarchy among themselves as natural and show surprise, such as Miss Fenton above, when an ‘accustomed’ rule is broken. There is, as noted earlier, an “unquestioning respect for hierarchies” (Stewart 108). It is interesting to see when there are changes and the downsizing of staff under Mr. Farraday, that each individual’s role is blurred. This concerns Stevens. He is sure that Mrs Clements and the girls will eventually get over their initial “aversion” to more “eclectic roles” and he himself has to be “broad-minded” in his new set of tasks as butler (Ishiguro 9).

2.2. The Control of Activities

When individuals are separated from each other and distributed in space, the next tool of discipline is the control of activities. Each individual’s behaviour is controlled to ensure efficiency through exhausting time through the use of timetables. Further to this, how the body carries out each physical task needs to be trained to ensure the results are optimal. As Marcelo Hoffman points
“Disciplinary power yields such effects by targeting bodies… to constitute them as bearers of a highly particular relationship between utility and docility” (28). Similarly, Deacon notes that the central objectives of discipline are “the inculcation in bodies of an immanent spiral of increasing compliance and utility” (144).

The timetable breaks down segments of time that can be repeated and supervised in order to make sure of “a time of good quality… which the body is constantly applied to its exercise” (Foucault 1977:151). Steven’s staff plan (or ‘servants’ rota’ as Mr. Farraday refers to it (7)) is a prime example of this kind of control of activity. As he points out, it is “the responsibility of every butler to devote his upmost care in the devising of a staff plan’ and a ‘good staff plan is the cornerstone of any decent butler’s skills” (Ishiguro 5). Ahead of the 1923 conference, Stevens carefully puts together a staff plan “anticipating all sorts of eventualities” and analysing their “weakest points” as a “general might prepare for a battle” (Ishiguro 81). When contemplating a new staff plan under Mr. Farraday, he lies awake late “after retiring” thinking it over (Ishiguro 8).

As well as time being used well it is also to be used exhaustively. Foucault writes about the exhaustive use of time, which “means that one must seek to intensify the use of the slightest moment, as if time, in its very fragmentation, were inexhaustible or, as if, at least by an ever more detailed internal arrangement, one could tend towards an ideal point at which one maintained maximum speed and maximum efficiency” (Foucault 1977:154). Stevens epitomises this idea, believing that as a butler, one should “never allow himself to be ‘off duty’ in the presence of others” (Ishiguro 178). At the start of the book he is reluctant to “get out of the house for a few days” (Ishiguro 50) and disguises time away from work as a professional trip to ask Miss Kenton to work again at Darlington Hall. When reading a book in his room in one of the “very few moments of spare time I have to myself” (Ishiguro 174), Stevens justifies this in terms of improving his language to carry out his work even more professionally. To be wholly absorbed in ones professional role or function can be can alienate the individual’s freedom as Terestchenko notes. At
the end of the book, during his meeting with Miss Kenton, he comments about his plans for the future: “I know I’m not awaited by emptiness. If only I were. But oh no, there’s work, work and more work” (Ishiguro 249). Stevens does not just believe in exhausting his own time for efficiency however, he believes that other employees should adopt the same stance when working at Darlington Hall. He claims that there has been a drop in “professional standards” in recent years in the profession of waiting on a house because of “employees having an unhealthy amount of time on their hands” (Ishiguro 8). When preparing for the big conference, he gives a “pep-talk” to the staff “impressing upon them that, for all their having to work at an exhausting rate, they could feel great pride in discharging their duties over the days that lay ahead” (Ishiguro 81). Stevens feels perturbed when Miss Kenton starts taking her entitled weekly amount of leave, rather than one day every six weeks as she had up to that point (Ishiguro 179). After reading Miss Kenton’s letter at the start of the book, which leads him to think she will return to work there, he considers her life one that “has come to be so dominated by a sense of waste” (Ishiguro 51), which he puts down to a life of no work or service at a house, rather than the missed opportunity of love between them both. When Stevens speaks to a stranger on a bench on the pier towards the end of the book, the stranger comments that, “The evening’s the best part of the day” (Ishiguro 256). It is after the time-tables of a working day that people can relax and have their own private time. It is poignant that Stevens has not given this much thought before and, it is after realising that “for a great many people, the evening is the most enjoyable part of the day” that he thinks that “he should adopt a more positive outlook and try to make the best of what remains of my day” (Ishiguro 256).

In addition to the management of time and the idea that time should be used exhaustively, the body should automatically carry out the physical tasks required. The movements, gestures and the duration of each of these in a particular task are taught and imposed on the individual, yet the goal is that through repetition the instructions should become mechanised. Instructions should come from within the individual. An historical example of this that Foucault cites is soldiers marching in
file to the beat of a drum (Foucault 1977:151). Discipline is concerned with the training of the body, as if it is natural for the body to be used and respond in the required manner. It is “organic” in so far as it lends itself to disciplinary practices all on its own, as if spontaneously and naturally (Taylor 29). It also ensures that the body learns the aptitude required. Indeed, formalised processes of pedagogically inculcating certain capacities, skills or abilities into individuals, often function by transforming an existing force of the body into “an aptitude” or “a capacity” (Deacon 167).

The majority of the worker’s tasks in Darlington Hall are comprised of such automated physical tasks, carried out in a particular pre-prescribed order, all limited by the time set to do the job. Examples of these tasks are dusting the portraits (Ishiguro 3), bringing in the afternoon tea (Ishiguro 13), fixing sewing cushions (Ishiguro 160), replacing crockery (Ishiguro 186), carrying trays (Ishiguro 62). If an individual is unable to carry out these physical tasks in the desired automated manner, then their usefulness as a worker is diminished. An example of this is Stevens’ ageing father who is no longer able to carry out the required movements to polish the silver adequately, to which Stevens attaches a great deal of importance (Ishiguro 59). Stevens’ father finds himself falling short as he gets older, as he is no longer able to serve dinner at the table faultlessly (a task he has done every day for the last fifty four years (Ishiguro 68)). When Steven’s father falls while carrying a tray of refreshments outside to guests, he seems puzzled in regards to why his own body didn’t carry out the task automatically. He retraces his steps over and over again to try and find fault outside of himself, blaming the uneven steps rather than question his own physical demise: “Seamus should be told to put those right before someone else does the same thing” (Ishiguro 69). Similarly, we see a demise in Stevens’ physical abilities that he does not want to confront. Stevens refers to a “series of very minor errors” of his, but puts this down to a “straightforward staff shortage” rather than his own physical powers diminishing (Ishiguro 51). At the end of the book, when speaking to the stranger on the bench, he confesses, “I find I do not have a great deal more left to give… more and more errors are appearing in my work… I know what they
signify… I’ve given what I had to give” (Ishiguro 255). Furthermore, Foucault writes about the correlation of the body and gesture, which is not just about the teaching of a particular movement and gesture in such physical tasks as described above, but it is to “impose the best relation between a gesture and the overall position of the body, which is its condition of efficiency and speed” (Foucault 1977:152). When Stevens comments on one of the new girls hired under the watch of Miss Kenton, he is surprised by her progress: “even her manner of walking and going about tasks…improved dramatically” (Ishiguro 164). This is evidence of the importance of being able to use the body in the required manner, as well as with efficiency. The employee is spoken about in terms of how successful she is in adopting the required behaviour at the required speed. The automatic manner in which orders are obeyed is the kind of blind loyalty and obedience that Terestchecenko notes can be socially destructive. This blind loyalty is dangerous according to Fonioková and is what totalitarian regimes need in order for support or to carry out their objectives.

2.3 The Composition of Forces

Foucault writes, “Discipline is no longer simply an art of distributing bodies, of extracting time from them and accumulating it, but of composing forces in order to obtain an efficient machine” (Foucault 1977:164). It is not enough that the workers at Darlington Hall know their position and work exhaustively, they must be organised and assembled in order to bring about the required efficiency. As Taylor writes, “this composition gives rise to a combinatory individuality by first treating individual bodies as mobile elements to be connected to other individual bodies as well as the totality of bodies” (30). There are two key components in achieving this: that staff are used efficiently to create a single efficient machine and that there is a clear system of command.

Regarding the former, the body needs to be “constituted as a multi-segmentary machine” (Foucault 1977:164). This machine, composed of the many servants all with their own integral role, is most notable at the 1923 conference. The threat of the efficacy of the machine is
Stevens’ ageing father. Lord Darlington says to Stevens that, “He must not be asked to perform tasks in any area where an error might jeopardise the success of our forthcoming conference” (Ishiguro 65). When Stevens brings up the subject with his father, he says to him that “he represents an ever-present threat to the smooth running of this household” (Ishiguro 68). As Stevens’ father’s physical strength diminishes it is clear that he is at risk of making the machine less efficient and jeopardises the smooth running of the house. He is in effect the weakest segment and this needs to be remedied. The measurement of this machine’s efficiency at Darlington Hall in this context is both the effectiveness and smoothness of which tasks are carried out and their apparent invisibility, as if the machine itself is to remain hidden from sight but just the results are to be presented. The whole process of cooking and serving dinner is referred to as dinner being “executed” (Ishiguro 102). Stevens describes the “balance between attentiveness and the illusion of absence that is essential to good waiting” (Ishiguro 75). It is as if the act of service is mechanical and when not needed it is invisible yet can be immediately switched on. Later on in the book, Stevens shares some “professional secrets” with a stranger on a bench and he describes the “various ‘sleights of hand’ - the equivalent of a conjuror’s - by which a butler could cause a thing to occur at just the right time and place without guests even glimpsing the often large and complicated manoeuvre behind the operation” (Ishiguro 254). During one point, some of the guests, while a little drunk, make fun of Stevens and the way things happen so efficiently, saying “But we could still have chaps like you taking messages back and forth, bringing tea, that sort of thing. Otherwise, how would we get anything done?” (Ishiguro 113). Stevens internalises the social rules concerning his status as a servant, rules that the aristocracy, the “dominating class,” has established in order to maintain the status quo. As Terestchenko notes, “ideological alienation is the intellectual (moral, philosophical, religious) camouflage of the reality of social oppression” (84).

Regarding the second point, the precise system of command, Foucault states that “all the activity of the disciplined individual must be punctuated and sustained by injunctions whose
efficacy rests on brevity and clarity; the order does not need to be explained formulated, it must trigger off the required behaviour and that is enough” (1977:166). Stevens is certainly in command as he speaks of a staff of seventeen “under me” (Ishiguro 7) and also as “my” team (Ishiguro 102). Stevens has an “insistent focus on his own "position" within this exalted order” (Guth 135). Stevens has “an unquestioning respect” for the hierarchy among the staff at Darlington Hall (Stewart 107) Stevens prompts the required behaviour from staff on a number of occasions. It is clear that he is there to command and trigger his staff into the correct actions, rather than listen to his team’s personal issues or feedback. He states that he is is not “that sort of butler who allows all sorts of people to wander in and out with their queries and grumbles” (Ishiguro 174). At the conference this trigger, the setting off of a desired behaviour, was visible: “the footmen looked relieved to see me, and I immediately signalled them to get to their positions” (Ishiguro 109). This is evidence of this mechanism, as well as the confusion that is caused by what to do without Steven’s command. Would they have continued to wait otherwise? There is evidence of this kind of automatic triggering from Steven’s employer. For example, there is the ringing of a bell for service (Ishiguro 228), the holding out of a cup for it to be filled (Ishiguro 112) and the touch of a fork’s prong to request a new one (Ishiguro 148).

When Stevens has a new employer, he has to learn a new set of triggers for when he is to be dismissed. There is a moment when Stevens is unsure of when to leave his employer, whether the conversation has ended or if banter is expected, “I therefore continued to stand there awkwardly” (Ishiguro 15) which is in contrast to the tacit code to leave under Lord Darlington; “Thank you Stevens, thus enabling me to take my leave” (Ishiguro 206). The repeated “stock phrases” (Guth 134) of Lord Darlington’s time, such as “I am unable to be of assistance on this matter” (Ishiguro 205), “I’m sorry sir”, “I’m afraid not sir” (Ishiguro 232-234) are not the replies that Mr Farraday expects and this is why Stevens wants to return to practising this with “renewed effort” (Ishiguro 258) in the closing sentences of the book. Both Darlington Hall and England are
changing and it is time for Stevens to adapt to these changes and learn the new expected responses
within a changed system of power. Guth points out the repetition of the polite phrases of servility as
one example of repetition in the novel. She writes, “for while repetition is central to Stevens self-
definition as a butler, it also leads to the realisation that repetition - in the form of imitation - is the
basis of his entire life which seeks to emulate the two models to whom he constantly refers: his
father and Lord Darlingon”(134).

2.4 Hierarchical Observation

Foucault describes power as,

a network of relations from top to bottom, but also to a certain extent from bottom to
top… like a piece of machinery… And, although it is true that its pyramidal
organisation gives it a head, it is the apparatus as a whole that produces power and
distributes individuals in this permanent and continuous field…This enables the
disciplinary power to be absolutely indiscreet, since it is everywhere and aways
alert, since by its very principle it leaves no zone of shade and constantly
supervises the very individuals who are entrusted with the task of supervising; and
absolutely discreet, for it functions permanently and largely in silence. (1977:177)

Observation is an important means of coercion and tool of discipline. This is based,
according to Gary Gutting “on the obvious fact that we control what people do merely by observing
them” (82). Stevens is clearly at the top of the hierarchy keeping a watch on the rest of the staff yet,
as Hoffman writes, the gaze operates in “a more multi-directional manner to the point of bearing on
the supervisors themselves” (31). Overall, “power relations are as dependent upon the fear and
resistance they may arouse within, as upon the willing or induced compliance of, the subjects of
these relations” (Deacon 168)
Stevens is at the top of the ‘pyramidal organisation’ at Darlington Hall. He is the “master’s eyes policing the goings-on” (Öztabek-Avcı 94) and, according to Miss Kenton, has “every aspect of (his)… domain well under-control” (Ishiguro 182). When a dustpan is left in the wrong place, when polish is left on the cutlery and when the Chinaman is left in the wrong place (Ishiguro 59), this is reported back to Stevens. Stevens checks up on his staff regularly, such as when he checks that Miss Kenton will have the bed linen ready for the 1923 conference (82). He is also not shy in pointing out errors. A prominent example of this is on page 57 of the novel, when he claims Miss Kenton had difficulty in the beginning knowing “what goes where and which item is which” (Ishiguro 57). Stevens also points out mistakes of his staff to the relevant supervisor. This in most cases is Miss Kenton, who supervises the team of housemaids (“my staff” as she refers to them (Ishiguro 156)). An example of this is when Stevens claims Miss Kenton has been a little “remiss” with some new employees since they are putting back the crockery in a manner that might cause damage and the problem with some dusting in the breakfast room (Ishiguro 187).

Yet it is not only his role as supervisor that maintains power. It is the apparatus of power that supervises all individuals at every level, both top to bottom and bottom to top. In Panopticism, Foucault’s study of Jeremy Bentham’s prison designs, Foucault writes that the major effect of the Panopticon on the prisoner is, “to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power” (Foucault 1977:201). Taylor writes that, “These features render the Panopticon a magnificent machine not only for subjection but also for self-subjection” (34). At Darlington Hall, it is not only Stevens who is giving orders and supervising. The workers at Darlington Hall are visible to one other and are supervising each other. When Miss Kenton changes her pattern of strolling and reading, taking her allocated days off and receiving more letters than before, this is noticed. Stevens is spoken to scornfully by Miss Kenton at one point before the 1923 conference, when she says “It is most curious to see that you have so much time on your hands that you are able to simply wander about this house bothering others with gratuitous
comments” (Ishiguro 83). This illustrates that even as Head Butler, he is visible, supervised and subject to scrutiny by those below him. This also returns us to an earlier observation pointed out by Stewart, that even “the bystanders and accommodators, are historical subjects with a responsibility for their one actions” (108).

2.5 Normalising Judgement

When Foucault writes about ‘normalizing judgement’ he describes a corrective, penal system that both punishes and rewards. This is a “kind of judicial privilege with its own laws, its specific offences, its particular forms of judgement” in “an area that the laws had left empty…” (Foucault 1977:177-178). Furthermore, normalising judgement,

differentiates individuals from one another, in terms of the following overall rule: that the rule be made to function as a minimal threshold, as an average to be respected or as an optimum towards one which must move… compares, differentiates, hierarchies, homogenises, excludes. In short, it normalizes. (Foucault 1977:183)

Therefore, as Gutting states, “Individuals are not judged by the intrinsic rightness or wrongness of their acts but by where their actions place them on a ranked scale that compares them to everyone else” (84).

Discipline requires a set of understood rules, that all individuals must either be reaching at a minimum or striving towards. There are punishments that aim to correct deviations from the norm, as well as rewards for those following these rules. As Gutting explains, “individuals are judged not by the intrinsic rightness or wrongness of their acts but by where their actions place them on a ranked scale that compares them to everyone else” (84). An example of this is when duties are taken
away from Steven’s father because of negligence, highlighted after being observed by Miss Kenton. Stevens speaks of a “dignity in keeping with his position” (Ishiguro 177), which is “something that one can meaningfully strive for throughout one’s career” (Ishiguro 34). As Öztabek-Avcı notes, “his narrative is an effort to ‘legitimize his mater’s opinions and actions’” (99). Stevens also clearly associates certain values and attributes with a certain rank. He speaks disparagingly of valets inspiring to the position of butler without the experience and qualities (Ishiguro 31). This is an example of what Terestchenko means when she writes that “there prevails an internal order with its own secret laws” (79) at Darlington Hall. When discussing this with Miss Kenton, he states “too many people believe themselves capable of working at these higher levels… lofty ambitions without qualities” (Ishiguro 182). We get a sense of this norm, a value to be either met or striven for when working at Darlington Hall, when Stevens gives his views on romance between workers. He sees “liaisons as a serious threat to the order in a house” (Ishiguro 53). Miss Kenton teases Stevens that he has a “curious aversion” to “pretty girls” on the staff (Ishiguro 164) and despite Miss Kenton leaving to marry, Stevens is at pains to point out to the reader that “during the time she worked as a housekeeper under me, she was nothing less than dedicated and never allowed her professional priorities to be distracted” (Ishiguro 53). It is important to Stevens, and his respect for Miss Kenton, to point out that she always worked to uphold the prevailing norms at the house. Anything less would be criticising her professionalism.

3 Conclusions

According to Foucault, power creates reality and the exercise of discipline creates power. Power has created Steven’s reality and he has been as much an instrument of this power as an object. He may be deceiving himself in terms of his own feelings, yet it is difficult to claim he is deceiving himself, as Fonioková does, in terms of his unquestioning belief in the hierarchy at Darlington Hall. Discipline shapes his reality and consequently his identity – even if this is
repressive, it is not deceiving, it is Stevens’ reality. Stevens’ identity is being formed by living in the enclosed space of Darlington Hall, a microcosm of its own where everything has a function. The individuals there are all placed in space and ranked. It is clear where to find somebody and where one stands in the hierarchy of individuals. Behaviour is controlled by the staff plan, by an exhaustive use of time and there is a real sense of the importance of efficiency and repetition of physical tasks. In Darlington Hall, the staff are all part of one machine that needs to be effective as possible in order to serve. Each individual knows their position and task, as well as how to act on command when certain triggers are given. Along with this, it is clear who is in command and from whom orders should be taken. Alongside this institutionalised behaviour, there is an established domain of norms, what rules there are and what one should be striving towards. Any divergence from this is looked to be corrected and compliance is rewarded. Both behaviour and compliance with norms is observed by all staff. What is created is a mini-world within an enclosed space, with behaviour controlled and monitored, established norms followed, a clear sense of hierarchy and a penal system that corrects and rewards. It is a world of clarity, stability and security. It is also one that is functional and well organised. Stevens unwillingness to leave such security - to leave this world - to pursue one’s own desires is one of the key reasons for Stevens not wanting to leave Darlington Hall.

This essay has demonstrated the usefulness of using Foucault’s ideas regarding power, particularly using his analytic concepts from Discipline and Punish, to show how a system of power functions in an enclosed space such as Darlington Hall. It also shows how a system of power can have such a strong hold over an individual such as Stevens. The micromanagement of one’s everyday through non-coercive routines is difficult to stand back from and critically analyse. Stevens finds comfort in working with set timetables, working in a clear hierarchy, having a clear function within team and having unwritten norms that one follows. A micro-system of power is always a temporary one, however, always shaped by the particulars of its historical, economic and
social conditions. It is clear that the world that Stevens felt so secure within is gone and will never return. The new owner is rarely at the house, and there is a small number of staff and part-time workers that come in by the day. Stevens’ own role has changed, a new staff plan is needed, there are different priorities when it comes to the physical tasks. Stevens seems to come to terms with this change by the end of the novel, when he very positively wants to practise his bantering skills to “pleasantly surprise” Mr. Farraday (Ishiguro 258).

When Ishiguro stated that “to some extent we are all butlers, we don’t stand outside of our milieu and evaluate it” (Matthew et al 2010), I believe that he is referring to the fact that citizens do not step back and critically evaluate their subordinate position in society. I would like to offer another interpretation. That is, that we are all part of different sites of discipline in our lives, for example schools, workplaces, hospitals etc. yet we rarely stand back and analyse how discipline shapes us. If we are unable to stand back critically we risk withdrawing into “our function” (Terestchenko), a “long-life passivity” (Fonioková) or becoming the “faithful acolyte” (Guth) showing “selfless devotion” (Öztabek-Avcı). This can have dangerous consequences. As Stewart points out, we all have to take responsibility for our actions whether we are the ones issuing the orders or carrying them out. Of course, an individual might be unable to be critical for different reasons. Holmes writes that Stevens might be suffering from trauma from the war and this is why he tries to cover up his connection with Lord Darlington on his trip. Yet, Foucault’s theory is one of resistance. By understanding how power has worked in the past, we can better see how power is working in our lives today. Once we understand how power is working around us, we can then take action to revolt against this.

I believe it would be of merit to examine and analyse other systems of power in a similar fashion in other novels written by Ishiguro, such as the art school in An Artist of the Floating World and the boarding school in Never Let me Go. The analysis has also highlighted one of the possible reasons for the popularity of The Remains of the Day, both among general readers and academics.
As Frederick Holmes point out, “realism…can be defined as the attempt to use linguistic and narrative conventions to create a fictional illusion of social and psychological reality that seems plausible to ordinary readers” (11). Readers appreciate the novel because it feels real, from a social and psychological perspective. When Ishiguro states ‘we are all butlers’, I believe he points to the fact that we are all a part of a range of systems of power within different institutions, such as schools, workplaces and hospitals. Although we might not be as strongly attached to these enclosed spaces as Stevens is to Darlington Hall, through Stevens we recognise various aspects of discipline from our own lives. The questions are raised, as as Salman Rushdie puts them in a review of the book, ‘What is our true relationship to power? Are we its servants or its possessors?’ By looking at how power effects Stevens in the book, the reader questions their own relationship to power.

O’Farrell states, “For Foucault, ‘history’ is the tool par excellence for challenging and analysing existing orders and also for suggesting the possibility of new orders. History is about beginnings and ends and about change and freedom” (61). By reading about Stevens experiences at Darlington Hall, about how discipline creates power in that enclosed space and at that particular historical time, the reader is able to reflect and recognise the structures of power in their own lives which means both critical reflection and the power to challenge and change.

References


