

The Remains of the Day (Ishiguro, 1988) is a poignant story of a middle aged English butler's journey to self awareness. He has spent his life in service to Lord Darlington, a flawed man who has colluded with the Nazis and whose treatment of his staff ranged from kindly patronizing to outright cruelty. In the course of a trip to Dorset, ostensibly for the purpose of recruiting the former housekeeper, Miss Kenton, to return to service in Darlington Hall, he has a series of encounters which lead him to reevaluate his relationship with his own father and with Lord Darlington. The trip culminates in his reunion with Miss Kenton and the excruciating acknowledgement of the personal sacrifices he has made in order to maintain the fiction that his employer was a noble man and that his father, also a butler, represented an ideal which he would do well to emulate.

The relationship between Stevens and the various father figures illustrates the importance of the resolution of what Blos (1985) calls the dyadic father complex which takes place during the the second

individuation of adolescence. During this phase, the teenage boy resolves earlier attachments including the dyadic father attachment and the attachment to the oedipal father. The relationship with the “dyadic father” (pps. 17, *et passim*) unfolds in parallel with the relationship to the oedipal father, and is characterized by the father’s cultivation of his son’s self assertion and his pride in his son’s development. Blos emphasizes that the relationship with the dyadic father has been seen as the negative oedipal complex. However, he views this as a critical step in the development of healthy self esteem. He quotes Freud. “This behavior has nothing to do with a passive or feminine attitude toward his father ... it is on the contrary typically masculine.” (Blos p.8) If this does not take place, the little boy/adult man may be stuck in an ongoing search for the approval of a substitute father figure. If he is unlucky, he may be caught in a sado-masochistic relationship which only intensifies his neediness. This, sadly, was the position of Stevens’ life until he encounters a new kind of father who encourages his development.

This unfolding begins upon the death of Lord Darlington and the purchase of his home by an American, Mr. Farraday. Mr. Farraday encourages Stevens to take a trip and not only offers him the use of his car but also offers (to the bemusement of Stevens) to “foot the bill” (Ishiguro, p. 12). When Stevens informs him of his plan to visit Miss Kenton, he teases him, telling him that he did not know that Stevens was a ladies’ man. At the outset, we see a new kind of relationship with a man – a relationship with a man who acknowledges him as a separate sexual person with his own set of needs rather than being merely an extension of his master.

Blos discusses the concept of the father’s blessing. This is the act of giving permission to the son to become separate and embark on his own path in life. He gives the example of the biblical story of Jacob who tricks his blind father Isaac into giving him the special blessing only accorded to the eldest son. Jacob, guilt stricken, wrestles with an angel

and says “I will not let thee go, except thou bless me” (Blos, p.12).

Jacob honestly receives the angel’s blessing and is now free to go on with his life.

In the case of Stevens, the blessing is offered in the most modern of ways – giving the son the car keys. This, in a literal and symbolic sense, gives him the means to be separate and affirms adult competencies.

It is also notable that this is the first time that Stevens demonstrates any interest in forming a connection with a woman (although it is under the guise of persuading her to return to her previous position at Darlington Hall). Up until this point Stevens has, himself, treated her with contempt and sadism, representing what seems to be his terror of the engulfing, castrating mother. It is significant that in the course of the novel, the only women depicted are servants (with the exception of two prominent women who are involved in efforts to establish ties with Nazi Germany). Stevens and Lord Darlington have basically been living in an all male society.

As Stevens prepares for his trip, his ambivalence about separating is demonstrated as he packs his clothing (or, as he calls them, his costumes). He takes two suits: one which was given to him by Lord Blair, a former guest of Lord Darlington. The other is a suit that he has bought for himself. The word costume is notable since it suggests that the clothing serves to represent alternative aspects of himself. There is the Stevens who is identified with his former employer and the Stevens who is forming his own identity and is buying his own, modern clothing. Stevens leaves Darlington Hall almost like a chick which is hatching from an egg. Blos (1967) compares the second individuation phase to the hatching phase of infancy, a “hatching from the symbiotic membrane” (p.162). In the second individuation, the adolescent sheds “the family dependencies, the loosening of infantile object ties in order to become a member of society at large, or, simply, of the adult world” (p.162).

His trip to Dorset takes on the tone of an analysis where his past is subject to reexamination and reinterpretation of events leading to both individuation and grieving over the loss of idealized figures and the sacrifices he has made in his search for affirmation.

At the outset he travels along familiar paths, but eventually “I knew I had gone beyond all previous boundaries” (Ishiguro, p. 24). As he travels, he encounters a number of people who serve as alternative analysts, father and mother figures who nurture his development. His first meeting occurs almost immediately. Unsure that he is on the right road, he stops the car to “take stock as it were” (p. 24). A stranger approaches him and suggests that he climb a path which leads to a spot in order to see the view. Stevens hesitates, thinking that the climb is too strenuous. The stranger encourages him, saying somewhat prophetically “... you’ll be sorry if you don’t take a walk up there. And you never know. A couple more years and it might be too late .... Better go up while you still can” (p. 25). Stevens rises to the occasion and

when he arrives at the top feels “the first healthy flush of anticipation for the many interesting experiences” (p. 26) awaiting him. And he feels “a new resolve not to be daunted in respect to the one professional task I have entrusted myself with on this trip; that is to say, regarding Miss Kenton and our present staffing problems” (p. 26).

At this moment, the trip, which is a literal and symbolic separation, is experienced as exciting and laden with new possibilities rather than anxiety provoking and signifying loss.

At this point in the trip, he arrives in Salisbury where he begins the first phase of his reexamination of his life. Stevens reflects on his father’s life and how his father has been a role model for him. Specifically, he discusses his assessment that his father was a great butler and outlines the qualities which make for greatness.

In short, the quality he focuses on is dignity i.e. the “ability not to abandon the professional being he inhabits” (p. 42). He gives two examples of his father’s behavior which embody this quality.

These two examples depict very different and opposite qualities. In one instance, his father powerfully intimidates two men who are guests of the house and who are, in a drunken state, mocking Mr. John Silvers, his employer. The other instance is one where his father masochistically agrees to serve another house guest, a general whose incompetent command during this Boer war led the death of Stevens' brother.

The quality Stevens describes seems to suggest that greatness involves the development of a false self. This false self gives the butler the ability to "serve" his employer and to completely abdicate any of his own needs and values (in the service of maintaining his position vis-a-vis a more powerful individual). Stevens says it best -- a "pantomime role" (p. 42).

Stevens' assessment of his father's abilities and of the quality which embodies greatness does not suggest that he is aware of the sacrifice involved in the assumption of this role.

However, as Stevens continues his reflections, he "confronts" his



father in a new way which considers not his greatness, but his decline (and its impact on his own self esteem).

Stevens' father has lost his position upon the death his employer and has been hired as an under-butler at Darlington Hall. Not only is he an "under-butler," but he is answerable to his son. Stevens notes that at some point he and his father had been conversing less and less and this had intensified when his father became his employee. This reaches a climax when his father drops a heavy tray of china while serving afternoon tea. Stevens is forced to confront his father about his declining abilities and take away many of his responsibilities. In a poignant scene, Stevens, unable to speak to his father, hands him a paper which lists his reduced responsibilities. His father does not speak either. "My father glanced at it, then returned his gaze to me" (Ishiguro p.66).

Later on, Stevens comments that at this time he came of age as a butler. While this is not a classical "Oedipal" triumph, it does suggest

that Stevens was only able to “come into his own” upon the decline of his father.

Shortly after his demotion, Stevens’ father becomes ill and, on the evening of an important party, has a stroke. Stevens is torn between attending to his duties and attending to his dying father. He rushes from the party to his father’s room, unable to choose which is more important. On his deathbed, his father apologizes to Stevens, finally telling him that he is a good son and that he is proud of him. He adds “I hope I’ve been a good father to you ... I suppose I haven’t” (p.97).

Stevens is unable to respond to his father’s dying words and declares that he is busy and will talk in the morning. Shortly after, his father dies. Stevens does not go up to his father’s room, allowing the housekeeper to close his eyes. (Closing the eyes of the dead is a universal custom and is referred to in the bible upon the death of Jacob). Stevens continues with his duties declaring that his father would have wished him to carry on. And he additionally states that “To do

otherwise, I feel, would be to let him down” (p. 106). Stevens is caught between two fathers, Lord Darlington and his own, now dead, father. His behavior, in his mind, honors both of them.

How does Stevens understand his behavior? He views it as the ultimate expression of dignity i.e. disregarding all personal concerns in the name of duty. And he insists that he recalls the evening with a large sense of triumph and views it as a turning point in his development as a butler.

What is the nature of his triumph? In his mind, this triumph is unrelated to his father’s death (the ultimate victory). The triumph is that his behavior has risen to the level of two of the butlers he most admires, who are his ultimate role models -- one of whom is his father.

Tragically, he was not able to take in or respond to his father’s dying words which were his belated attempt to give him his blessing. Stevens now travels to Dorset where he begins to reevaluate his relationship with Lord Darlington. Stevens has idealized Lord Darlington, much in the same way as he has idealized his father. However, he faces a

different task in reassessing his relationship with him. His father's decline was associated with a feeling that he had come into his own. Stevens does not view his father as a fraud. He does, however, feel empowered as his father weakens.

Stevens self worth is inextricably linked to the notion that he is serving a great man (idealizing transference), and as he travels he deals with the gradual acknowledgement that Lord Darlington was a fraud.

Stevens begins to recall several episodes which point to serious flaws in the "great man." He is faced with the challenge of how to maintain his self esteem, even as he acknowledges the true nature of Lord Darlington.

The first challenge occurs when he recalls some strange behavior that he had engaged in. While traveling, his car has overheated and a stranger comes to his assistance. As they talk, Stevens reveals that he is a butler at Darlington Hall, but denies that he had worked for Lord Darlington. How do we understand this? Stevens then describes an

episode that occurred when his new employer, Mr. Farraday, invited guests to his home. The guests tour the mansion and point out that parts of the mansion are not what they seem to be. Rather than being built in the seventeenth century, they are “mock period pieces” (Ishiguro p. 123). The guests then ask Stevens if he had worked for Lord Darlington, and he denies that he did. His employer, understandably upset, confronts him and says that he had paid for a real house and a real butler. At this point Stevens’ idealizations are being replaced with a more realistic assessment of Lord Darlington, and he is beginning to understand his otherwise strange behavior. (separation/deidealization).

Stevens then recalls other, serious behaviors of Lord Darlington, including meetings with Nazi officials and dismissals of servants who were Jewish. In his efforts to exonerate Lord Darlington, he attributes his behavior to the undue influence of a friend, a woman associated with the notorious English Nazi, Oswald Mosley. Darlington was behaving in a manner that, at the time, seemed honorable.

Banai et al. (2005) discuss Kohut's theory of the role of the idealizing transference in the development of the child. In order to develop a healthy sense of self esteem, the child goes through a phase of idealization. During this phase the child merges with the idealized image. If healthy development occurs, the child is able to internalize a sense of self esteem which is independent of the external object (self object). However, this process of deidealization can leave the child depleted and in search of new self objects which are used in the service of warding off narcissistic vulnerability. In the process of analysis, the inevitable empathic failures of the analyst challenge the patient's idealizations. Hopefully this leads to what Kohut calls transmuting internalizations -- i.e. the patient can tolerate the disappointment and internalize a sense of self esteem which is independent of the relationship with the analyst.

As Stevens travels, his recollections of Lord Darlington's failures are experienced as empathic failures. He struggles to reconcile his new-

found understanding with his previous admiration. Does he succeed? It appears that he acquires a new self object – his American employer. He is both authentic and nurturing. As he returns to Darlington Hall, he resolves to learn to banter – an activity that Mr. Farraday enjoys and encourages Stevens to participate in. The reader is left with the hope that this relationship will nourish Stevens in a way that the others had not.

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