

"extreme emotional control and the damage it can afflict"



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Stevens kept his emotions under a tight restraint for all his life, he had donned the mask of an imperturbable butler, denying and unexpressing his own beliefs, substituting them for those of his employers, such as Lord Darlington. In the novel Stevens is always keeping to himself, never seeking advise or asking for moral support from anyone, as if he doesn't need it. Even as a narrator he never really mentions any worried he has involving his personal life, until the end of the book.

However he is always telling the reader about some, almost irrelevant, problems he faces profession-wise, such as flaws he has been making in his work, like giving Mr. Farraday a slightly dirty fork, Stevens recalls the moment as one in which he felt " genuine embarrassment". Stevens overreaction to such a petty incident only shows us the over perfectionism he incorporates in his work, and how completely obsessed he is by it. He exerts this extreme emotional control on himself to keep him in a completely professional mindset, so that he is calm in any possible situation. Anthony Hopkins, who plays Stevens in the movie of the book said that, when he got help on how to play a butler from a butler in Buckingham Palace, he was told that, " there is nothing to being a butler, really - when you're in a room it should be even more empty".

By this quote we are told a lot about what Stevens sets out to do, his ever-calm manner makes him unnoticeable in the background and the modesty shown by the butler, is also shown by Stevens in many occasions in the novel, especially when talking to visitors of a high status. Stevens tells us many stories about his father and we see that he is strongly influenced by him. His constant mentioning of stories in which, Stevens thinks, his father

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perfectly exemplifies the qualities of dignity, such as the encounter with a tiger under a dining table and his father's immaculate dealing with the situation. We are clearly made aware of Stevens' wishes to be like his father, and he succeeds, if only too well. There is no denying that Stevens is a very competent butler, maybe even one of the best, but his impossibly formal behaviour and interactions with others limit his own personal private growth and relationships with others, which is vital for any human being.

Even though Stevens is often talking about his father, his relationship with him is destitute of any sign of family warmth. If Steven's relationship with such a close family member is so distant, we can only but imagine how hard it must be for him to relate to anyone else by breaking away from his codes of repressed formalities. The arrival of Miss Kenton at Darlington Hall was a big chance for Stevens to develop a private relationship with someone, but Stevens doesn't allow Ms. Kenton to interfere in his life because of his impermeable nature, which is resistant to any kind of affection.

Ms Kenton tries to bring flowers into Stevens' room to brighten it up, but Stevens' rejection of Ms. Kenton's offer, which he thought of as being rude, elucidates their relationship to us and how Stevens always fails to recognise Ms Kenton's efforts to make his life better. He is alarmed by Ms Kenton's displays of warmth and personality, and thinks of her to be ignorant, because she is always trying to interfere with his personal life. However Ms. Kenton probably shows more dignity than Stevens because she makes her decisions on her own thoughts, beliefs and values, unlike Stevens who does everything in the best interest from his employers. When a doctor tells

Stevens that his father had died, he replies by saying, " Thank you, sir."
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.. however if I may, there is a most distinguished gentleman downstairs in need of your attention." He completely restraints his emotions and his poised professional mindset comes through once again.

He doesn't even show a hint of surprise at what the doctor tells him, and makes his way back to the smoking room to attend to matters, which to him seem more important than his fathers death. Stevens thinks that his reaction on that evening was highly dignified, to an extent to dignity worthy of someone like Mr Marshall or Mr Lane, his butler mentors, he also says that his father would have been proud to see how he reacted. When he recalls that evening he does so " with a large sense of triumph", which to me seems nauseating because I can't understand how anyone could describe their fathers death as being " a large sense of triumph". We furthermore see his obsession with his work and, what could be described as his " greed" for dignity. But in the climax of the book when he meets Ms Kenton again after twenty years he realises his love for Ms Kenton for the first time in the novel saying that, " his heart is breaking".

He knows that it is too late to change anything and wonders about the life he could have had. He always refers to Ms Kenton as Mrs Benn, her married name, while he always thinks of her as Ms Kenton. This suggests to her that he was attached to Ms Kenton to an extent that he can't let her go from his life, even after twenty years, however he tries to maintain a formal conversation with her and therefore refers to her as Mrs Benn. After his meeting with Ms Kenton he sits by the pier and is offered a handkerchief from a man next to him, which suggests to us that he is crying. He tells the man of the mistakes he made by trusting Lord Darlington completely.

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Slowly we see Stevens mask, as a perfectly poised butler crumbling leaving the real, sad, disillusioned man who Stevens really is. Stevens achieved nothing in his life apart from, regret and loss. The extreme emotional control he placed over himself resulted in no avail, only sadness. He is an example of a man consumed by professional desires, which in his case was dignity.

He was too benighted to realise the consequences of what he was really doing, ignoring chances given to him to triumph over his designated fate of loneliness. By the end of the novel he realises that he has nowhere else to go and knows that he will always be confined inside the walls of Darlington Hall, in a profession which is part of a bygone era, like silver polish companies like Griffin ; Co. which was shut down. He realises that the rest of his life is meaningless and that he should learn the art of bantering (he still uses the word " bantering" which is a very formal and old fashioned, like Stevens, word rather than using something informal) because it is useful to use in conversation, and it will also " pleasantly surprise" his employer, upon his return.