

**THE REMAINS OF THE DAY:  
KAZUO ISHIGURO'S SONNET ON HIS BLINDNESS**

They also serve who  
only stand and wait. *John Milton*

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*RESUMEN: Mirar hacia atrás para contemplar la vida y aceptar el destino es el tema principal tanto del soneto XIX de John Milton como de la novela "Los Restos del Día" de Kazuo Ishiguro. Ambas obras literarias demuestran claros paralelismos de forma y sentimiento: tienen como centro un hombre que examina su vida y, después de pensar cómo han salido las cosas, acepta su destino. Aunque las obras están separadas por más de tres siglos, Ishiguro retoma y desarrolla de forma narrativa los temas vitales ya considerados en el soneto. Este trabajo estudia la novela "Los Restos del Día" a la luz del soneto XIX, comúnmente conocido como el "Soneto sobre su ceguera", para mostrar las semejanzas que se encuentran entre las dos obras maestras. Por un lado, analiza temas paralelos, como son la idea de la espera y el concepto del servicio, la experiencia de la ceguera física o metafórica, y por otro, proporciona una reflexión sobre lo que se debe a un señor. Por otro lado, la técnica narrativa utilizada por Ishiguro se ve como un desarrollo de las principales características formales del soneto, por su brevedad y por las alusiones que emplea, quedando así subrayadas en un nivel formal las relaciones entre las dos obras literarias.*

*ABSTRACT: Looking back on a life lived and coming to terms with one's destiny is the pervading theme of both Milton's Sonnet XIX and Kazuo Ishiguro's "The Remains of the Day". The sonnet and novel show striking parallels in both form and feeling, as they have at their center a man examining his life and, after reviewing the way things have turned out, accepting his fate. Although over three centuries separate the writing of both works, Ishiguro appears to take up and develop in narrative form vital themes already considered in the sonnet. This paper will examine The Remains of the Day in the light of Milton's Sonnet XIX, commonly referred to as the "Sonnet on his Blindness", to reveal similarities between both literary masterpieces. On the one hand, it will analyze parallel themes such as the idea of waiting and the concept of service, the experience of a physical or metaphorical blindness, as well as provide a reflection on what is due to one's master. On the other hand, the narrative technique used by Ishiguro is also shown to be a development of the principal formal characteristics of the sonnet, particularly in its economy and the use of allusions, emphasizing on a formal level the relations between these two works.*

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Looking back on a life lived and coming to terms with one's destiny is the pervading theme of both Milton's Sonnet XIX and Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*. The sonnet and novel show striking parallels in both form and feeling, as they have at their center a man examining his life and, after reviewing the way things have turned out, accepting his fate. Although over three centuries separate the writing of both works, Ishiguro appears to take up and develop in narrative form vital themes already considered in the sonnet. This paper will examine *The Remains of the Day* in the light of Milton's Sonnet XIX, commonly referred to as the "Sonnet on his Blindness", to reveal similarities between both literary masterpieces, analyzing parallel themes and the relevance of the techniques used for the development of the discourse articulated. As the autobiographical connotations of the sonnet are well known, this paper will center primarily on the light the poem may shed on a deeper understanding and appreciation of Ishiguro's novel.

The first line of Milton's sonnet is an appropriate introduction to both works. To begin with a line like "When I consider how my light is spent" immediately centers the narrative focus: there is prompt recognition of the direction the experience will take, that of a "consideration", a reflection. This retrospective element is essential to the development of both thought-processes, although the manner in which these examinations will be performed will vary. Milton's reflection on his life is overt, done consciously from a great anguish and need to understand the tragedy that has come to him. The beginning of *The Remains of the Day* also signals a looking back, albeit an unforeseen and unplanned reflection, as Stevens begins his journey into the past he has not allowed himself to ponder over or question. To consider how one's "light is spent" casts a valedictory glow over the sonnet analogous to that implied by a reference to the end of the day, as well making an allusion to darkness and the inferred deprivation of sight that will be a central point of both works.

To present a retrospective inquiry on the purpose and direction of one's life, both writers chose literary forms and styles characterized by economy. The brevity and concision of the sonnet form permits Milton to describe what we recognize as great emotion made perhaps more poignant by understatement. The characteristic combination of discipline, musicality, and amplitude of the sonnet is reflected in *The Remains of the Day*. Ishiguro's narrative technique surprises the reader with its simplicity, both in style and storyline. The novel is austere in its presentation, full of melancholy and irony, and yet clearly constructed with immense care. But this simplicity is quite deceptive, disguising rare sensitivity, artistic sobriety, and well-ordered craft. The novel's strength is a remarkable quality of style in which dialogue and narration are unemphasized and yet strangely powerful. Furthermore, Pico Iyer has pointed out that the atmosphere of all Ishiguro's books is set by the title of the first, *A Pale View of Hills*, and all three of his novels have that same ink-washed elusiveness, an ellipticism almost violent in its reticence; all three, moreover, are exquisitely fashioned miniatures that suggest everything through absence and retreat (588).

Darlington Hall, where Stevens has worked for over thirty five years, is now owned by an American, Mr. Farraday, who encourages the butler to take a long overdue vacation. Unable to accept the idea of going on a trip with no outward purpose, Stevens decides to take advantage of this generous offer to go and visit Miss Kenton (now Mrs. Benn), a former housekeeper, in the hopes of convincing her to return to Darlington Hall to remedy what he perceives as problems in household organization. The journey Stevens eventually undertakes corresponds to the double movement characteristic of the sonnet, variations on two basic patterns - of thought as well as of grammar and rhyme. Stevens's voyage away from his familiar surroundings sets in motion another journey - into the past, and the uncharted waters of his emotions. As he drives along, he begins to contemplate the events he has lived through and the essence of his profession. But as the novel progresses, it becomes clear that Stevens is not merely contemplating the meaning of butlering: he is grappling with ways to justify his life, for once you take his professionalism, his dignity, out of the picture, not much is left. In proudly describing his service, he says that "a 'great' butler can only be, surely, one who can point to his years of service and say that he has applied his talents to serving a great gentleman - and, through the latter, to serving humanity"(117). But the reverence he shows towards his master is slowly revealed to be barren and delusive as it turns out that Lord Darlington, with his old-fashioned ideas of chivalry, was tricked by the Nazis into championing their interests. Stevens's defense of his master rapidly loses validity, and his own life loses all traces of "greatness" as he reveals how, in seeking meaning only in self-subordination, he sacrificed his own growth as a human being.

Although the sonnet traditionally offers a unified pattern that leads to the "turn" of thought in a more varied sextet, Milton's innovative use of the sonnet form included the possibility of the octet running into the sextet to achieve a more artistically compact and effective pattern. The "turn" in the novel, Stevens's slow realization that his life has been wasted, is likewise woven into the entire novel. It is in this turn that the main themes discussed in the novel and the sonnet are revealed in all their profundity. The tragedy of blindness united to the ideal of service and the meaning of dignity are the considerations that permeate both literary works.

The novel unfolds as a first-person narrative in which Stevens recounts events of several days in the present that blend with recollections of the past so that both seem to fuse into one coherent whole. The direct, almost unadorned, narration takes place largely in the past but moves freely and skillfully across time, capturing the ebb and flow of his thoughts and conflicting emotions. What Stevens's reminiscences unveil, though, come to form the basis and permit understanding of his life, and the remembrance of choices irrevocably made compels him to reassess the present and look towards the future. The structure Ishiguro builds is rather like that of a murder mystery, in which fragments of crucial information are exposed gradually, piece by piece, often seemingly in passing, so that the reader collects clues and arrives at the truth by

himself. And, more interestingly, the truth is revealed through Steven's own words while he remains, for the most part, blind to it. As Milton's sonnet marks the awareness of his physical blindness and the initial rebellion against this limitation, Ishiguro's novel presents a man who comes to see that he has been, even chosen to be, metaphorically blind, oblivious to what is really happening around him - a defect that will make his whole life seem almost useless when he contemplates it at the end. Stevens's reminiscences are, in essence, a slow, reluctant slide downward to the most painful sort of self-knowledge: an end of the day realization that his scrupulous and effortful life has been entirely wasted (Rafferty 102). In the end, he knows cannot fight the burden of his memories and his years of self-justification. His journey back to see Miss Kenton therefore takes the unconscious form of a desire to turn back the hands of time, to rewrite history: so Stevens spends his holiday driving towards Miss Kenton in the unspoken hope that she may come back into his life. In his stiff, inhibited fashion, Stevens hopes she may redeem the past.

Both poet and butler are made aware of their lack of sight at the middle of their lives - although the latter's blindness was, in a manner of speaking, directly self-inflicted. Nonetheless, as John S. Smart points out, Milton had been warned by his physicians that he ran the risk of losing the sight of his remaining eye, if he persevered in the composition of *Defensio Pro Populo Anglicano*, an arduous piece of labor, but rejected their counsel, believing that he had to choose between loss of sight and the neglect of duty (94). The same choice is made by Stevens, who elects to deny anything that might deter him in the slightest from his absolute dedication to Lord Darlington. A butler's life, as he sees it, has no meaning save in service. He permits himself neither opinions, curiosity, or even self. His insistence on self-control, "a butler of any quality must be seen to *inhabit* his role, utterly and fully"(169) prevents him from admitting into his life anything that might deter him from the fulfillment of his duties. He believes he is only as great as the man he serves, and can best serve king and country by waiting, quite literally, upon history, keeping the silver polished on behalf of the ministers and ambassadors who visit his house to change the world.

Interestingly enough, Ishiguro echoes Milton's obsession with service, as directly related to the condition of blindness. Both poet and butler have always sought, and continue to seek - to serve their masters, to whom they owe absolute loyalty and allegiance. The idea of not being able to continue with this aspiration is what causes, in both cases, the troubled questioning with which the works begin. As the poet asks himself how he can continue serving God now that he has lost his sight, the butler must continue to remain blind, to both the mistakes of his past and the realities of the present, in order to serve the way he considers fit. Stevens is distraught by the thought that because he had given to Lord Darlington "the very best I had to give" he now finds that "I've not a great deal more to give"(242).

For we were, as I say, an idealistic generation for whom the question was not simply of how well one practised one's skills, but to what end one did so; each of us harboured the desire to make our own small contribution to the creation of a better world, and saw that, as professionals, the surest means of doing so would be to serve the great gentlemen of our times in whose hands civilization had been entrusted (116).

Ishiguro skillfully reveals Stevens's perceptions of the world at the same time he unveils, more importantly, how these perceptions blind him. Thus, he does not "see" the injustice of dismissing the two Jewish maids, does not let even his dying father interfere with the fulfillment of his duties, does not comprehend the implications of Lord Darlington's growing involvement with the Nazis, and does not recognize that he loves, and is loved by, Miss Kenton, and that she marries another only to spite him. At the beginning of the novel, he will not admit that the difficulty he is having in keeping Darlington Hall well organized stem from his own aging self, the increasing inability to put into practice the "experience and expertise"(7) in his profession that he had always been proud of. In all these instances, Stevens had suppressed all his feelings; he has retreated from the unruly forces of death, politics and love by claiming to be following a principle of order higher than that of narrow individualism (Graver 3).

Closely linked to the theme of service is that of dignity. Stevens's reflections on his work revolve around that question, the various answers to which, as the novel progresses, reflect his growing awareness of the realities of his life: "It is surely a professional responsibility for all of us to think deeply about these things so that each of us may better strive towards attaining dignity for ourselves"(44). But, as Galen Strawson has pointed out, Stevens is so concerned with dignity as a condition one must struggle to achieve that he does not realize that it becomes, for him, a condition from which one cannot escape (535). All the actions that have determined the course of his life have been performed under the yoke of dignity, in particular, the unquestioning obedience to Lord Darlington. His rationalizing recollections, ostensibly a review of how he has struggled to live this "dignity" point, more and more clearly, to the fact that this supposed ideal was precisely what prevented him from living a real life for himself. Towards the end of the novel, Stevens is no longer capable of rhetorical discourses and, asked what he thought "dignity" really was, he can only reply: "It's rather a hard thing to explain in a few words, sir. But I suspect it comes down to not removing one's clothing in public"(210).

While Milton perceives that his blindness will change his life because he will no longer be able to do what he did before and needs to be able to serve God, Stevens comes to realize that his lack of vision - or foresight - while permitting him to fulfill his role as the perfect servant, has forever deprived him of a real life. Both, one in spite of his blindness and the other perhaps because of it, maintain service as the highest ideals in their lives. The sonnet and the novel capture in literature the moment of recognition of the principal defect, its consequences, and their reactions to it. Milton's

moment of rebellion swiftly changes to humble acceptance; “a blind poet intensifying a glory he cannot apprehend” lives, according to Harold Bloom, a “blindness of faith, the evidence of things not seen” (409). Stevens’s tragedy is his misguided devotion to Lord Darlington: “I trusted in his lordship’s wisdom. All those years I served him, I trusted I was doing something worthwhile”(243). But he, too, recapitulates, and, unable to break from the habit of service to his master, decides to develop his “bantering skills” so that, upon his Mr. Farraday’s return, he will “be in a position to pleasantly surprise him”(245).

Milton’s use of rhyme is very subtle because he is using a more intricate sonnet form (the Petrarchan with its *abbaabbacdecde* scheme), and partly because his use of enjambment tends to subordinate the rhyme sounds and blend them into the total harmony of the poem. The reader thus touches the rhyme sounds very lightly, as they call only a minimum of attention to themselves, and centers his attention on the lines as the thought progresses. In a similar manner, Ishiguro’s elaborately constructed prose, while pleasing in its precise imitation of the speech of a lost era, constantly makes reference to deeper realities. It is clear from the beginning that Stevens is the sort of narrator that exists principally to be seen through. He is unbending, humorless, incapable of understanding anything outside his own limited experience, and tenacious in defending the beliefs and the prejudices of an era whose time has passed. His verbal style is elaborately inexpressive, or intends to be: but the language of rationalization is immediately perceived, as well as the deliberate neutrality of someone taking great pains to avoid telling the truth. There is in the novel an observable pattern of simultaneous admission and denial, revelation and concealment, that emerges as the defining feature of the butler’s personality (Graver 3). Underneath everything he says lie unadmitted truths, that reveal themselves to be a moving series of chilly revelations of the butler’s buried life - the compromises he has made and the recognition of the price he has had to pay in striving for his lofty ideal of professional greatness. For all his command of subtleties, Stevens is, in many ways, emotionally blind, trying with reason to fathom the logic of the heart. “Why, Mr. Stevens, why, why, why do you always have to *pretend*?”(154) the woman who loves him finally cries out. To that he can only answer that it is his duty, his self, and, as such, is no pretense, but rather a conscious choice.

Although Stevens remembers with pride his years of service to Lord Darlington, he is too honest not to provide incriminating evidence against His Lordship and his rambling memory evokes incidents that demonstrate layers of guilt, hidden regrets and a capacity for self-questioning. It becomes evident that the course of Lord Darlington’s life was a troubled one. Idealism led to appeasement, to sympathy with the Nazis and to active anti-semitism. Lord Darlington was in disgrace, during and after the war; his reputation became notorious. But even as the butler struggles to come to terms with the truth, his years of devotion weigh on him and he demonstrates perplexity faced with his own reactions. On two occasions he tells anecdotes about recent encounters during which he went so far as to deny he had worked for Lord

Darlington. One of the most poignant regrets he has to face is the possibility of what might have happened between him and Miss Kenton. His vain attempt to justify his actions resounds with feeling: "There was surely nothing to indicate at the time that such evidently small incidents would render whole dreams irredeemable"(179).

In the last section of the novel, Stevens experiences two very brief and extraordinarily moving moments of self-recognition. The first one is at his meeting with Miss Kenton. When she confesses that sometimes she gets "to thinking about a life I may have had with you, Mr. Stevens," he is dumbstruck for a moment by her words, but regains his composure and quickly agrees with her that it is too late to turn back the clock. But, deep inside, he admits to himself: "Moreover, as you might appreciate, their implications were such as to provoke a certain degree of sorrow within me. Indeed - why should I not admit it - at that moment, my heart was breaking"(239).

The second moment is when, in a conversation with a stranger on the pier at Weymouth, he is again stirred to talk about his attachment to Lord Darlington.

Lord Darlington wasn't a bad man. He wasn't a bad man at all. And at least he had the privilege of being able to say at the end of his life that he made his own mistakes... He chose a certain path in life, it proved to be a misguided one, but there, he chose it, he can say that at least. As for myself, I cannot even claim that. You see, I *trusted*. I trusted in his lordship's wisdom. All those years I served him, I trusted that I was doing something worthwhile. I can't even say I made my own mistakes. Really -one has to ask oneself- what dignity is there in that? (243)

Stevens's ultimate confessions of his mistakes and the images of what might have been loom large before him, leaving him desolate. But, finally alone on the pier, he is still incapable of assuming responsibility for his cowardice and compromises and cannot escape his instinct to rationalize his actions.

Perhaps, then, there is something to his advice that I should cease looking back so much, that I should adopt a more positive attitude and try to make the best of what remains of my day... The hard reality is, surely, that for the likes of you and I, there is little choice than to leave our fate, ultimately, in the hands of those great gentlemen in the hub of this world who employ our services. Surely it is enough that the likes of you and I at least try to make our small contribution count for something true and worthy. And if some of us are prepared to sacrifice much in life in order to pursue such aspirations, surely that is, in itself, whatever the outcome, cause for pride and contentment (244).

Ultimately, Stevens's years of service and capacity to deceive himself prove stronger than his emotions. In an interview with Susan Chira, Ishiguro has manifested how this particular point is essential to the novel:

To combat complacency, I suppose I'm always trying to remind myself in my writing that while we may be very pleased with ourselves, we may look back with a different perspective, and see we may have acted out of cowardice and failure of vision. What I'm interested in is not the actual fact that my characters have done things they later regret. I'm interested in how they come to terms with it. On the one hand there is a need for honesty, on the other hand a need to deceive themselves - to preserve a sense of dignity, some sort of self-respect. What I want to suggest is that some sort of dignity and self-respect does come from that sort of honesty (3).

Though he is aware that his role as butler in Darlington Hall is fundamentally decorative, taking into account his diminishing capabilities: "So you stayed on with the house. Part of the package"(242); Stevens recovers his energy by deftly creating still another ideal that will allow him to suppress feeling and knowledge in pursuit of a newly revised ideal of service, adapting to the apparent eccentricities of his American employer.

Another interesting parallel that may be observed in both the sonnet and the novel is how both derive a special quality of strength from the application of allusion. The use of allusion in the sonnet is both direct, as in the reference to God as "My Maker", or indirect, as in the key image with which Milton works. In many ways, the indirect approach is more suggestive: without identifying the thing to which allusion is made, the poet can develop stronger overtones for his principal theme. The indirect allusion is also subtler and correspondingly more illuminating, but this assumes the reader will recognize it; even if he does not, the poem may still be meaningful, but it will lack the added dimension to which it is susceptible. Behind the sonnet is the alluded-to parable of the talents, that underlines the profoundly religious source of the poet's turmoil. The key allusion is that of the "talent", a term that offers in itself a variety of readings. A modern interpretation would be to say that Milton had a talent for writing, but now questions his ability to use the talent because of his blindness. But the poetic reference is clearly to the Biblical parable of the talents, where a talent is a denomination of weight, equivalent to money. The talent, then, becomes a metaphor for both Milton's sight, now "hidden" and useless despite his wish to serve and return a "true account" favorable to God, and his literary skill, which he fears may subsequently be lost, or at least hindered. In his biography on Milton, William Riley Parker argues that the sonnet is not primarily on the subject of blindness but is actually a dramatic rejection, or qualification of the parable of the talents; a more accurate title would be "On Serving God, or his neglected poetic faculty," as Milton complains, not only of blindness, but of his own misuse of time, of his own failure to employ fully his God-given talents as a poet (469).

Similarly, Ishiguro's novel is an inquiry into the nature and use of "talent". The word may also bear the definition of "inclination, propension, or disposition for anything; 'mind', 'will', 'wish', 'desire', appetite'" (OED, 2). Stevens's "talent" is thus his



singular aspiration of service to Lord Darlington, a talent that overshadows any other aspect of his life. The novel's development shows how, because of his blindness, his years of dedicated self-giving have been "useless", or at least have been spent on the wrong course and for the wrong cause - a talent consumed to no honorable profit and, therefore, wasted. But, as the parable of the talents weighs heavily upon the poet, his desire to serve his Maker has the full force of a much-trying maturity and apparent frustration; yet, under a blow so calamitous for a scholar and writer, he rallies all his faith to accept God's ways and appointed service (Bush 121). In the sonnet we also see how a momentary rebellion turns into trust in God's purpose for him. Stevens reacts in identical manner: he recapitulates and decides to learn how to banter, to continue trusting in the figure of his master and, as always, serving him.

There is a further allusion to be encountered in the novel. Stevens's despair at his "talent" wasted is the first step Ishiguro takes to present an even more notable decline. Behind the personal tragedy in Ishiguro's novel is the implied but never directly mentioned end of the British Empire, an experience hidden in the novel that adds to the complexity of the discourse. Meena Tamaya has pointed out how historical events, elliptically alluded to but never directly mentioned, are the powerful absences which shape the characters and the narratives of all three of Ishiguro's novels (45). Crucial to the tone and texture of *The Remains of the Day*, therefore, is the memory of imperialism and war. It is the dismantling of Britain's colonial empire, mentioned only as the date on which the narrative begins, that provides the determining historical and cultural context of the character's attitudes and aspirations. The destruction of Stevens's world of proud butlers and stately English manor houses coincides with the final curtain of Britain as the world's foremost imperial power. His end of the day realization that his scrupulous life has been entirely wasted embodies and further dramatizes the denouement of his country's former omnipotence.

John S. Smart has pointed out that the sonnet "opens with a mood of discouragement and grief, and closes with quiet resignation"(95). In this composition, Milton goes beyond the normal octave-sestet division and permits his eighth verse to run over into the ninth. He thus gains an overall integration of the fourteen lines. There is, first, the long, sweeping development of lines 1-6, in which, cutting across the rhyme scheme in its urgency, the poet suggests the impatience with which he is writing. Then with shorter phrases he goes on to build up the arguments against his opening premise, gradually quieting down to the calmness of acceptance and understanding in the last line. In the sonnet, according to Pyle, the octave builds up to a climax of emotion from which the sestet will lead down to a state of "calm of mind all passion spent" (379). As the sonnet may be read as one compound-complex sentence that proceeds from the grief of a troubled mind, through questioning, to final recognition, *The Remains of the Day* also passes through the same stages, to arrive at Stevens's final resignation and compromise.

The last line of the sonnet is of crucial interest to understanding of both the poem and the novel. In the sonnet, the comparison in the last line may be understood as

being that between angels who serve God in heaven, and bear his errands throughout the world, and devout men on earth who approve themselves in the sight of God only by the humble and submissive acceptance of his decrees, and by waiting with quiet endurance for the fulfillment of his purposes. And furthermore, according to Pyle, now that Milton is blind he is all the more resolutely determined (“bent”) to use his “Talent” in God’s service (378). This is likewise Stevens’s motto and renewed aim in life because, for the butler, the thousands who “at his bidding speed” are the “great gentlemen of our time to whom civilization had been entrusted”, the objects of his devoted life of service. Unlike the poet, who in the poem comes to see himself as occupying now what may seem to be a different role in the order of things, Stevens’s “yoke” had always been to “wait”, literally, on these men as he, and they, believed that were serving the best interests of humanity.

In his own tragic need for patience, Milton found strength by discarding his long-held conviction of God’s plans for him, and by adjusting himself to a new and humbler conception of service. God did not demand a return of his talent; God asked only a spirit of submission and fortitude, a spirit of patient endurance. Blindness was a “mild yoke” that might easily have been heavier. On the other hand, he was not expected to give up all hope of being used further... He need not sit in despair; he should “stand” ready for the divine bidding, “wait” for the illumination from above. In true service, or waiting, readiness is all (Parker 472).

The various definitions of “wait” demand at this point clarification and the drawing of further parallels. Honigman suggests that Milton uses it in the sense of “attend as a servant, to receive orders” (OED, 9), but its most common meaning, “stay in expectation” (OED, 5) is clearly present; further reference may be made to another biblical passage, that of the laborers standing in the square, waiting to be called for work (176). Pyle offers a similar interpretation as he asserts that Milton here is referring to those servants who, in Luke XII, 35-40, “stand and wait, in readiness to open when the Lord knocks; but their service is blessed not barren, for they stand not idle but waiting expectantly...it is a position of preparedness... enlarging the concept of service to include the ministration of those who though inactive are eagerly prepared for action when the call comes”(382-3). In *The Remains of the Day*, both meanings are applicable as the driving purpose of Stevens’s life: to serve and, at the end, to linger with renewed hope. Finally, in neither piece is there triumph or exultation, no suspension of will, no abnegation of purpose, no prospect of a sterile future. Both the poet and the butler, finding themselves incapable of “serving” as they once had or would wish to, or finding emptiness in that service, have come to terms with himself, and end their contemplation in an atmosphere of quiet hope.

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