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**TITLE: Class, Identity and Dignity in *The Remains of the Day* and *The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner***

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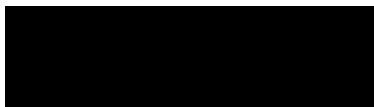


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## ABSTRACT

In my essay I compare Stevens and Smith, the main characters of *The Remains of the Day* by Kazuo Ishiguro and *The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner* by Alan Sillitoe as they are both working class men who lived in 20<sup>th</sup> century Britain who due to their way of identifying with their class accepted or rebelled against the system. I do this by first focusing on the notion of “class” and how the working class evolved throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century in order to set a historical context of both works . I then analyse the way both characters are treated in the works because of their class and then how, despite receiving a similar treatment, the way they identify affects the way they choose to act in the texts; while doing this I also comment on the loneliness that surrounds the figure of the working-class man in these texts. Finally, I refer to the concept of ‘dignity’ in Ishiguro’s text and of ‘honesty’ in Sillitoe’s text as the definition that the two characters have of these ideas greatly impacts the way they understand their position in the world and the way they choose to behave in the texts.

Key words: class, Britain, identity, Sillitoe, Ishiguro

## RESUMEN

En mi trabajo comparo a Stevens y a Smith, los protagonistas de *Lo que queda del día* de Kazuo Ishiguro y de *La soledad del corredor de fondo* de Alan Sillitoe ya que los dos son hombres de clase obrera que vivieron en el siglo XX en Gran Bretaña que, debido a su manera de identificarse con su clase, aceptaron el sistema o se rebelaron contra él. Para hacer esto primero me centro en el concepto de “clase” y en como la clase obrera evolucionó a lo largo del siglo XX para así tener el contexto histórico de las dos. Después analizo la manera en la que los personajes son tratados en las obras por pertenecer a la clase obrera y también como, a pesar de ser tratados de manera similar, actúan según como se identifican con su clase; junto con esto también observo la soledad que envuelve a la figura del hombre obrero en los textos. Finalmente, aludo a los conceptos de ‘dignidad’ en el texto de Ishiguro, y de ‘honestidad’ en el de Sillitoe, ya que las definiciones que tienen los dos personajes de estas ideas influye mucho sobre la manera en la que entienden su posición en el mundo y en la manera en la que deciden comportarse en los textos.

Palabras clave: clase, Gran Bretaña, identidad, Sillitoe, Ishiguro

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In my essay I analyse how two characters of the working class: Stevens in *The Remains of the Day* by Kazuo Ishiguro and Smith in *The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner* by Alan Sillitoe have different ways of identifying with their class despite being treated in similar ways by others. *The Remains of the Day* is set in the 1950's but is mostly comprised of the retelling of the life of the main character, Stevens, a butler in a big house called Darlington Hall. Throughout the novel, he reminisces about his experiences in the house, about what he calls his best moments as a butler but were in fact his missed opportunities in life such as having fulfilling relationships and standing up for what was right. Through his narrative we see the power of the values that were widespread in those years, the sense of duty above all, the "dignity" of being invisible and of being a butler first, and then a man. This contrasts with the main character in *The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner*, Smith. He is a young man in the late 1950's who feels angry about his limited choices in life as a member of the working class and chooses a life of crime instead of a life in the milling factory which ended up killing his own father. When he ends up in the Borstal he uses his time as a long-distance runner to reflect on the status quo, to criticize the system he is a part of, and finally decides to rebel against it with the only tool he feels he has, by losing the race for the Borstal, by choosing to maintain the little autonomy he has. I argue that this is due to the significant changes that took place in Britain between the moments when the texts are set: the 1930's and the late 1950's such as World War II and the decline of the British Empire. These affected the position of Britain and lead to British society wanting to have better conditions and feeling disaffected after having fought in a war that wasn't their own and for a country that was now losing its power. From my point of view this is the fundamental difference between the two characters, that they are either still trapped by the old values of pre-war Britain which makes them think that they have no choice but to accept the conditions they live in and, in Stevens' case, to truly believe that this is the way it should be and the changed working class man who is still angry after World War II and wants has found the strength to voice his opinions. I do this by first defining the notion of class in order to clarify how class can be seen both in an objective and in a subjective sense which can also be called class consciousness. I then briefly go over the evolution of the working class in Britain during the 20<sup>th</sup> century and then focus on the context of the two main characters in the texts. After this, I explore how the concept of class and identity are intertwined in the texts as Stevens and Smith both belong to the same social class but have

different ways of dealing with and reflecting on their position which leads to them either rebelling or not and I also comment on how belonging to the working class contributes to them being isolated and lonely characters. Finally, I approach the concept of “dignity”, which plays a major role in both texts as it determines how both characters act throughout the texts and holds a radically different meaning for Stevens and Smith.

## 2. THE NOTION OF CLASS, THE EVOLUTION OF THE WORKING CLASS IN THE 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY IN BRITAIN AND STEVENS AND SMITH IN CONTEXT

### 2.1. The notion of class

As my essay is strongly structured around the idea of social class and, more specifically, the working class, I want to firstly give a brief introduction into what the notion of class means and how it is usually defined. The notion of class is a concept that is ambiguous and therefore difficult to define. This is due to two main reasons: firstly, that the notion of class is changeable, that is to say, that class can only be defined in relation to a specific time period and the circumstances within this time period and, secondly, that the notion of class is often considered to be a term that can be used in two senses: in an objective sense and in a subjective sense too.

As E.P Thompson states: “the definition can only be made in the medium of *time*- that is, action and reaction, change and conflict” (Thompson, 1965, p.357 in Katznelson and Zolberg, 1986, p.18). The argument that class, that the distinction between classes, changes with time and depends on the historical context is fundamental given that it proves that it is therefore impossible to have only one definition of class. This can be seen in a very relevant observation by Hobsbawm that Bourke included in her book *Working-class cultures in Britain 1890-1960. Class, gender and Ethnicity*:

If the ‘working class’ were defined as manual workers, the 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed a decline in this and 64 per cent by 1961. If, however, ‘working class’ was defined in a more Marxist sense, that is, as the proportion of the population who earned a living by selling their labour power (plus ‘dependants’), then this ‘class’ had grown. In 1911, around 7 per cent of the workforce were ‘employers and proprietors’, compared with around 4 per cent by the 1960’s (Bourke, 1994, p.2)

In *Worlds of Labour: further studies in the history of labour* Hobsbawm explains how Marx made a distinction between class in an objective sense, if this objective sense can really be considered to exist given the first reason I explained, and in a subjective sense. The objective

sense that Marx gave to the notion of class referred to the circumstances that the people within a class share which was based on the distinction between those who owned the means of production, the bourgeoisie, and the proletariat or working class who had to work for the owners and gained money in exchange for their work force. The subjective sense he refers to is the way the class identifies and behaves as a class, their class consciousness. According to E.P Thompson, “when we speak of class we are thinking of a very loosely-defined body of people who share the same congeries of interests, social experiences, traditions, and value-system, who have a *disposition to behave* as a class, to define themselves in their actions and in their consciousness in relation to other groups of people in class ways”. This quote proves how behaving as a class, feeling like a strong “us” versus a “them”, seeing the differences between one’s group and the other group, is a fundamental part of belonging to a class and of materializing the very notion of class.

## 2.2. The evolution of the working class in the 20th century in Britain

In this section of the essay I mostly focus on the situation of the working class in the moments that the two texts are set: in the case of *The Remains of the Day* the years leading up to World War II and then in 1956 and in *The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner* around the end of the 1950’s, given that it was published in 1959. I think it is important to note that there is a fundamental difference between these two texts when taking historical context into consideration given that *The Remains of the Day* was published by Kazuo Ishiguro in 1989, which is many years after the action is meant to have taken place and, therefore, is not a piece of writing which is a product of its time. It is instead narrative which takes place in a past situation as told by someone who was not present in that moment and, for this reason, despite the undoubtable research that the author conducted, there is a greater distance between author and experience, between context and written text. This is very different from Sillitoe’s work, as he was a writer who wrote about the time he was living in and who, therefore, experienced the historical context he was writing about; he lived in Nottingham in the 1950’s and knew what it meant to be a member of the working class in that time.

In the years leading up to World War II, the working class was still only a class in the objective sense that Marx referred to in his work; they were a group of people who had certain similarities in terms of the work they performed and their conditions. What had not appeared yet was the second sense he refers to, the class consciousness. This could be due to what Sinfield describes in this quote:



The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas: ie the class, which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. (Sinfield, 1989, p.34)

In the pre-war era there was no real organization of the working class, unions had not appeared yet, and people trusted the rulers of Britain which was one of the biggest world powers and ruled an enormous Empire. Within this context, the working classes, which also included service, displayed the attitudes that Sinfield mentions, they shared similar beliefs to people who lived in very superior conditions to them and were tied to very established ideas of duty and obedience.

This situation dramatically changed after World War II and other events in the following years which led to the decline of the British Empire. During World War II the working class was pushed to participate in the war effort in the name of patriotism and public service. They were told that their situation would improve after the war, there would be a fairer distribution of their rewards. The promise that Britain would be stronger than ever after a World War II victory was everywhere and, more importantly, the assurance that this Britain would be a fairer place for the working class, was too. The trauma of experiencing the realities of war and then seeing how the British Empire crumbled under the stress of new independence movements throughout the British Empire lead the population of Britain to a newfound sense of confusion and lack of direction, as Hobsbawm explains:

The old moral vocabulary of rights and duties, mutual obligations, sin and virtue, sacrifice, conscience, rewards, and penalties, could no longer be translated into the new language of desired gratification. Once such practices and institutions were no longer accepted as part of a way of ordering society that linked people to each other and ensured social cooperation and reproduction, most of their capacity to structure human social life vanished. They were reduced simply expressions of individuals' preferences, and claims that the law should recognize the supremacy of these preferences. Uncertainty and unpredictability impended. Compass needles no longer had a North, maps became useless (Hobsbawm, 1994, p.338).

However, as Jones points out, after World War II and maybe because of the trauma after the Great Depression, free-market capitalism was no longer an option, and the conservative party, the Tories, had to accept the welfare- state and a strong network of trade unions. The widespread desire for social reform led to the formation of the most important

change in terms of the political landscape, the appearance of the Labour Party with Clement Attlee, forming the first labour majority government. The ideology of this party was radically different from the Conservatives', who had governed for ten years. There finally seemed to be a voice for the working class in Britain, the welfare state was established as well as better conditions for workers.

That said, as Keady points out, as the years went by the situation of Britain was losing force in two senses. For one, it was no longer a world power and had become dependant on America after the Suez canal crisis and most importantly, despite people apparently having a better standard of living, that is to say, "while the full employment which was being enjoyed, the rising wages, and the increased availability of consumer goods seemed to indicate a more equal society, at the same time they helped to disguise the persistence of inequality and its continuing connection to a class system". (Keady, 2008, p.130) So, the same people were still in control of the means of production, these people were few and apart, and the class system was still alive in Britain.

### 2.3. Stevens and Smith, in context

To begin, I want to address the fact that I consider Stevens and Smith to both be representatives of the working class but, at the same time, I am aware of the difference between their circumstances; Stevens is a butler in a big house, he wears suits, he most likely has the means to do more things than he does while Smith is a young man in Nottingham who doesn't have enough money to buy a coat and whose choice is either the milling factory or a life of crime in order to survive. However, I consider that they both fall under the same category in terms of the criterion posed by Marx when he describes the working class as the class who is not in control of the means of production and who have to sell their labour in order to survive. For this reason and due to the way they two differ in terms of their class consciousness, Marx's second criterion, I have chosen to put them on a similar level by analysing them as members of the working class.

Stevens is a butler, he is the top of the service ladder in Darlington Hall and works under Lord Darlington. He tells his story in 1956, when butlers and country houses are no longer what they used to be, they have lost power in the same way as Britain has; the aristocracy has been substituted by Mr. Farraday, a rich American who Britain and now also Stevens is dependant on. Government measures also contributed to the downfall of the aristocracy and of the big houses as Atkinson explains "The Labour Government's wealth transfer taxes have

begun to break up the ancestral estates of people like Lord Darlington. Members of the aristocracy are now opening their houses to throngs of tourists or, worse still, conveying them to the National Trust or, worst of all, selling them to foreign, even American, millionaires”(Atkinson, 1995, p.181). In this context we see how Stevens who was in the hub, if only while serving drinks to the protagonists, of the political decisions of Britain in the 1930’s has become in the 1950’s a relic of another time, a time where the values of duty and patriotism tied him to people who made choices for their country which would affect everyone without consulting them with the butler.

Smith is a young man in Nottingham at the end of the 1950’s. He has grown up in a post-war society where the Labor Party has been in power and put forward some major changes in relation to society and his social class; this can be seen in how we are told that his father was in a Trade Union. Also, the fact that Sillitoe chose to tell the story of a teenager was not by chance, given that youth culture was very important in the late 1950’s; consumerism was targeted at young people, including working class youths. Moreover, as can be seen in the character of Smith, “central to the imagery of the “affluent teenager” was the idea of a dissolution of old class barriers and the construction of a new collective identity based on teenage values” (Hill, 1986, p.11 in Keady, 2008, p.138). It is this dissolution of old class barriers that Smith aims to accomplish in *The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner*, despite at the same time feeling that it might be impossible to do so, that things have not changed that much from pre-war times to post-war times despite the more superficial changes like having a TV at home. Instead, the TV is still a tool to keep the working class always wanting more, having to work more time because they are constantly being encouraged to spend money and consume. Throughout the narrative, and while Smith runs, he realizes that there is still a clear “them” and a clear “us” and realizes that him running for the Borstal is like working class men fighting in World War II, that is to say, that “men like Smith are never more than cannon fodder for other men’s victories” and that he has nothing to win from winning (Small, 2010, p.140).

### 3. THE WORKING CLASS: HOW THE CHARACTERS ARE TREATED AND HOW THEY CONSTRUCT THEIR IDENTITIES

#### 3.1 How the characters are treated

The fact that both main characters in the texts, Stevens and Smith, belong to the working class has a great effect on how they are treated and perceived in relation to their status, and

also on how they both identify with their class and construct their identities in relation to it. Despite the fact that the characters belong to the working class in different time periods, as I mentioned before, and are also different in the sense that Stevens is a butler in a big manor house and Smith is a teenage criminal, it is significant to see that they are both commodified and oppressed by the upper classes in the text. That is to say, that despite their differences, the fact that they both belong to the working class means that they share the role of working-class man and are therefore treated in similar ways. However, what is significantly different about the two characters is how they identify in relation to their class as it affects the way they act throughout the texts and determines the choices they make and the consequences that these bring. In Stevens' case, his personal identity is not clear to the reader as it is hidden behind the mask of his national identity and his professional role as a butler which will lead him to live a life which, at the end of the day, he will find to have been unfulfilling as his choices have been made in order to please not himself but, as he sees it, his lord and through it, his country. This is very different to Smith's case, as his identity is fully based on his individuality and on his strong connection to his social class which will lead him to questioning the status quo throughout the text and his position within it as a young rebellious working-class man.

Stevens' and Smith's treatment as members of the working class by the people who are above them in the class ladder and who, therefore, have some kind of control over how they live their lives and over what they can and cannot do, over who they are allowed to be within a system run by them, is defined by an intention to strip them of their own individuality and to, in turn, dehumanize them in order to keep them in their place as a functioning and unproblematic part of the well-oiled machine that is the class system. In both texts, the characters are treated in certain ways in relation to their class: they are commodified, they are not respected by their superiors and their individuality is not appreciated. Moreover, both Ishiguro and Sillitoe have chosen to show how the working-class men are no longer individuals for the people in charge in Darlington Hall and in the Borstal by only giving us the characters' surnames and never letting us know their first names. This helps to show how they are not seen or treated like individuals, as they are receiving a treatment which brings to mind other scenarios in which people are robbed from having a first name as a way of dehumanizing and trying to avoid individuality and with it, individual thought, like in the contexts of slavery, the army and prison life. This technique, therefore, is an obvious tool used by the establishment to try to make these characters feel no longer as people but as a servant first and then a person in the case of Stevens and as an inmate and runner first in the case of Smith.

According to Williams as cited by Fluet, the way Stevens acts in *The Remains of the Day*, how he accepts his situation as a man destined to spend his whole life as a servant and is unable to find a strong ‘we’ that connects him to his class and which could possibly offer the grounds for rebellion or at least for questioning his role is because “service cannot be the basis for a transformative class solidarity, or a legitimate ‘we’,[...] few men can give the best of themselves as servants; it is the reduction of man to a function’ (Fluet, 2007, p.271). Therefore, what Williams is saying is that the servant is the utmost reduction of a man to his role, to what he does more than to what he feels or is. Not only is he reduced to a role but is in turn commodified by Farraday, the new owner of Darlington Hall after Lord Darlington has to leave; Oruç describes this phenomenon very accurately by referring to the scene in the novel in which Stevens is reduced to an object:

In turn Stevens is commodified and sold along with Darlington Hall, like any other British thing the new owner wants to see in his collection. He is treated like an object whose originality can be disputed. Thus, the new owner of the mansion gets disillusioned when one of his guests does not believe in Stevens’ being an authentic butler. Thus, the new owner asks Stevens if he is “the real thing” (Ishiguro, 2018, p.131), or just an ordinary waiter. (Oruç, 2018, p.125)

In this scene we see how Stevens is just something else to be acquired along with the house he works in and is a part of. As a servant he is just another piece of furniture that can be passed on in a purchase agreement, and not only this but also a symbol of old English glory, a piece of memorabilia for Farraday to admire and show off to his American friends.

Moreover, Stevens’ own personality and opinions are expropriated by Lord Darlington who, by referring to his own interests as the interests of the household and, therefore, also of Stevens, attempts to make him responsible of his decision to fire the Jewish maids and to as a result escape being held accountable for the decision. By doing so, he falsely makes Stevens think that he is in fact more like Lord Darlington than like the other servants in the house and manipulates him into believing that he has the same opinion that he has, which in turn also frees Stevens of having to form his own opinion and be responsible. This works as a way of in fact robbing Stevens of the act of having to use his own mind to think, and could be a way of avoiding Stevens thinking too much or, what is the same, having an individual opinion. Lord Darlington, therefore, might be doing this in order to avoid Stevens thinking for himself which could possibly lead to him questioning the way things are, to questioning Lord Darlington and the relationship between them. This can be seen in this exchange between them: “Of course, you’ll have to let them go. It’s regrettable, Stevens, but we have no choice. There’s the safety

and well-being of my guests to consider. Let me assure you, I've looked into this matter and thought it through thoroughly. It's in all our best interests" (Ishiguro, 2018, p.147).

Finally, Stevens is also mocked and ignored by Mr. Spencer, a guest at Darlington Hall while he the other guests and Lord Darlington are discussing universal suffrage. In this instance, Mr. Spencer decides to prove his point that not everyone should be granted an opinion and that, instead, important decisions should be made by important people, by the people who he considers are more prepared to decide due to their money and power. He does so by ridiculing Stevens, asking him complicated questions about politics and current affairs: "My good man, I have a question for you. We need your help on a certain matter we've been debating. Tell me, do you suppose the debt situation regarding America is a significant factor in the present low levels of trade?" (Ishiguro, 2018, p.205). To this question, Stevens responds "I'm very sorry, sir but I am unable to be of assistance on this matter" (Ishiguro, 2018, p.205), an answer he will give a number of times as Mr. Spencer keeps questioning him as a way of proving his point and showing that the working class has no place in the realm of politics and of having their own opinion. This scene shows how Stevens and others like him are considered as inferior people with inferior capacities for forming their own opinions and, what is even worse, as puppets to use to win an argument and entertain fellow guests.

In *The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner*, Smith mentions that he was previously a worker in a milling factory and that "as soon as I got to Borstal they made me a long-distance runner" (Sillitoe, 1959, p.7). In the first environment, despite not hearing much from Smith in relation to the experience, we can imagine that he carried out the activities of a typical working man and that, therefore, he can be seen as a typical working-class character of the time in working class fiction: "The protagonists of such fiction typically find their actions soon became automatic, reducing them as workers (and, more importantly, as human beings) to mere operative extensions of the factory's machinery in exactly the way that Marx described" (Hutchings, 1987, p.35). Hutchings also argues that working-class characters like Smith were not considered human and therefore we can guess that Smith's treatment in the milling factory would have been of this nature. He adds that the body was expropriated by the "Establishment" in this context of work but that, moreover, in *The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner*, Smith's body is also expropriated in the context of running which, as a form of play and of "a refuge from the workaday monotony, fragmentation, and dreariness of factory-bound life in a class-ridden world" (Hutchings, 1987, p.35) could have been the only instance in which Smith could be free and his own. Moreover, not only is his body expropriated from him but he is also dehumanized and compared to an animal in one instance: "They give

us a bit of blue ribbon and a cup for a prize after we've shagged ourselves out running or jumping, like race horses, only we don't get so well looked- after as race horses, that's the only thing" (Sillitoe, 1959, p.8).

In the short story, Smith is told to run and does not do it for himself but for the Borstal, in order to win them the "Borstal Blue Ribbon Prize Cup for Long-Distance Country Running (all England)" (Sillitoe, 1959, p.12). The Governor in exchange promises better conditions in the Borstal and by doing so turns their relationship into one that according to Hutchings is of a contractual nature and from which both can benefit. The difference is, of course, that Smith has not chosen to run and to be part of this agreement, and instead of running and using this time to only improve his running times and to thinking about what he can gain from winning, he chooses to use it to question and reflect on the class system and to plan how he will carry out his personal rebellion given that the body can be controlled but not the mind. Therefore, he reclaims his power over his own mind despite his body having been expropriated from him and takes advantage of the situation that he is forced to participate in.

### 3.2. How the characters construct their identities

Stevens and Smith, therefore, are treated in similar ways because of the class they belong to, neither of them is respected and their humanity is not acknowledged. However, despite the fact that to us they belong to the same 'us' of the working class and would therefore probably have a similar idea of who 'us' and who 'them' is in relation to them varies given that, as Keady argues "the world is divided along the lines of 'them' and 'us', a division which, while universal, varies according to the definitions of the two group and who is giving the definition" (Keady, 2008, p.226). I now explore what 'we' is in *The Remains of the Day* for Stevens and how, in relation to this, he constructs his identity and acts according to it as well as what 'us' and 'them' mean to Smith in *The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner* and how this affects his identity given that according to David Cannadine as cited in Fluet, "at the end of the 20th century, the most honest way to frame class in Britain is simply as a discussion about 'how we see ourselves' (Fluet, 2007, p.267). That is to say, identity in relation to one's class, belonging to a certain class, is greatly determined by how one sees oneself, what group one believes one belongs to. But what exactly is identity? According to Oruç, "identity constitutes an indispensable part of humans as people define themselves in accordance with their identity" (Oruç, 2018, p.113). He adds that the definition of identity has changed throughout the years as, to begin with, it was considered to be a unified and fixed state but is

now, from a postmodernist point of view, considered to be a fluctuating state that is flexible and influenced by certain conditions such as choices and memory and which therefore can be constructed. This explains why the identities of Stevens and Smith aren't easily determined and are in no way simple matters to address.

Stevens is a character who proves the complexities in the matter of identity as, in his case, there is a problematic relationship between his public and private identities. This is due to the fact that Stevens does not really allow us as readers or the other characters in the novel to see more than Stevens the butler, Stevens the man of his generation and Stevens the Englishman. As I have discussed before, Stevens is a servant and can therefore be considered as a working-class man who dedicates his life to serving others. For Stevens, being a butler is not only a profession but a way of acting and being in every aspect of his life. Therefore, the fact that his life ambition is to be a great butler points to the fact that he takes on the social class role that has been assigned to him and that, due to a lack of independent thought and to a fear of taking responsibility for himself and his actions, chooses to see his job, his generation and his nationality as stronger 'we's than the 'we' of class solidarity. From his point of view, being a good butler is a way to achieve greatness and this can be seen in how he glorifies service throughout the novel; Stevens often comes up with tips and qualities that for him, make the perfect butler that he aspires to be. Firstly, being a good butler is strongly connected to one's capacity to find the right employer to work for. Making the right choice will, in his eyes, lead to a life of service that transcends household duties: "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". (Ishiguro, 2018, p.117)

Another fundamental characteristic of a good butler for Stevens is the awareness that, as a butler, there are certain realms of life and opinion which are reserved to his employee and others like him and in which he, therefore, must not participate. According to Oruç, "Social position determines for Stevens the ways in which he can be 'great'. He takes for granted that the call to greatness makes very different demands upon Lord Darlington and himself" (Oruç, 2018, p.122). This is also apparent in the situation regarding the firing of the Jewish maids, where we are told by Stevens that: [t]here are many things you and I are simply not in a position to understand concerning, say, the nature of Jewry. Whereas his lordship, I might venture, is somewhat better placed to judge what is for the best (Ishiguro, 2018, p.149). And also in this same situation: "[M]y every instinct opposed the idea of their dismissal. Nevertheless, my duty in this instance was quite clear, and as I saw it, there was nothing to be gained at all in



irresponsibly displaying such personal doubts. It was a difficult task, but as such, one that demanded to be carried out with dignity” (Ishiguro, 2018, p.156).

Secondly, throughout the novel, we see how Stevens is hanging on to a past glory and with it, to a past national glory. ‘We’ for Stevens becomes a generation, a generation of butlers like his father and the butler in his father’s story who as he says: “Viewed the world not as a ladder, but more as a wheel...revolving with these great houses at the hub, their mighty decisions emanating out to all else, rich and poor, who revolved around them” (Ishiguro, 2018, p.115). This quote points to a glorification on his behalf of there being no upwards mobility but instead a never-ending revolving mobility with no chance, or desire for him, for the situation to change. Moreover, the fact that he considers the “mighty decisions” of the ruling class to be “emanating” to both “rich and poor” shows how he truly believes that it is the ruling class who must rule and he who must serve.

Thirdly, a fundamental part of Stevens’ identity is related to his national identity. This is because, according to Oruç, “personal identity and national identity are so embedded in Stevens’ case that it is difficult to discern where one starts and the other ends”. The ‘we’ that Stevens refers to when including himself in a collective is therefore first a generation, then a generation of butlers, and finally, a generation of British butlers as, in his opinion, being a butler is a profession which is exclusively British. This can be seen in how Stevens differentiates between the English ‘race’ and others: “Continentalers are unable to be butlers because they are as a breed incapable of the emotional restraint which only the English race is capable of” (Ishiguro, 2018, p.44).

Moreover, due to the context of the novel and the unfolding events, we see how Stevens believes he is doing a job for his country by working for a great man like Lord Darlington. In some way, therefore, it could be said that the ‘them’ for Stevens is more connected to nationality than to class, as he seems to identify more strongly with his British nationality than with his position as a working-class man: “Continentalers- and by and large the Celts, as you will no doubt agree-are, as a rule unable to control themselves in moments of strong emotion, and are thus unable to maintain a professional demeanour other than in the least challenging situations” (Ishiguro, 2018, p.44).

As Oruç argues, memory and the construction of identity are strongly linked but given the unreliable nature of memory, not to be completely trusted. This can be seen in both personal and national identity given that, in the case of national identity, it is constructed around national history, which is as unreliable as memory considering that it is the same but has also been affected by politics. An example of this is how Stevens seems to have a glorified view of the

past, of the past of particular characters like his father and the butler his father used to tell people about, but also of the nation as a whole, of the way the nation these characters lived in was organised and functioned. As Stevens' whole narration is based on memory, therefore, his story also shares this unreliability and is in a way constructed by the Stevens who now knows what the future, his present as he is driving around Britain, is. A Britain that has changed and where being British does not mean the same as it used to, a Britain which has survived its participation in the Second World War, whose Empire has declined, and who is no longer the world's number one superpower as it used to be. Also, a Britain where its citizens have started to question the way things are run and who do not view the past the way Stevens does.

What is important to note about the three dimensions of his identity is that they are always attached to him always feeling like a part of a bigger thing, an identity that is based on his role in a bigger picture than on him being his own person. According to Oruç, Stevens "bases his identity on three role models, Lord Darlington, his father who is a butler as well, and the butler figure in a story his father told once" (Oruç, 2018, p.123). By doing this, Stevens never shows any kind of individuality or independent thought until the end of the novel, when we learn his true feelings about Miss Kenton and about his opinion on his life of service. When he does this, we get the chance to see the real Stevens who has finally stopped 'pretending' like Miss Kenton accused him of doing: "Why, Mr. Stevens, why, why, why do you always have to pretend?" (Ishiguro, 2018, p.153). Therefore, it can be argued that part of the reason for never managing to question his position until the end is because "Stevens that is to say, allows his own intentions and exertions to lose their individual affiliation, to vanish into someone else's labours, someone else's struggle, someone else's mission" (Fluet, 2007, p. 266). Moreover, his lack of rebellion can be attributed to a fear of being responsible for his own feelings and actions as, living a life in which one loses their 'individual affiliation' also frees one from having to have their own opinion as it gives one a clearly set path of rules to follow and dangers to avoid.

In *The Loneliness of the Long- Distance Runner*, however, we find a very clearly defined 'us' and 'them' as they are referred to many times during the text by Smith who is very adamant about the unbridgeable difference between these two groups. There is also no doubt about what this 'us' and 'them' differentiation is based on, it is a class distinction and, for Smith, the grounds for a class war given that: "They don't see eye to eye with us and we don't see eye to eye with them, so that' how it stands and how it will always stand" (Sillitoe, 1959, p.8). For Smith, he is above anything else a working-class man, someone whose family and himself have been trodden on by who he calls "the in-laws". However, according to Hughson,

the character's relationship to his class isn't that simple as he claims that Smith (and Seaton, the main character in *Saturday Night, Sunday Morning*, also by Sillitoe), "exhibit class fixity balanced in tension between a sense of belonging- a begrudging class loyalty- and a feeling of suffocation"(Hughson, 2005, p.41). This would explain how, despite Smith having been exposed to the problems that the status quo offers to his class, seeing the effects of extreme working conditions through the situation and death of his father and suffering them himself in Borstal, he has descended "into criminality and disaffection", he has decided to steal from the bakery as a way of getting fast and easy money instead of working. This is recurrent in the working class characters in Sillitoe's work, given that he "is refreshingly uninterested in themes of social mobility, education and breaking away" like some of his contemporaries who write about the working class (Haywood, 1997, p.105 in Keady, 2008, p.249). This can be seen in how Smith at no point wants to achieve social mobility or become anything that could be mistaken for an 'in-law'. This shows his pride in being a working-class man and also, a criminal who is an "out-law" and a rebel, defying the way the system is established.

Given that Smith is in Borstal, his 'them' refers to people in authority, to people who make decisions for him like the Governor and the policeman who got him into Borstal. However, we also see glimpses of other people he considers 'them' and who he therefore despises such as the Tory politicians on television:

It was best of all though when we did it to some Tory telling us about how good his government was going to be if we kept on voting for them- their slack chops rolling, opening and bumbling, hands lifting to twitch moustaches and touching their buttonholes to make sure the flower hadn't wilted, so that you could see they didn't mean a word they said, especially with not a murmur coming out because we'd cut off the sound (Sillitoe, 1959, p.22).

This quote shows how Smith does not have the feeling that the Government represents him or people like him and finds them ridiculous and dishonest and tries to battle this by refusing to listen to him and ridiculing him. It also proves how he does not feel represented by people who have power over others and sees politicians as manipulative and as people who are only trying to make life better for themselves, regardless of how it affects the working class.

Smith also points out that the 'in-laws' always refer to themselves in the plural, how they always say 'we' instead of 'I' as a way of trying to intimidate the working class and making them feel like there is nothing for them to do about the way things are. However, Smith finds power in his individuality, in being an 'I' and decides to use it in order to challenge what their 'we' are trying to make him do, how they are trying to control him. Throughout the short story and through Smith's running we see how he finds his own identity and his own opinions

about class. Therefore, we can agree that Borstal does not change his relationship with the system, it clarifies it: “What it does is show me what they’ve been trying to frighten me with as if he was rushing up to thump a man and snatch the coat of his back when the man whips out his knife... that knife is Borstal, clink, the rope now I know something that I didn’t know before: that it’s war between me and them... I know who my enemies are and what war is” (Sillitoe, 1959, p.16).

In this quote class war is described as something that is happening between “them” and “I”, Smith sees that he himself must confront the enemy and that he “lives in a state of open warfare, in direct conflict with the dominant class and the dominant ideology” (Keady, 2008, p.227). This new individualism is characteristic of working-class fictional characters of the period according to Keady, who adds that “individualistic youth of post-war Britain are part of a continuum of literature about working class” (Keady, 2008, p.12).

Therefore, it is due to his strong identity as an individual of the working class that Smith, through running, plans a way to assert his autonomy and to prove to the ‘in-laws’ that they do not control him, that he can and will defy them. According to Hutchings, “sport provides a haven from the factorylike regimentation and routine of borstal life, and it allows him to assert his individuality and self-reliance in a way that his workaday life in the ‘outside’ world seldom affords (...) running allows him complete autonomy”. (Hutchings, 1987, p.43). Asserting his individuality is the tool Smith needs in order to deliberately lose, which according to Hutchings, is to win.

#### 4. THE LONELINESS OF THE WORKING-CLASS MAN

Both in *The Remains of the Day* and in *The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner*, it seems that there is a certain level of isolation and loneliness that is a part of being a working-class man. The lives of the main characters are defined by going through their struggles alone, they do not seek any kind of solidarity from the people around them and therefore cannot achieve the feeling of belonging and being understood that comes with being part of a group.

In *The Remains of the Day*, Stevens is a character who never really shows others who he is and who as a consequence fails to establish an honest relationship with Miss Kenton and his father, the two people who are closest to him. He does this because, as I said before, he sees himself firstly as a butler and then as a man and also because he lives by the example of his father, who acted in the same way and that, from what we learn at his deathbed, was not a very good father to Stevens. For Stevens, being a butler is not just a job but a role that he must

inhabit at all hours given that “there is one situation and one situation only in which a butler who cares about his dignity may feel free to unburden himself of his role; that is to say, when he is entirely alone”(Ishiguro, 2018, p.117). Considering that Stevens has taken on his father’s way of understanding a profession which entails keeping oneself detached from emotion and only focusing on trying to better oneself as a butler instead of as a person, we can draw the conclusion that butlers in general were advised to be people who remained unmarried in order to be a great butler and that, therefore, it is by definition a profession for which one has to sacrifice a part of their humanity and instead be isolated and alone. There is a scene in the novel in which we see the damage that comes from Stevens choosing to side with Lord Darlington in the matter of the firing of the Jewish maids instead of following his own feelings about it, sharing them with Miss Kenton and possibly complaining or doing something about it. In the novel he comments on how this situation makes him uncomfortable, to fire maids who work perfectly well, but he neglects to stand up for what he believes in. According to Fluet, “Steven’s difficulty is not courage, but collegiality. He fails to share his distress about the state of his workplace with a co-worker, instead opting to preserve his own idealistic commitment to what he considers someone else’s superior knowledge about ‘the nature of Jewry’” (Fluet, 2007, p.270). By doing this he greatly damages his relationship with Miss Kenton and this will result in him questioning his actions and inactions throughout his life at the end of the novel due to the fact that “his unconfessed guilt about this incident and his involvement with Lord Darlington's fascistic activities gnaw away at Stevens for the rest of his career” (Atkinson, 1995, p.195).

In *The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner*, we find the word ‘loneliness’ in the title itself which points to the importance of Smith’s loneliness and isolation. In the short story we see how Smith is able to think and question the status quo when he is running and is therefore alone. This is when he feels the most able to plan his personal rebellion and when he feels like “the first and the last man on the world” (Sillitoe 8). The fact that the sport that Smith has to undertake is long-distance running alone may be an attempt made by the ‘in-laws’ to try to keep the young criminals away from each other and to avoid any kind of plotting against the Borstal at a minimum. Smith seems to have mixed feelings about being alone in his private thoughts and hunger for rebellion; on the one hand: “It’s sometimes when I stand there [at the start of a morning run] feeling like the last man in the world that I don’t feel so good. I feel like the last man in the world because I’m thinking that all those three hundred sleepers behind me are dead” (Sillitoe, 1959, p.9). In this quote we see how he worries that he is the only one who is thinking as deeply as he is. He worries that the other prisoners are “sleepers” that is, that they

are not making the most out of running and taking the time to think about their situation and the unfairness of the class system. He wonders about this and asks himself if they might also be “on to the same lark” but comes to the conclusion that “for a fact that they aren’t” (Sillitoe, 1959, p.4). This may be why, according to is the rebellion remains individual and therefore lacks the strength it could have had:

Colin’s highly individualist spirit militates against him forming the fraternal bonds that might facilitate the type of collective engagement that he rhetorically advocates. Colin’s fight against systemic injustice is conducted alone and is ultimately doomed to represent little more than an annoyance to and a nose tweak of the officials to whom Colin is institutionally answerable (Hughson, 2005, p.44).

Therefore, Smith chooses to do it alone, to be “a long-distance runner crossing country all on my own no matter how bad it feels” despite this maybe affecting the effectiveness of his rebellion and keeping it on a personal level which grants no real changes to the system as his individuality and his “honesty” are more important to him than forming the bonds necessary in order to accomplish a significant threat to the way things work which proves that “Smith feels very little necessity for solidarity with anyone else” (Small, 2010, p.138).

## 5. DIGNITY AND HONESTY

In both texts, a notion is repeatedly referred to by the main characters, Stevens and Smiths, despite the fact that they have different names for this idea: in Stevens’ case he calls it “dignity” and in Smith’s case it’s referred to as “honesty”; they hold similar meanings and are instrumental when talking about the characters’ actions or lack of action throughout the texts. This is because it is the fact that they both live by their definition of the concept that decides whether they choose to stand up for what they believe in or not.

When reading *The Remains of the Day*, it is impossible to avoid the word “dignity” as Stevens refers to it constantly and according to Oruç, his obsession with this notion is part of the reason he dedicates his whole life to trying to achieve it by being a great butler. This is due to the fact that, according to his own definition:

Dignity has to do crucially with a butler’s ability not to abandon the professional being he inhabits. Lesser butlers will abandon their professional being for the private one at the least provocation. For such persons, being a butler is like playing some pantomime role; a mall push, a slight stumble and the façade will drop off to reveal the actor underneath. The great butlers

[...] will not be shaken out by external events; however surprising, alarming or vexing. They wear their professionalism as a decent gentleman will wear his suit (Ishiguro, 2018, p.44).

Dignity, therefore, seems to be based on the ability to practice self-restraint, the same self-restraint that Stevens so admires in the English landscape. For him, dignity means not abandoning his professional identity at any point and, in Oruç's words "restraining personal matters and feeling even if it requires letting go of the personal self" (Oruç, 2018, p.123).

However, it is in his obsession to attain total dignity and in how he defines it that he finds his undoing; he missed out on the important moments that existed in his life and that could have led to a different conclusion, like for example one of the most disturbing moments in the novel when he does not go to his father's room to say goodbye as he lays dying and which he describes like this: "For all its sad associations, whenever I recall that evening today, I find I do so with a large sense of triumph" (Ishiguro, 2018, p.172). He chillingly says this about the night his father died because, in his eyes, and he claims in his father's eyes also, that night he achieved the highest level of dignity because he managed to continue working and did not let the death or his emotional reaction interrupt the night. Another moment in which he does the wrong thing in the name of dignity is when he doesn't stand up for his fellow employees and allows them to be unfairly fired. In this moment "his shock at Darlington's order to fire the maids barely registers with his master, and he congratulates himself on the concealment" (Atkinson, 1995, p.200).

However, despite being so pleased with himself in those moments, in the last scene in the novel, after having confessed that his heart is breaking after realizing that Miss Kenton will not come back to Darlington Hall, and therefore, finally confessing that he loved her all along, he reflects on his life work and draws a conclusion regarding his idea of dignity and where it has led him:

Lord Darlington wasn't a bad man [...]. And at least he had the privilege of being able to say at the end of his life that he made his own mistakes. His lordship was a courageous man. He chooses 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 his lordship's wisdom. All those years I served him, I trusted 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? (Ishiguro, 2018, p.256)

Therefore, for Stevens the meaning of dignity changes throughout his life. To begin with, it is based on the ability to contain and hide true feelings and emotions, to hide his personality and to force himself to inhabit the role of servant at all times. However, after

thinking about how this definition of dignity has ruined his life and how he never did what he wanted or believed but instead acted on the behalf of his employer, he realizes that, despite being flawed, at least Lord Darlington did what he believed to be right and took responsibility for his actions, which he never did, and by doing so changes his own definition of what dignity means and changes it to having the courage to be responsible for one's desires and choices.

Smith chooses a different word to refer to a concept which will also greatly define how he sees the world and how he chooses to act. For him the word is "honesty" and he compares it to the opposite "dishonest". He also connects these two words to another two states which he feels are necessarily tied to them: "alive" which he connects to people who are "honest" and "dead" which he links to the idea of "dishonest". According to Smith, one the great differences between himself, an "out-law" and the Governor and the other "in-laws" is that they do not share a definition for what "honesty" is. For Smith, his "honesty" is the best weapon he has against the in-laws" because as he claims "I know what honest means according to me and he only knows what it means according to him" (Sillitoe, 1959, p.15). He comments on how it must sound funny to describe himself, a burglar, as "honest" but it is because his notion of "honesty" refers to avoiding hypocrisy, to being true to one's true feelings and opinions, not what the Governor sees as honesty which is "settling down to a menial, steady job which for Smith is the same as death" (Keady, 2008, p.237). For Smith, in-laws are "dishonest" due to the way they try to manipulate "out-laws" like himself into coming to agreements with each other. He, instead, claims that if he were in their position: "I'd stick them up against the wall and let them have it, like they'd have done with blokes like us years ago, that is, if they'd ever known what it means to be honest" (Sillitoe, 1959, p.15).

According to Head, as cited by Keady, Smith has an unshakeable conviction concerning the integrity and honesty of his refusal to conform, to become the governor's "prize race horse" (Sillitoe, 1959, p.12) and the story's celebration of this "honesty" goes beyond confirmation of predetermined roles. The governor is not interested simply in the rehabilitation of Smith; rather he wants the glory that winning the Prize Cup will bring. It is this hypocrisy, this concealed use-function, that Smith resists" (Head, 2002, p.55 in Keady, 2008, p.243). This is why Smith chooses to lose the race on purpose as he wants to show that he is a human being who is capable of independent thought and who is not a "race horse at all" (Sillitoe, 1959, p.13).

He connects the idea of having his own thoughts and ideas and wanting to show them to demonstrate his capacity for autonomous thought to the idea of being alive and compares it to the "out-laws" who, in his opinion are "dead". He reaches the conclusion that "maybe as soon as you get the whip-hand over somebody you go dead", that having power over someone



leads you to no longer being alive. This could be because to him having power over someone means that you are not totally free, that you are playing your role in the Establishment and, also, that by having someone bellow you you are not being honest, as honesty, as I said before, would mean killing his enemies, according to Smith. According to Keady, the idea of “death” that Smith is resisting can also be interpreted as ideology, to the ideology that he does not want to conform to and which leads people to living automatically, to not questioning the way things work and therefore not seeing the existing problems.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

To conclude, while reading on the social changes between the 1930's the late 1950's I came across the problem of arguing my thesis that the characters in the novels were examples of the way people had felt in their times and that the fact that Stevens had accepted the way he was treated and Smith hadn't proved that on the one hand, the situation in Smith's time had been as bad for the working classes as it had in the 1930's and, secondly, that a new sense of rebelling and voicing one's discomfort about the system had appeared in the late 1950's. I found the problem in my first point given that the situation of the working class did improve after World War II, the welfare state was established with the first ever Labour Government and Trade Unions gained popularity and strength in that time. However, I then realized that despite these significant changes, the class war was not over, as Macmillan claimed in 1959 when he won the election. I came to understand by reading *The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner* that the division between upper class and lower class still existed, that there was still a strong “them” versus “us” in British society in the 1950's because there was still the fundamental difference between those who own the means of production and those who have to use their work force to survive. However, do consider that Smith is a good example of an individual who is questioning the way things are and rebelling in his own way, despite not finding true solidarity with others around him who also belong to his class which would have probably lead to a more successful rebellion. I consider that there was a big improvement in terms of nonconformity in one's situation between the 1930's and people like Stevens and the late 1950's and people like Smith.

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