

The Remains of the Day

by Kazuo Ishiguro

This novel is seemingly a butler's recollections of his life and career in service to an English lord during the mid-1930s. It covers the years pre-WWII; the period of international politics and the appeasement of Nazi Germany.

What this book really covers - and it is a classic of "reading between the lines" - is wasted lives and missed opportunities. Mainly those of Stevens the butler, but also those of his father and the housekeeper (Miss Kenton) at Darlington Hall.

The present time has Stevens about to retire in the mid-1950s, at the twilight of his career, or at the remains of the day. The tale is told through reminiscences and flashbacks to his career.

This story is jaw-droppingly good. It won the Booker Prize for Fiction in 1989 and was made into a film in 1993 starring the wonderful actors Anthony Hopkins and Emma Thompson. The film is excellent - but not a patch on the written book.

Perhaps the reason this book resonates so well with me is that Stevens is the very antithesis of "we only have one life to live, so live it well". But he doesn't realize this! (It is arguable whether he finally does, at the end). He is a fine, hard-working man, one cannot easily criticise him. Yet, just as we might shout out at a horror film, then so we do in this story about his life: *"It's Behind You! It's Behind You!!"*

