

The Remains of the Day (1993)



Film poster (Wikipedia)

TOMATOMETER

All critics

97%

Average Rating: 8.4/10

Reviews Counted: 39

Fresh: 38

Rotten: 1

Top critic

89%

Average Rating: 8.2/10

Reviews Counted: 9

Fresh: 8

Rotten: 1

Critics Consensus: Smart, elegant, and blessed with impeccable performances from Anthony

Hopkins and Emma Thompson, *The Remains of the Day* is a Merchant-Ivory classic.

AUDIENCE SCORE

89%

liked it

Average Rating: 3.8/5

User Ratings: 23,896

Movie Info

Filed with the usual meticulous attention to period and detail of films from Ismail Merchant and James Ivory, *The Remains of the Day* is based on a novel by Kazuo Ishiguro. Anthony Hopkins plays Stevens, the "perfect" butler to a prosperous British household of the 1930s. He is so unswervingly devoted to serving his master, a well-meaning but callow British lord (James Fox), that he shuts himself off from all emotions and familial relationships. New housekeeper Miss Kenton (Emma Thompson) tries to warm him up and awaken his humanity. But when duty calls, Stevens won't even attend his own dying father's last moments on earth. The butler also refuses to acknowledge the fact that his master is showing signs of pro-Nazi sentiments. Disillusioned by Hitler's duplicity, the master dies an embittered man, and only then does Stevens come to realize how his own silence has helped bring about this sad situation. Years later, regretting his lost opportunities in life, he tries once more to make contact with Miss Kenton, the only person who'd ever cared enough to seek out the human being inside the butler's cold veneer. ~ Hal Erickson, Rovi

Rating: PG

Genre: Drama , Romance

Directed By: James Ivory

Written By: Ruth Prawer Jhabvala , Harold Pinter

In Theaters: Nov 4, 1993 wide

On DVD: Nov 5, 2001

Runtime: 134 minutes

Studio: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment

[www.rottentomatoes.com]

***The Remains of the Day* (film)**

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

The Remains of the Day is a 1993 drama film adapted by Ruth Praver Jhabvala from the novel by Kazuo Ishiguro. It was directed by James Ivory and produced by Ismail Merchant, Mike Nichols and John Calley. It starred Anthony Hopkins as Stevens and Emma Thompson as Miss Kenton with James Fox, Christopher Reeve, Hugh Grant and Ben Chaplin. The film was nominated for eight Academy Awards.

Plot

In 1950s post-war Britain, Mr Stevens, the butler of Darlington Hall, receives a letter from Miss Kenton, a recently divorced former co-worker employed as the housekeeper some twenty years earlier. Lord Darlington has died a broken man, his reputation destroyed after he was exposed as a Nazi sympathizer, and his stately country manor has been sold to a retired United States Congressman, Mr Lewis. Stevens is granted permission to borrow his Daimler, and he sets off to the West Country to meet Kenton.

The film flashes back to Kenton's arrival as housekeeper in the 1930's. The ever efficient Stevens manages the household well, taking great pride in his profession, and his dedication is fully displayed when, while his father lies dying, he steadfastly continues his duties. Kenton also proves to be a valuable servant, and she is equally efficient and strong-willed, but also warmer and less repressed. Relations between the two eventually warm, and it becomes clear that she has feelings for him, yet despite their proximity and shared purpose, Stevens' detachment remains unchanged. Eventually, she forms a relationship with a former co-worker and leaves the house prior to the outbreak of World War II. Before she resigns, Stevens finds her crying in frustration, but the only response he can muster is to call her attention to a neglected domestic task.

Meanwhile, the hall is regularly frequented by politicians of the interwar period, and many of Lord Darlington's guests are like-minded British and European aristocrats, with the exception of Congressman Lewis. Darlington later also meets Prime Minister Chamberlain

and the German Ambassador, and uses his influence to try and broker a policy of appeasement towards Nazi Germany, based on his belief that Germany had been unfairly treated by the Treaty of Versailles following World War I. In the midst of these events, one day Darlington suddenly requests that two newly appointed German-Jewish maids, both refugees, should be dismissed. Stevens carries out the command, and Kenton threatens resignation in protest, but she is too timid to do so.

En route to meeting Kenton, when asked about his former employer, Stevens at first denies having served or even met him, but later admits to having served and respected him. He meets Kenton (now Mrs Benn), and they reminisce, but she declines Stevens's offer to return to Darlington Hall, wishing instead to remain near her pregnant daughter. After the meeting, Kenton is emotional, while Stevens is still unable to demonstrate any feeling. Back in Darlington Hall, Lewis asks Stevens if he remembers much of the old days, to which Stevens replies that he was too busy serving. Symbolically, a pigeon then becomes trapped in the hall, and the two men eventually free it, leaving both Stevens and Darlington Hall far behind.

Departures from the novel

The film compresses the time frame of the novel considerably, offering a less subtle treatment of Anglo-German relations between the wars. In the novel, the conference at Darlington Hall takes place in 1923, prompted by concerns that the terms of the Treaty of Versailles were unduly vindictive, and therefore has no direct connection with the Nazis or appeasement. Also in the novel, the two Jewish servants who are dismissed are not German and are therefore in no danger of being sent back to Germany, and Lord Darlington's order to dismiss them is prompted by his brief infatuation with an anti-Semitic woman. When the affair ends, he renounces his action and attempts to make reparations to the girls.

The film is also less condemnatory of both Stevens and Darlington. According to Pinter scholar Steven H. Gale, the Ishiguro novel and Pinter's screenplay are both fairly clear that Stevens is aware of the discussions occurring at Darlington Manor. They also make it clear that Darlington is not a well-intentioned fool but a

man wedded to fascism. As an example, Gale points to the scene where Sir Leonard Bax and a man identified as "Spencer" humiliate Stevens by asking his opinion on various world problems. Not included in the film is the scene which follows in both the novel and Pinter draft, in which Darlington apologizes for Spencer's treatment of Stevens but also claims democracy is "finished" and "rubbish". Stevens quotes Spencer almost verbatim, showing that he did pay attention to the speeches and discussions (contrary to his claim in the film).

In the film, Stevens' father, ill and bedridden, makes an embarrassing admission about his marriage. In the novel, he only asks Stevens whether he was a good father—a question which Stevens dodges due to discomfort and a haste to get back to work.

Mr Lewis, the American Congressman who calls Lord Darlington an amateur, is seen as the owner of Darlington Hall in the film after the earl's demise. In the novel, however, the Hall is owned by an American called Mr Farraday who lends Stevens his Ford for the motoring trip.

In addition, the scene in which Miss Kenton is crying is off-stage in the novel; Mr Stevens does not interrupt it to talk about domestic matters, but instead walks away, thereby appearing less hard-hearted than in the film.

Moreover, in the novel, Mr Stevens was alone at the seaside without Miss Kenton, which differs from the film. It was a stranger whom Stevens encountered at the pier who told him that "the evening's the best part of day," rather than Miss Kenton.

Cast

- Anthony Hopkins as Mr James Stevens
- Emma Thompson as Miss Sarah "Sally" Kenton (later Mrs Benn after marriage)
- James Fox as Lord Darlington
- Christopher Reeve as Congressman Trent Lewis
- Peter Vaughan as Mr William Stevens ("Mr Stevens, Sr")
- Hugh Grant as Reginald Cardinal (Lord Darlington's godson)
- John Haycraft as Auctioneer
- Caroline Hunt as Landlady
- Michael Lonsdale as Dupont d'Ivry
- Paula Jacobs as Mrs Mortimer

- Ben Chaplin as Charlie
- Steve Dibben as George (footman no. 2)
- Abigail Harrison as Housemaid
- Rupert Vansittart as Sir Geoffrey Wren
- Patrick Godfrey as Spencer
- Peter Halliday as Canon Tufnell
- Peter Cellier as Sir Leonard Bax
- Peter Eyre as Lord Halifax
- Terence Bayler as Trimmer
- Hugh Sweetman as Scullery Boy
- Tony Aitken as Postmaster
- Emma Lewis as Elsa
- Joanna Joseph as Irma
- Tim Pigott-Smith as Benn
- Lena Headey as Lizzie

Production

A film adaptation of the novel was originally planned to be directed by Mike Nichols from a script by Harold Pinter. Some of Pinter's script was used in the film, but, while Pinter was paid for his work, he asked to have his name removed from the credits, in keeping with his contract. Christopher C. Hudgins observes: "During our 1994 interview, Pinter told [Steven H.] Gale and me that he had learned his lesson after the revisions imposed on his script for *The Handmaid's Tale*, which he has decided not to publish. When his script for *The Remains of the Day* was radically revised by the James Ivory-Ismail Merchant partnership, he refused to allow his name to be listed in the credits" (125).

Though no longer the director, Nichols remained associated with the project as one of the producers of the Merchant Ivory film.

Settings



Music Room of Powderham Castle in 1983

A number of English country estates were used as locations for the film, partly owing to the persuasive power of Ismail Merchant, who was able to cajole permission for the production to

borrow various houses not normally open to the public. Among them was Dyrham Park for the exterior of the house and the driveway, Powderham Castle (staircase, hall, music room, bedroom), the interior of which was used for the aqua-turquoise stairway scenes, Corsham Court (library and dining room) and Badminton House (servants' quarters, conservatory, entrance hall). Luciana Arrighi, the production designer, scouted most of these locations. Scenes were also shot in Weston-super-Mare, Somerset, which stood in for Clevedon. The pub, where Mr Stevens stays, is the Hop Pole in Limpley Stoke; the shop featured is also in Limpley Stoke. The pub where Miss Kenton and Mr Benn meet is The George Inn, Norton St Philip.

Characters

The character of Sir Geoffrey Wren is based loosely on that of Sir Oswald Mosley, a British fascist active in the 1930s. Wren is depicted as a strict vegetarian, mimicking the diet of his idol, Adolf Hitler.

Edward Wood, 1st Earl of Halifax also appears in the film. Lord Darlington tells Stevens that Halifax approved of the polish on the silver, and Halifax himself later appears when Darlington meets secretly with the German Ambassador and his aides at night. Halifax was a chief architect of the British policy of appeasement from 1937 to 1939.

Score

The original score is composed by Richard Robbins. The score was nominated for the Academy Award for Best Original Score, losing to the score of *Schindler's List*.

Track listing

1. Opening Titles, Darlington Hall - 7:27
2. The Keyhole and the Chinaman - 4:14
3. Tradition and Order - 1:51
4. The Conference Begins - 1:33
5. Sei Mir Gegrüsst (Schubert) - 4:13
6. The Cooks in the Kitchen - 1:34
7. Sir Geoffrey Wren and Stevens, Sr. - 2:41
8. You Mean a Great Deal to This House - 2:21
9. Loss and Separation - 6:19
10. Blue Moon - 4:57

11. Sentimental Love
Story/Appeasement/In the Rain - 5:22
12. A Portrait Returns/Darlington Hall/End Credits - 6:54

Critical reception and awards

The film received a 97% rating on Rotten Tomatoes, a site that tracks film reviews posted by both critics and audiences; its consensus states: "Smart, elegant, and blessed with impeccable performances from Anthony Hopkins and Emma Thompson, *The Remains of the Day* is a Merchant-Ivory classic." Roger Ebert particularly praised the film and called it "a subtle, thoughtful movie." In his review for *The Washington Post*, Desson Howe gave the film a favorable review, and said of it "Put Anthony Hopkins, Emma Thompson and James Fox together and you can expect sterling performances," praising their work in the film. Vincent Canby of The New York Times said, in another favorable review, "Here's a film for adults. It's also about time to recognize that Mr Ivory is one of our finest directors, something that critics tend to overlook because most of his films have been literary adaptations." The film was nominated for eight Academy Awards, but won none:

| Award Nomination | Lost to |
|--|---|
| Best Actor in a Leading Role (Anthony Hopkins) | Tom Hanks (<i>Philadelphia</i>) |
| Best Actress in a Leading Role (Emma Thompson) | Holly Hunter (<i>The Piano</i>) |
| Best Art Direction-Set Decoration | Allan Starski and Ewa Braun (<i>Schindler's List</i>) |
| Best Costume Design | Gabriella Pescucci (<i>The Age of Innocence</i>) |

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|----------------------------|--|
| Best Director | Steven Spielberg (<i>Schindler's List</i>) |
| Best Music, Original Score | John Williams (<i>Schindler's List</i>) |
| Best Picture | <i>Schindler's List</i> |
| Best Adapted Screenplay | Steven Zaillian (<i>Schindler's List</i>) |

The film is also recognized by American Film Institute in these lists:

- 2002: AFI's 100 Years...100 Passions – Nominated