

ENGLISH – AFTER DARKNESS LOVEDAY

After Darkness is a story of personal growth and, in this sense, it is a bildungsroman- a novel that charts the psychological or moral growth of the protagonist. The relationships Ibaraki forms during his exile- particularly at Loveday are critical to this metamorphosis. Loveday reinforces the messages from Tokyo. Again Ibaraki finds that he has placed his trust in the wrong men and the wrong values. Once he discovers the perfidy of Mori and Yamada, Ibaraki questions his own judgement and blames himself for being blinded by “misguided loyalty”. The film screening presents Yamada targeting Stan. When the young man comes to Ibaraki after being assaulted, his distress is obvious; he explains that it has been “a tough year”. This is Ibaraki’s first test at Loveday. In his naivety he refuses to believe Stan, allying himself instead with Yamada and Mori- a choice that will haunt him in the days to come. Ibaraki lives in a permanent state of regret for the mistakes he has made. At Loveday, he misreads the camp dynamic and naively allies himself with Yamada and Mori, simply because they are authority figures in the camp who befriend him. He is predisposed to trust authority figure such as Yamada and Mori, taking their criticism of the other internees at face value. Ibaraki’s diffident, self-effacing nature inclines him to keep to a low profile and avoid the politics in the camp. Belatedly, Ibaraki realizes that they are “not good men”. Stan’s attempted suicide is a turning point, Ibaraki berates himself for his inability to listen to the young man or see his distress: “I began to tremble with regret”. Piper punctuates the narrative with evocative descriptions of the approaching dust storm that suggest an imminent crisis. Ibaraki is bemused by the strange “opaque” sky and an unfamiliar haze that hangs in the air. The “opaque” sky foreshadows Stan’s death and his death brings Ibaraki’s guilt to the surface. Ibaraki’s remorse is such that the two issues- his failure to advocate for Stan and the work he performed as a research scientist- become blurred in his mind. After his appearance at the inquiry into Stan’s death, he weeps uncontrollably: “I could have done something. I could’ve helped them, but I didn’t”. He cannot forgive himself for his failure to help Stan, and berates himself for his lack of empathy: “I was horrified to think my insensitivity could have led to his death”. Initially when Ibaraki arrives at Loveday, he hesitates to trust Stan. However, the two form a really close bond as they spend time together in the “infirmary” The formation of close friendship places more guilt and burden on Ibaraki as when Ibaraki finally opens to Stan, it’s too late. Stan’s reluctance to write to Isabelle reminds Ibaraki of his own failure with Kayoko. Remembering Harada’s fierce loyalty to the woman he loved- “surely he would have fought for her, even at the risk of shaming himself”- Ibaraki advises Stan to take the initiative. He confesses that his lack of honesty with Kayoko is his “greatest regret”. It is a mark of Ibaraki’s increasing willingness to become involved that he decided to share such a personal story with Stan. The power of empathy and forming connections with others is enforced through the baseball competition at Loveday. Baseball acts as a metaphor for inclusion. The organization of the inter- compound competition develops a sense of unity among the internees, changing the atmosphere at the camp by lifting morale and cementing friendships. Johnny tells Ibaraki that his team consists of “all camp rejects”. In other words, no-one who wants to play is excluded. The power of empathy is further explored as officer McCubbin displays kindness and compassion for Ibaraki when they receive word that Ibaraki’s brother Nobuhiro has been killed at war. Delivering the news, McCubbin removes his hat and is genuinely concerned for Ibaraki, asking, “Will you...will you be alright”? McCubbin’s treatment of Ibaraki appears especially compassionate when contrasted with Yamada, who reacts to the news by encouraging Ibaraki “not to think of his death as a loss but as a gift”. Upon the realization of Yamada’s misguided, Ibaraki illustrates that the patriots such as Yamada looked at Nobu’s death as a “gift” rather than a profound loss: an expedient sacrifice that contributes to Japan’s territorial ambitions. Hence, Ibaraki’s own long process towards enlightenment culminates in 1989 when he makes the courageous decision to reject the injunction of silence that has been imposed on him. Ibaraki feels a long buried memory coming to the surface, one that has always been there. Only once, in 1959, did the past “threaten to overwhelm” him. It is when

his mother noticed an obituary for Ishii Shiro and showed it to him. The obedience and respected inculcated in Ibaraki, doesn't allow his conscience to break the silence of his horrific experience. It is only when the emperor dies, Ibaraki is able to connect back with himself and feel a weight lifted off his soul. Writing a public letter to the press exposes the darkness of Unit 731 to the light. Moral doubt and secrecy are replaced by moral clarity. The continuous reminder of Ibaraki's past is what enables him and gives him courage to write his letter, addressing the horrific experiences he was forced to endure at the "Epidemic Prevention Laboratory". An insight of Ibaraki's emotional state is presented through the landscape as he travels to Loveday by train, Ibaraki passes a river, flanked by dead trees that "haunted its edges, their limbs stretching skywards, as if begging for forgiveness". The image hints at the guilt that haunts Ibaraki. His situation exemplifies the dictum that "the only things necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing" Central to Ibaraki's personal journey towards self-knowledge is the idea of moving from darkness in to light. Through the portrayal of Ibaraki's character, Piper suggests that a character who couldn't emotionally connect with others comes to a stage where his heart feels great sorrow for the departure of his friend. Ibaraki has demonstrated that he is capable of change, and the lessons that he has learnt at Loveday will guide his actions in the future. Like the mallee tree after a bushfire, Ibaraki resolves that he too will "regrow from the embers" in order to build a new life for himself. This is proven as Ibaraki learns that the notion of duty that have been inculcated from boyhood are less important than values such as empathy, forgiveness and the courage to speak out in the face of blatant immorality.