

Contemporary Literature

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Good morning, we will continue with the remains of the day by Kazuo Ishiguro. We stopped when Mr. Stevens is reminiscing about his days at Darlington hall and the acts of cruelty that Mr. rather Lord Darlington had been indulging in towards him and also the wrong decisions he had taken which had a major repercussions on the international foreign policy. Apart from this, we will also look at how Stevens has a tendency to objectify himself. As we begin the lecture, I would also like to repeat the key words as I generally do for every lecture.

So, we are again going to look at the construct of memory, nostalgia and forgetfulness in the remains of the day. We will look at the Jewish situation in Britain during the Second World War and a few years before that preceding the Second World War and prejudices against the Jewish people. We will also look at how Englishness is defined and how Mr. Stevens comes across as a person who has perhaps unconsciously or at some kind of a subconscious level objectified himself and while identifying himself deeply with the house as well with his profession.

So, how he has become more of an object and less of a person and how this had created a deep divide led to a deep divide in him, in his personality. And also, there is one interesting factor and I am just referring to the theoretician post-colonial theorist Homi Bhabha where one feels that how people where Bhabha was suggest how people stereotype themselves and in the same way, you can feel that how Steven stereotypes himself and his nation. He signifies England by its big houses and their butlers in an attempt to stabilize a social narrative that defines the narrative of his life. So, this is rather interesting and that also we are going to see as we start the text today and of course, the very notion of Stevens as an unreliable narrator. We are in chapter Moscombe, title Moscombe near Tavistock, day one and it is day three evening.

Now, the suggestion that is made is Lord Darlington was anti-Semitic in his tendencies. He harbored certain deep rooted prejudices against Jewish people and Stevens as we have as we understand him, he is deeply loyal and he is harbours absolutely unwavering sense

of loyalty towards Lord Darlington. So, it has often been suggested that Lord Darlington was not after all such a great man and Stevens denies. He says that it was not like that at all because he has been after all in the service for such a long period and he would know, but then he concedes there were minor incidents and what were those minor incidents? We are on page 146. I recall overhearing at dinner one evening when a particular newspaper had been mentioned, his lordship remarking, oh you mean the Jewish propaganda sheet and then on another occasion around that time, I remember his instructing me to cease giving donations to a particular local charity which regularly came to the door on the grounds that the management committee was more or less homogenously Jewish.

I have remembered these remarks because they truly surprise me at the time. So, it was not as if Lord Darlington was utterly innocent. Yes, there were some deep rooted prejudices and this comes across more strongly when he dismisses two girls who are in the service of Darlington hall. Their names are Sarah and Ruth and Stevens also recalls how indignant Miss Canton was at this unfair dismissal or discharge of these two young women all because they were Jewish mates and as Stevens looks back, he tries to comprehend the true nature of Lord Darlington which was after all not entirely blemish less. Page 154, now that I have recalled this episode of the dismissing of the Jewish employees, I am reminded of what could I suppose be called a curious corollary to that whole affair, namely the arrival of the household called Lisa that is to say we were obliged to find replacements for the two dismissed Jewish mates and this Lisa turned out to be one of them.

So, what he is suggesting is that two very decent girls, two honest hard working girls, they were unfairly unceremoniously dismissed just because of their race and what they got instead was a very flighty kind of a maid called Lisa and there are with whom nobody was extremely pleased with the kind of services she rendered at the household. From here, we will go on move on to page 164. The fact is I have tended increasingly of late to indulge myself in such recollections and ever since the prospect of seeing Miss Kenton again first arose some weeks ago, I suppose I have tended to spend much time pondering just why it was our relationship underwent such a change. For change, it certainly did around 1935 or 1936 after many years in which we had steadily achieved a fine professional understanding and while he regrets the loss of Lord Darlington, what he is unable to admit to himself was how deeply he cared about Miss Kenton. Miss Kenton too had a strong feeling for Mr. Stevens, but Mr. Stevens who had become such a master in repressing his emotions that it was practically next to impossible to get any kind of an emotional response out of him. I would also like to quote here Milan Kundera, the Czech writer in his book *Ignorance*. He defines nostalgia as the suffering caused by an unappeased yearning to return and this is what we find repeatedly in Mr. Stevens

character.

He suffers, he longs for the days gone by, he specially longs for the return of Miss Kenton and let us see whether he succeeds or not. He particularly recalls what exactly led to this rupture in their relationship between Stevens and Miss Kenton, what actually happened and he says that they had gradually started enjoying each other's company and after the days work, they would make it a point to sit together and have a cup of cocoa and discuss the next days assignments or plan the week schedule and things like that, but what led to the end of these meetings and Stevens tells us what really exactly happened and he says that one day he was enjoying a romantic novel in his room and Miss Kenton just barges in and insists on knowing what exactly he is reading and Mr. Stevens is quite shy about this and he does not want to really tell Miss Kenton what he is reading. Miss Kenton being what she insists and she would not go unless Stevens tells her what exactly he is reading and when she sees, it is just a sentimental love story and this is what he says about it. I rarely had the time or the desire to read any of these romances cover to cover, but so far as I could tell, the plots were invariably absurd indeed sentimental.

So, look, it is love and romance perhaps sentimental and may be not to the taste of Mr. Stevens, but these novels also serve a purpose. They represent or they portray the lives of lovers, but Mr. Stevens is actually ashamed to be caught reading a romantic novel and this also tells us a lot about his character. He is a man who was so utterly devoted to his professional development that things like cultivating a sense of humor or accepting one's love for someone.

They were totally beyond his consideration. He would not even think of indulging anything which he feels is below dignity. Remember from the word go, he has been fixated with the idea of what is dignity. So, banter, love, all these things which actually complete a human being, those were, these emotions are something which are totally unfamiliar to Mr.

Stevens. Having said that, however, I do not mind confessing today and I see nothing to be ashamed in this that I did at times gain a sort of incidental enjoyment from these stories. He refuses to accept that he actually enjoyed reading love stories. The expression he uses is incidental enjoyment from these stories. It is like I read them, but I am detached from them. At the same time, he displays a sort of condescending attitude towards romance.

I did not perhaps acknowledge this to myself at the time, but as I say, what shame is there in it? Why should one not enjoy in a light hearted sort of way stories of ladies and gentlemen who fall in love and express their feelings for each other, but this is what he feels now and not at the time where he actually felt ashamed to have been caught reading

these novels, this such kind of a work. The fact and what happens, what actually leads to this disconnect between Miss Kenton and Stevens is the fact that she caught him reading something so, something that romantic and a love story, a sentimental love story. The fact that she could behave as she had done that evening was rather alarming and after I had seen her out of my pantry and had had a chance to gather my thoughts a little, I recall resolving to set about reestablishing our professional relationship on a more proper basis and this at this point, he tells her that he would not like to meet her except during the working hours and unilaterally decides to end those very pleasant evening sessions where he would meet and discuss the weeks schedule with Miss Kenton and both of them actually looked forward to these meetings, but now that he feels that he has been caught by Miss Kenton reading a sentimental novel and he feels that he has been exposed and he is a kind of man who does not want his feelings to be exposed to anyone. He does not want to reveal himself to anyone at all and Miss Kenton's act something, you know he feels that she has acted in a very over familiar way and has over stepped her boundaries and he needed, he felt it important that this kind of behavior should end because it is not professional and it is not dignified and there hence after the meetings and Stevens and Miss Kenton go back to being mere professionals. Once page 179, but what is the sense in forever speculating why it might have happened had such and such a moment turned out differently.

we are talking about this sense of nostalgia where he is suffering, he knows what he has lost, he yearns to get her back. One could presumably drive oneself to destruction in this way. From here we will move on to his time where he is in this place called Moscombe at Davin and he is with a couple of country folk where he is resting with people, a couple that runs an inn and they are so proud to have him because of his fine manners and fine appearance and he is also driving Mr. Faraday's Ford and that is that you never, you do not come across a car that posh in that part of the country and Mr. and Mrs. Taylor are quite impressed with Stevens and they want the other people of the village to come and make an acquaintance with him. So, he, Mr. Stevens meets a number of people and there is a person called Harry Smith who has quite strong political convictions and then there in that company they start discussing the notion of dignity and while for Stevens the notion, the definition of dignity is very conventional. It belongs to the realm of ladies and gentlemen, but Harry Smith who is a very militant kind of a democrat, he begs to differ and he says dignity is not just something for gentlemen. That is what we fought Hitler for.

If Hitler had had things his way, we would just be slaves now. The whole world would be a few masters and millions upon millions of slaves and I do not need to remind anyone here. There is no dignity to be had in being a slave. That is what we fought for and that is what we won. We won the right to be free citizens and it is one of the

privileges of being born English that no matter who you are, no matter if you are rich or poor, you are born free and you are born so that you can express your opinions freely and vote in your member of parliament or vote him out.

That is what dignity is really about and now this very unorthodox notion of dignity is completely antithesis of what Stevens believes because Stevens has actually reduced himself to the single identity category of butler. He is nothing more or he thinks of himself as nothing more than an English butler and this entire sermon about what exactly Englishness is. Englishness also means dignity for the poor, dignity for the common people, freedom for the people to express themselves, to express their opinions, to cast a vote. Those things also constitute dignity according to free thinkers like Harry Smith and that also suggests the dawn of a new era.

Mr. Stevens feels that after all he is quite out of tune with the present times. He has reduced himself to the single identity category of butler and all he has to do is only to keep the house clean and in proper order to make sense of everything. His own opinions and his own ideas or his own emotions do not account for much. And page 193, as it happens, there is an instance that comes to mind which I believe illustrates rather well the real limits of whatever truth may be contained in Mr. Harry Smith's views. It is as it happens, an instance from my own experience, an episode that took place before the war around 1935. Now, Harry Smith's political views trigger of old memories and this is something that Stevens had suppressed for a very long time because there is also a sense of deep humiliation that he had to suffer at the hands of Lord Darlington and his associates. So, what actually happened? We are told that there is one Mr. Spencer who while Stevens is going about his business in Darlington hall, he is asked by one Mr. Spencer to stay back in the presence of Lord Darlington and others and he says, he asks him and this observe the line of questioning.

My good man, I have a question for you. We need your help on a certain matter we have been debating. Tell me, do you suppose the debt situation regarding America is a significant factor in the present low levels of trade or do you suppose this is a red herring and that the abandonment of the gold standard is at the root of the matter? And Stevens is completely taken aback by this question. You see, he knows nothing about international finance or politics or economy and what has happened. He had never concerned himself with any of these matters.

The only concern he had entertained throughout his life was how to excel himself in his profession as a butler and his profession had defined him throughout. He knows nothing about these matters and then, Mr. Spencer further questions him. Would you say that the currency problem in Europe would be made better or worse if there were to be an arms

agreement between the French and the Bolsheviks? I have one more question to put to our good man there. I very much wanted his help on the question presently vexing many of us and which we all realize is crucial to how we should shape our foreign policy.

What was Mr. Laval really intending by his recent speech on the situation in North Africa and to all these pointed questions, everyone knows that Stevens does not have the foggiest notion about what Mr. Spencer is talking about and to every question, he has the same standard answer. I am sorry sir, but I am unable to assist in this matter. To see gentlemen, Mr. Spencer said turning to the others, a man here is unable to assist us in these matters.

This brought fresh laughter now barely suppressed and what is the purpose of asking someone like Stevens all these questions? Mr. Spencer went on, we still persist with the notion that this nation's decisions be left in the hands of our good man here and to the few millions others like him. Is it any wonder settled as we are with our present parliamentary system that we are unable to find any solution to our many difficulties? Why you may as well ask committee of the mother's union to organize a war campaign? So, you see such people do not matter. Opinions do not matter. What do they know? Now Stevens as he sits in this company and listening to Harry Smith's very unorthodox political views and now he feels the deep chasm that exists between the world outside and his own situation.

He had been treated just like an object, a dumb inanimate object whose only worth was how useful he could make to Lord Darlington and his affairs. Then next comes the more interesting part where Lord Darlington comes. There he comes and sees that see look Stevens, we were just trying to prove that he was not going to prove a particular point. Democracy in this country would not work and that was the purpose behind Mr. Spencer's questions because he wanted to prove a point that the common folk in this country cannot be trusted.

They just do not have the brains and the intellect to run the business of the country and therefore, their opinion does not matter and we do not need democracy in this country. Sooner or later, we will need to face up to the facts. Democracy is something for a bygone era. The world is far too complicated a place now for universal suffrage and such life for endless members of parliament debating things to a standstill. All fine a few years ago perhaps, but in today's world, absolutely it does not work.

Look at Germany and Italy Stevens. See what strong leadership can do if it is allowed to act. None of this universal suffrage nonsense there. What we need is firm authority and if you remember at the beginning of this class, we have been talking about what

happens to a society when the citizens harbor a strong and unwavering sense of loyalty, unquestioning attitude towards the leaders and this is what happens. So, the remains of the day becomes a parable of sorts to what happens when people conform too much. So, trust and faith in a strong leadership or authority as history has taught us has given rise to Nazism and fascism in Germany and Italy and Lord Darlington who Stevens throughout the novel has been so staunchly defending.

Now, it is revealed to us that he too is no different, not much different from the likes of Hitler and other dictators because of his total and complete support and sympathy for them. If your house is on fire, you do not call the household into the drawing room and debate the various options for escape for an hour, do you? It may have been all very well once, but the world is a complicated place now. It occurs to me in recalling these words that of course, many of Lord Darlington's ideas will seem today rather odd. So, gradually he is coming to terms as he looks back. So, remains of the days you see, he remembers now as he remembers that he has given the best years of his life to a person who was not really such a great man and he tries to defend himself.

He says that in practice, it is simply not possible to adopt such a critical attitude towards an employer and at the same time provide good service. So, this is the way he is consoling himself, indelible in lot of self-justification and self-defense that it really does not matter what kind of employer you are serving as long as you are serving the person very faithfully. His ideologies should not matter. What should matter is how well you serve or how well you deliver your services or how professional you are, but the question that arises is that if everyone turns out to be like this, then what happens to the society and to the world because some a little bit of questioning and some subversion is after all necessary if one needs to maintain any kind of equilibrium. Otherwise, the world would turn into a very lopsided place where many would be ruled by very few.

So, therefore, when we look at the character of Stevens as an unreliable narrator, we now understand that how he has been deceiving himself all these years, how he has been living in some kind of a naive faith in his employer in spite of being aware of the reality, but the trouble is that Stevens is not the kind of person who was willing to face reality. Now, as he is facing the remaining part of his life, he understands the follies that he has been making. As he leaves, his car had run out of petrol and all that.

As he leaves, Mr. and Mrs. Taylor's in, he is accompanied with a very fine gentleman, a doctor, Dr. Carlisle and he says they start having a conversation and then he points out he says that people have been, there is a very interesting part that had a conversation that had taken place in that inn when Harry Smith and Mr. and Mrs. Taylor are having a conversation with Stevens. Stevens does not divulge that he is actually a butler from a

distinguished household.

He merely mentions that he comes from Darlington hall and very interestingly, he adds that he has been a part of several matters of international importance and that shocks the company. I mean they are totally overawed by the presence of such kind of a personage amidst them and everyone takes him for some kind of a diplomat or a baron or something very important, but Dr. Carlisle understands and as they walk towards Stevens car, Carlisle asks him that are you a man servant or something like that and he says yes, I am and he feels extremely relieved. Why? Because he feels that finally, there is no need for any kind of play acting. He feels that it is good that somebody has managed to actually understand what he really is and he does not deny.

So, that trip does him plenty of good because he now feels that he does not have to pretend or suppress or conceal his real self from anybody anymore. We come to the next chapter, Weymouth and this is the place where we are going to discuss where he has an appointment with Miss. And then, they come face to face finally. So, Ishiguro builds up the suspense till the end. What is going to happen when these two eventually come face to face after such a long period, nearly 20 years? Mr. Stevens, how nice to see you again. The light in the room was extremely gloomy on account of the rain and so we moved two armchairs up close to the bay window. She had naturally aged somewhat, but to my eyes at least, she seemed to have done so very gracefully. Her figure remains slim, her posture as upright as ever. She had maintained too her old way of holding her head in a manner that verged on the defiant. Of course, with the bleak light falling on her face, I could hardly help, but notice the lines had appeared here and there.

But, also observe that how keenly he remembers Miss Kenton and you cannot remember someone that clearly unless you have deep feelings or deep concern for that person. He actually remembers her very clearly. The way she tilts her head and her posture and her mannerisms, all these things are firmly etched in his mind. As we continue to talk, I must say, I thought I began to notice further more certain changes which the years had wrought on her.

For instance, Miss Kenton appeared somehow slower. It is possible this was simply the calmness that comes with age and I did try hard for some time to see it as such, but I could not escape the feeling that what I was really seeing was a wariness with life. The spark which had once made her such a lively and at times volatile person seemed now to have gone. In fact, every now and then, when she was not speaking, when her face was in repose, I thought I glimpsed something like sadness in her expression. So, see, the remains of the day is a novel about loss.

Everybody loses someone precious. Miss Kenton loses Stevens who she had deeply cared about. We can even say that she was in love with Stevens when he abruptly ends those evening sessions with her, those meetings with her. Then, she was deeply distraught and therefore, she starts seeking solace in the company of other men who she ends up marrying and leaving Darlington hall for good. Now, she might have married on rebound just to get away from Stevens because she knew that he would never confess. He would never accept that he too loved her and she knew that he is not the kind of person who is going to admit his feelings to her or to anyone about anything, but and she had to go away.

She is not the kind of person who suppresses her feelings and she could not bear to go on living in that house with Stevens forever pretending as if there is nothing between them. So, she decides to leave, but that has taken its toll on her and now she has lost that spark. Of course, with age comes maturity and calmness, but he also feels that there is a sense of world wariness in her. So, this is a novel about losses and what they used, what they had once they realized that they will never have it again.

We also remember that Mr. Stevens was banking on Miss Kenton's return to Darlington hall because she had written him a couple of letters where she had hinted that she was not very happy and she would like to return. So, now, he asks her, indeed as you say we are old friends, I simply wish to ask you Mrs. Ben, but the fact is the letters I have had from you over the years and in particular the last letter have tended to suggest that you are rather unhappy. I simply wondered if you were being ill treated in some way. Forgive me as I say, but it is something that has worried me for some time.

I would feel foolish had I come all this way and seen you and not at least asked you. Mr. Stevens, there is no need to be embarrassed. In fact, I am very touched. You should be so concerned and I can put your mind at rest on this matter absolutely and then she tells him that she may not be very happy in her marriage, but no way she is going to leave her husband because all said and done he is a fine man.

He has treated her well and she is determined to continue that way. She also feels that sometimes due to sheer impulsiveness in her nature, she writes certain things which she does not really mean and that is what she says, but then we can never be sure. Perhaps she wants Stevens to confess something which never comes out as we know that with Stevens emotions are he is the kind of man who will always guard his emotions. I believe I thought of it as simply another ruse Mr. Stevens to annoy you.

It was a shock to come out here and find myself married. For a long time, I was very unhappy indeed, and then year after year went by. There was the war. Catherine grew up

and one day I realized I love my husband.

You spend so much time with someone. You find you get used to him. He is a kind steady man and yes, Mr. Stevens, I have grown to love him, but that does not mean to say of course, there are not occasions now and then extremely dissolved occasions when you think to yourself what a terrible mistake I have made with my life and you get to thinking about a different life, a better life you might have had. For instance, I get to thinking about a life I may have had with you Mr. Stevens and I suppose that is when I get angry over some trivial little thing and leave, but each time I do so, I realize before long my rightful place is with my husband.

After all, there is no turning back the clock now. You are very correct Mrs. Ben. As you say, it is too late to turn back the clock. Indeed, I would not be able to rest if I thought such ideas were the cause of unhappiness for you and your husband.

So, both of them agree to an extent. I mean Miss Kenton or Mrs. Ben, she accepts what her life would have been with him had she not left and married. Perhaps, she has made a mistake and she is honest enough to admit that to Mr. Stevens. Mr. Stevens who has asked himself this question several times as we have just seen, he regrets the ending, the abrupt ending of the coffee, the cocoa sessions in the evening with Miss Kenton and he regrets what perhaps things would have been different had he continued those meetings with her, those sessions with her, who knows where all that would have led to, but now it is too late as this except that they are old and they do not have much time left anymore and too much has happened.

So, there is no question of going back and then they take leave of each other in a very formal way and thank you for the lift. It was very kind of you. It was so nice to see you again, she says and then he says it was a great pleasure to see you again, Mrs. Ben and in this way, they take each other's leave. So, as he is waiting now, as he is about to leave and leave the country sign and go back to Darlington hall, return to his duties, he meets another person at the end and they talk about various matters, illnesses, middle age and other things and then the other man confesses that he is actually an under butler of foot man of sorts in a big establishment and then Mr.

Stevens acknowledges that he also is a butler with a very great establishment Lord Darlington hall. The fact is of course, I said after a while, I gave my best to Lord Darlington. I gave him the very best I had to give and now, well, I find I do not have a great deal more left to give. So, finally, we find Stevens being honest with himself and with others. All his life, he had evaded certain issues, but this complete weak, it had given him time and freedom and opportunities to look back.

He had met several people. He had met completely different section of society. He has listened to their points of view and now, he realizes that perhaps he was wrong about several things. The world is a changed place and he is a relic of sorts and he confesses. He admits to himself. Lord Darlington was not a bad man and here comes the confession. He was not a bad man at all and at least, he had the privilege of being able to see, sorry, to say at the end of his life that he made his own mistakes.

His lordship was a courageous man. 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 I was doing something worthwhile. I cannot even say I made my own mistakes. Really, one has to ask oneself what dignity is there in that.

So, finally, he comes to terms with his life. You see, there was no, really no dignity. He may, I have been sort of fooling myself into believing that I am being very professional by serving Lord Darlington faithfully, but Lord Darlington is a very good man. He has not even made his mistakes, but what was I doing there. So, the novel, although it is set in England and everyone is English in the novel, but it can also be read as a very post-colonial kind of a work where how people are oppressed to such an extent that they are even unable to think for themselves. They are denied the right to think for themselves.

Even their thoughts are controlled by their masters and that is Stevens tragedy. As he looks back to his life, a life which he thought for a long time was a success. He was that he has, he, there was a time when he had reached the epitome or the peak of his profession, but now he realizes that it was all a big sham. Nobody ever bothered about him except and the people who actually cared about him, his father and Miss Kenton, he never paid them any attention, the kind of attention that they deserved and both left him. When one died, utterly neglected and Miss Kenton had no other choice, but to leave and get married to someone else and lead a life of loveless marriage. So, so many lives ruined all because his misguided or misplaced sense of loyalty in Lord Darlington who was not even worth it.

At one point during the course of the novel, we are told by one of Lord Darlington's friend's son who has been participant in the activities, the international affairs and he says that you see Lord Darlington is playing indeed a very important role in facilitating anti-Semitic feelings in England and this should not be allowed and like it or not directly

or indirectly, he has become a major supporter of Hitler in England and that is something everyone should be careful about, but at no point does Stevens accept that, but it is only towards the end of his life he believes, he realizes that Lord Darlington was not a great man and he has wasted rather, just you know thrown away his life away for someone who was not really all that great. So, the novel ends on a very somber note and on a note of nostalgia. It occurs to me, furthermore that bantering is hardly an unreasonable duty for an employer to expect a professional to perform. I have of course, already devoted much time to developing my bantering skills, but it is possible I have never previously approach the task with the commitment I might have done.

Perhaps then when I return to Darlington hall tomorrow, Mr. Faraday will not himself be back for a further week. I will begin practicing with renewed effort. I should hope then that by the end of my employer's return, I shall be in a position to pleasantly surprise him and that is how the novel ends. The feeling that the desire to please one's master remains, but he also realizes that he has to unlearn a lot what he has been doing and what the kind of person he was during Lord Darlington's return.

That would not work anymore. He has to change and perhaps it is for his own good that he has accepted that there is a need for him to change in the remains of his day. So, that is how we end the novel and I will be giving you some questions and quizzes on the novel very soon. Thank you very much. Thank you.