

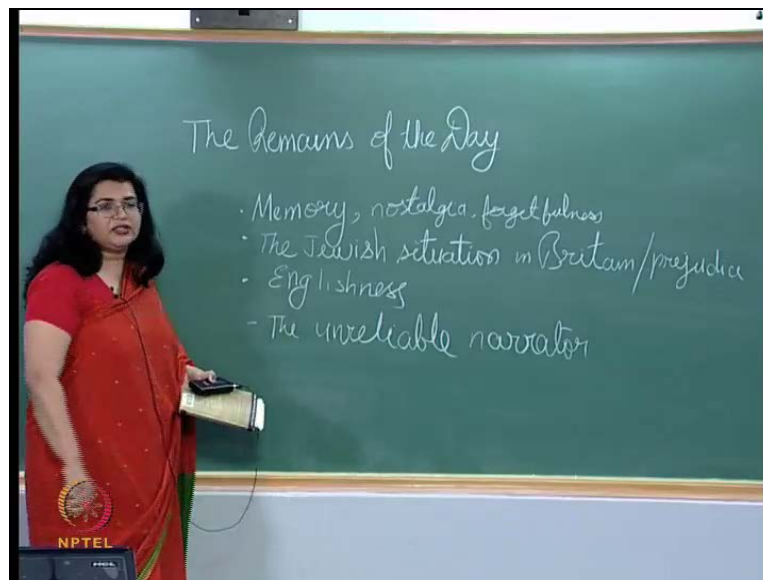
Contemporary Literature
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Module No. # 01

Lecture No. # 31

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 little acts of cruelties that rather Lord Darlington had been indulging in towards him. 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.

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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 sub-conscious level objectified himself and while identifying himself deeply with house as well with profession.

So, how he has become more of an object unless of a person and how this had created a deep divide, led to a deep divide in him, in his personality. Also, there is one interesting factor I am just referring to the theoretician, post colonial theorist Homi Bhabha where one feels that how people **where Bhabha were suggest**, how people stereotype themselves. In the same way, you can feel that Steve, 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 Devon and its day three evening. Now, the suggestion that is made is Lord Darlington was anti-symmetric in his tendencies. He certain deep rooted prejudices against Jewish people and Stevens as we understand him, he is deeply loyal and his harbors 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 his service for such a long period and he would know, but then he concedes. They were minor incidents. What were those minor incidents, we are on page 146. I recall over hearing at dinner one evening when a particular news paper had been mentioned, his lordship remain remarking. Oh! You mean that Jewish propaganda sheet. Then, on another occasion around that time, I remember that he is instructing me giving donations to a particular local charity which regularly came to the door on the grounds that the management committee was more or less homogeneously Jewish.

I have remembered these remarks because they truly surprise me at that time. So, it was not as if Lord Darlington was utterly innocent. Yes, there were some deep rooted prejudices and this comes across more or strongly when he dismisses to girls who are in the service of at a Darlington hall. Their names are Sera and Ruth. Stevens also recalls how indignant Miss Kenton was at this unfair dismissal or discharge of these two young

women, all because they were Jewish maids. As Stevens looks back, he tries to comprehend the true nature of Lord Darlington which was after all not entirely blemishless.

Page 154. Now, that I have recalled his 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 Liza. That is to say, we were obliged to find replacements for the two dismissed Jewish maids and this Liza turned out to be one of them. So, what he suggesting is that two very decent girls, two honest hardworking girls, they were unfairly, unceremoniously dismissed just because of their race. What they got instead was very flighty kind of maid called Liza and there are with whom nobody was extremely pleased with her, 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 says the prospect of seeing Miss Kenton again first a row some weeks ago. I suppose, I have tended to spend much time, just while our relationship underwent such a 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 had strong feelings 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. This is what we find repeatedly in Mr. Stevens character. You know he suffers, he wants, he longs for the days gone by, especially longs for return of Miss Kenton. Let us see whether he succeeds or not.

So, he particularly recalls what exactly led to this rupture in the relationship between Stevens and Miss Kenton. What actually happened and he says that they had. So, they had gradually started enjoying each other's company. After the day's work, they would make it a point to sit together and have a cup of cocoa and discuss the next day's assignments or plan the week's schedule and things like that, but what led to the end of these meetings

and Stevens tells us what really exactly happen. He says that one day he was enjoying romantic novel in his room and Miss Kenton just barges in and insists or knowing what exactly he is reading.

Mr. Stevens is quite shy about this and he does not want to really tell Mrs. Kenton what he is reading. Miss Kenton being what she is she insists and she would not go unless Stevens tells her what exactly he is reading. When she sees, it is just a sentimental love story and this is what he says about it. I had really had the time or the desire to read any of these romances cover to cover, but so far as I could tell their plots were invariably absurd indeed sentimental. So, look it is you know love and romance perhaps sentimental and may be a not to the taste of Mr. Stevens, but these novels also serve a purpose. They represent their portrait, the life of lovers, but Mr. Stevens is actually ashamed to be caught reading 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 ones 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 fix it with the idea of what is dignity. So, benter love all these things which actually complete a human being. Those were, they are 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 in incidental enjoyment from these stories just like you know I read them, but I am detached from them. At the same time, he displays a sort of condensing attitude towards romance. I did not perhaps acknowledge this to myself at the time, but as I say what she miss there in it. Why should one not enjoy in a light hearted sort of way. Story is of ladies and gentleman 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 be to have been caught reading these novel to 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 have been,

she could behave as she had done that evening was rather alarming and after I had seen her out of my pantry and had a chance together, my thoughts are little. I recall resolving to set up about reestablishing our professional relationship on a more proper basis. At this point, he tells that he would not like to meet her except during the working hours and unilaterally decides to and those very pleasant evening sessions where he would meet and discuss the week scheduled with Miss Kenton.

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. 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 any one at all and Miss Kenton act something you know he feels that she has acted in a very over familiar way and has over stepped boundaries. He needed, he felt it important that this kind of behavior should end because it is not professional and it is not dignified. After that their meetings end and Stevens and Miss Kenton go back to being professionals one.

Page 179. But what is the sense in forever speculating what might have happened had such and such a moment turned out differently? So, look again we are talking about this sense of nostalgia where he is suffering. He knows what he has lost. He earns to get her back. One could presume a dry oneself to destruction. In this way, from here we will move on to his time where he is in this place called Moscombe near Tavistock Devin. He is with couple of country folk where he is resting with people where a couple that runs an inn. They are so proud to have him because of his fine manners and fine appearance.

He is also driving Mr. Farraday's ford and that is that you never come across a car that Porsche in that part of the country. 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, Mr. Stevens meets a number of people. 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. While for Stevens, the notion, the definition of dignity is very conventional. It belongs to the realm of ladies and gentleman but Harry Smith who is a very militant kind of a democrat, he backs to differ.

He says dignity is not just something for gentleman that is what we fought Hitler for. If Hitler 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. 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. Now, this very unorthodox notion of dignity is completely anti-thesis of what Stevens believes because Stevens has actually reduced himself to the single identity category of butler. Is nothing more or hitting of himself as nothing more than an English butler and this entire summon about what exactly Englishness is.

Englishness also means dignity for the poor, dignity for the common people, dignity freedom for the people to express themselves, to express their opinions, to cast a vote. Those things also constitute dignity; according to you know free thinkers like Harry Smith and that also suggest 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.

Page 193. As it happens, that is an instance that comes to mind which I believe illustrates rather well. That really meets of whatever truth may be contained in Mr. Harry Smith's views. It is as it happens in instance from my own experience and 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 a Lord Darlington and his associates. So, what actually happened, we are told that there is one Mr. Spencer who invite 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 asked him and observes the line of question, 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 dead situation regarding America is a significant factor in the present low levels or do you suppose this is a red and that the abandonment of the gold standard is at the root of the matter?

Stevens is completely taken aback by this question. He knows nothing about international finance or politics or economy. What has he has never concerned himself with knew of these matters. The only concern he had entertained throughout his life was how to excel himself in his profession as a butler. His profession had defined him throughout. He knows nothing about these matters and then a mistress Spencer, further questions him.

Would you say that the currency problem in the Europe would be made better or worse if there were to be an arms agreement between the French? I have one more question to put to our good man very much wanted his help on the question presently waxing many of us and which we all realize this crucial to how we should shape our foreign policy. What was Miss Mr. really intending by his recent speech on the situation in North Africa? To all these pointed questions, everyone knows there 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. You see gentleman, Mr. Spencer said turning to the others, a man here is unable to assist us in these matters. This brought feel 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 nations decisions be left in the hands of our good man here and to the few millions others like him. Is it any wonder saddled as we are with her present parliamentary system that we are unable to find any solution to our many difficulties? Why you may as well ask committee of the mothers union to organize a war campaign?

You see such people do not matter, their opinions do not matter. What do they know? Now, Stevens as he sits at in this company and listening to Harry Smith's very unorthodox political views and now he feels that deep exist between the world outside and his own situation. He had been treated just like an object, a dump in a limit object who's only worth was. How useful he could make to Lord Darlington and his affairs. Then, next comes our more interesting part where Lord Darlington comes, where he comes and sees that see look Stevens, we were just trying 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 intellect to run the business of the country. Therefore, their opinion does not matter and then, 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's far too complicated a place now for universal suffrage and such life. For endless members of parliament debating things stands still. All fine a few years ago perhaps, but in today's world absolutely it does not work. Look at Germany and Italy's Stevens. See what strong leadership can do if it is allowed to act. None of this universal suffrage nonsense there. What we need as 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 and questioning attitude towards the leaders and this is what happen.

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 Italy and Lord Darlington who Stevens throughout the novel has been. So, staunchly defending now it is revealed towards that he is no different, not much different from the lights 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 nor do you. It may have been all very well worse, but the world is a complicated place. Now, it occurs to main recalling these words that of course, many of Darlington, Lord Darlington's ideas, we will see in today rather odd. So, gradually he is coming to terms as he looks back. So, 'The remains of the days' you see he remembers now that he has given the best years of his life to a person who was not really such a great men 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, what has this is the way he is consoling himself indwelling in not 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 ideology should not matter. What should matter is, how well you serve or how well you deliver and 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 a little bit of questioning

and some is after all necessary if one needs to maintain any kind of equilibrium, otherwise the world would turn into 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 kinds of faith in his employer inspired of being aware of the reality, but a 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 fall is that he has been making and as he leaves his car had run out of petrol and all that. So, as he leaves, Mr. Taylor is accompanied with a very fine gentleman a doctor, Doctor Karline. He says you know they start having a conversation and then, he points out. He says that yeah 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 nearly 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. They are totally over odd by the presence of such kind of a personage. It is them and everyone takes him for some kind of a diplomat or a barren or something very important, but doctor Karlie understands and hence, they walked towards Stevens car ask him that are you a man servant or something like that. 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 good that somebody has managed to actually understand what he really is and he does not deny. So, that trip has actually, that trip does him plenty of good because he now feel that he does not have to pretend or suppress or conceal his real self. I mean you anybody anymore. We come to the next step to we math and this is the place where he has an appointment with Miss Kenton and then, become face to face finally. So, Ishiguro bills of the suspense till the end. What is going to happen when these two eventually come face to face after such a long period, nearly twenty years? Mr. Stevens, how nice to see you again? The light in the room was extremely gloomy on account of the rain.

So, we move to arm chairs up close to the window. She had naturally aged somewhat, but to my eyes at least she seem to have done. So, very gracefully a figure remains slim. Her posture as ever she had maintained to her old way of holding her head in a manner that verged on the defined. Of course, with the bleak light falling on her face I could hardly help, but notice the lines had appeared here and there. 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 very clearly the way she stills her and her posture and her mannerisms. All these things are firmly edged in his mind.

As we continue to talk, I must say, I thought I begin to notice for the more certain changes with the years had her. For instance, Miss Kenton appeared somewhat 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 up with life. The spark which had once made her such a lively and at times volatile person seems 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. Therefore, she starts seeking solace in the company of other man who she ends up marrying and leaving Darlington hall for good.

Now, she might had 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. She knew that he is not the kind of person who is going to admit his feelings to her or to anyone about anything. She had to go away. She could not, 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 live, but that has taken it is taller 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 loss. This is the end. What they use, what they had once they realize 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. What he ask her indeed as you say we are old friends. I simply wish to ask you Mr. 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 are being ill treated in some way, forgive me as I say, but it is something that has worried me for some time. I would fool, I would feel foolish had I come all this way and I have 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 concern and I can put your mind at rest on this matter absolutely. 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 he is a fine man.

He has treated her well and she is determined to continue to that way. She also feels that sometimes due to shear impulsiveness in her nature, she writes certain things which she does not really mean. 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 the Stevens emotions are. He is the kind of man who will always guard his emotions. I believe I thought of it as simply another Mr. Stevens to annoy you. It was shock to come out here and find myself married for a long time. I was very unhappy indeed, but then year after year went by there was the Katharine grew up and one day, I realized I love my husband.

He spent so much time with someone if I get use to him. He is a kind steady man and yes, Mr. Stevens I have grown to love him, but that that does not mean to say of course, there are not occasions now. Then, extremely desolate occasions when you think to yourself what a terrible mistake I had made with my life and you get to thinking about 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 Mr. Benn 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 and Mr. Benn. 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 had just seen, he regrets the ending, the abrupt ending of the coffee the coco sessions in the evening with Miss Kenton. He regrets what to perhaps things would have been different. Had he continued those meetings with her, those sessions with her who knows where all that could have to let 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 happen. So, there is no question on 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 Mr. Benn and in this way they did not 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. They talk about various matters, illnesses, middle-aged and other things and then, the other man confesses that he is actually an under butler of foot man of sorts you know big establishment. 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 fine 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 is a complete week, it had given him time and freedom and opportunities to look back. He had met several people. He had met a completely different section of society. He has listen 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 relic of songs and he confesses, he admits to himself.

Lord Darlington was not a bad man and he has the confession. He was not a bad man at all and at least he had the privilege of being able to say sorry 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 in his lordships 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 really no dignity. He may have been sort of fooling myself into believing that I am being very professional by serving Lord Darlington faithfully, but Lord Darlington made his mistakes. What was I doing there? So, the novel although set in England and everyone is English in the novel, but it can also be read as a very post colonial kind of work where how people are apprised 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. 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 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. One died utterly neglected and Miss Kenton had no other choice, but to leave and get married to someone else and live a life of loveless marriage. So many lives and 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 activities of 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. This should not be allowed and like it not directly or indirectly, he has become a major supporter of Hitler in England. 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 realizes that Lord Darlington was not a great man. He has wasted rather 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 for the 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 skills, but it is possible I have never previously approached the task with the commitment I might have

done. Perhaps, then when I return to Darlington hall tomorrow, Mr. Farraday will not himself be back for a further week

I will begin practicing with effort. I should hope then that by the end of my employers 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. What kind of person he was during Lord Darlington's time 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 days. 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.