The Remains of the Day

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF KAZUO ISHIGURO

Ishiguro was born in Japan, but, as a child, he moved with his family to Guildford, a small town in southern England. He attended the University of Kent before publishing his first novel, the award-winning *A Pale View of Hills*, in 1982. His next two books, including *The Remains of the Day* (the winner of the Man Booker Prize) allowed him to achieve international fame. His experimental 1995 novel *The Unconsoled* received more mixed reviews, though it received the Cheltenham Prize for fiction in England. Ishiguro has also written screenplays for film and television. He lives with his wife, a former social worker, in London, and continues to write.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Remains of the Day is, in some ways, a historical novel that is "about" the effects of Nazism and World War II on England, even if it is more concerned with the ways these significant historical events pressed on individual circumstances. Also implicit, though, is the decline of the English aristocracy, a process that began in the nineteenth century with the rise of a new moneyed class whose status was based not on land possession and noble titles, but on the acquisition of commercial wealth. The Parliament Act of 1911, which undid many of the privileges of the aristocracy, only hastened the decline, one that proved definitive after World War II, when many aristocrats still retained their titles but were financially ruined—and, like Darlington's family, forced to sell off their grand estates. The novel also includes real historical figures, like Herr Ribbentrop (the German ambassador to England and Nazi Foreign Minister) and Lord Halifax (Britain's foreign minister), who in the book are frequent visitors to Darlington Hall. The character of Lord Darlington embraces what historically was known as "appeasement," the idea that Britain should have done everything it could to resolve tensions with Germany peacefully rather than entering into another war as devastating as World War I. The Versailles Treaty, which is mentioned in the novel, is the peace treaty that Germany was forced to sign when it lost World War I, and whose harsh terms were economically devastating to the country—contributing, many have argued, to the rise of Nazism in the first place. In the 1930s, the idea of appeasement was broadly shared in England: in 1938, Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain famously announced, "We have achieved peace for our time" after meeting with European powers to sign the Munich agreement with Germany—only to have war break out a year later. In retrospect (which, as the novel itself shows, always shows thing more clearly than they once seemed), it can be seen that appeasement only allowed Nazi Germany to gain strength.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Like *The Remains of the Day*, Ishiguro's first two books are also related to history and personal memory: *A Pale View of Hills* is about a Japanese widow looking back to the destruction and rebuilding of Nagasaki after the atomic bomb, and *An Artist of the Floating World*, also set in Japan, is narrated by an elderly painter looking back on his past and reconsidering Japanese attitudes about World War II. Indeed, Ishiguro has said in an interview that *The Remains of the Day* was his third attempt to write the same book, a first-person narrative by an aging person who seeks to reconsider the past—a historical novel that only obliquely deals with the historical events themselves. In this sense, Ishiguro's novel is related to the works of Czech writer Milan Kundera, as well as the late German author W.G. Sebald, both of whom have written multiple novels concerned with twentieth-century European history, memory, and narrating the past. The prose in *The Remains of the Day*, while fully inhabiting the voice of a traditional English butler, also recalls the thoughtful but sometimes convoluted language of Henry James, whose late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century novels often depict characters who feel somehow out of place in their world.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *The Remains of the Day*
- **When Written:** 1986-1989
- **Where Written:** London, England
- **When Published:** 1989
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Novel
- **Antagonist:** There is no clear-cut antagonist in *The Remains of the Day*. Stevens struggles against his own self-censorship, which can, in some ways, be seen as an antagonist to him. The novel also implicitly critiques the rigid, hierarchical aristocratic society of prewar England, a society that created Stevens and that leaves him at a loss to handle any other way of life.
- **Point of View:** The novel is told in the first person, with Stevens reflecting (in what seems to be the form of a diary) both on the day's events during his travels and on events from several decades in the past. While the first person might seem to grant unlimited access into Stevens's mind, the novel uses this point of view to thematize the limits of memory and the limitations of one's own perspective and

self-knowledge.

EXTRA CREDIT

Jazzing it up In addition to his literary output, Ishiguro has also composed song lyrics for the jazz singer Stacey Kent; their CD was a best-selling album in France.

On remainder When Ishiguro was at a writers' festival in Australia, attempting to think up the title of his next novel, his friend threw out the psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud's concept of *Tagesreste*, "the day's debris." The friend translated it as "remains of the day," giving Ishiguro his title.

PLOT SUMMARY

Stevens, a butler at an old English country house called Darlington Hall, is preparing to take a short trip through the English countryside. His new employer, an American named Mr. Farraday, is returning to the United States for a visit, and Farraday has suggested that Stevens take some time off. Mr. Farraday's casual, informal manner is unfamiliar to Stevens, who had served for many years under a traditional English aristocrat, Lord Darlington. As a result, Stevens is still learning to **banter** and joke, which he thinks of as a professional skill he should develop. Although he's initially unsure, he finally decides he will take the trip: it will give him the chance to pay a visit to Miss Kenton, who used to be Darlington Hall's housekeeper, but who married and left several decades ago. Stevens has been making a few errors in running the household— mistakes he dismisses as minor—but he thinks Miss Kenton's return might help him resolve them.

On his first day of travel, Stevens reflects on the greatness of English scenery—scenery which he believes to be all the greater precisely because it is subtle and not as "magnificent" as the **landscape** of other countries. Stevens also reflects on what it means to be a "great" butler, recalling a number of conversations he's had with other butlers over the years. Stevens turns to his own father (who was a butler himself) as one example of someone who was a great butler—that is, who embodied the dignity of the profession. He recalls a number of anecdotes that he thinks prove his father's dignity.

The next day Stevens wonders whether or not Miss Kenton—who now, he reminds himself, uses her married name, Mrs. Benn—will actually agree to return; he's received some letters from her in which she seems unhappy, even desperate. He thinks back to when he first met Miss Kenton, in 1922. She was hired around the same time as his father, whose long-time employer had just died. Miss Kenton immediately proved herself to be stubborn and headstrong; when Stevens asked her to address his father formally, even though she was technically in a position above him, she began pointing out a number of mistakes and examples of absent-mindedness on the part of his father. At first, Stevens recalls that Miss Kenton told Stevens that his father's trivial mistakes added up to something more significant, but then Stevens realizes that he has misremembered—that in fact it was Lord Darlington who said so, in asking Stevens to remove his father from some responsibilities.

Stevens recalls this request coming in the context of an approaching event of great importance: Lord Darlington had, together with his friend Sir David Cardinal, invited a number of important people to Darlington Hall to try to promote the easing of sanctions against Germany following World War I. Darlington and Cardinal were particularly eager to convince the French guest, M. Dupont, of their position, thinking that he might hold the key to changing France's course. But immediately upon his arrival, Dupont spent most of his time with an American senator, Mr. Lewis. At one point, Stevens overheard Mr. Lewis attempting to turn Dupont against the Englishmen present.

During the conference, Stevens senior took ill, but Stevens's help was so needed downstairs that he barely spent time with his ailing father, leaving Miss Kenton to care for him instead. For the next few days, Stevens moved between his father's room and the drawing and dining rooms downstairs, never betraying any emotion about his father's state. During the final dinner, M. Dupont made a toast and accused Mr. Lewis of duplicity and betrayal; Lewis, in turn, called Lord Darlington an amateur who was out of his league in trying to arrange international politics in a gentlemanly way. Not long after that, Stevens's father died. Stevens was shaken and came close to crying, though he rapidly returned downstairs to serve the guests with his composure intact. Now he remembers that night with a certain feeling of triumph for having retained such dignity.

Stevens's thoughts turn to the importance he's always placed in serving an employer of great moral stature. While sitting at Mortimer's Pond in Dorset, he thinks back to earlier that day when he was faced with car trouble and had to stop to ask help from a chauffeur outside a Victorian house. While saying he came from Darlington Hall, Stevens had implied that he hadn't, in fact, worked for Lord Darlington. He admits that this slightly misleading comment is related to another recent event, when friends of Mr. Farraday, the Wakefields, came to visit Darlington Hall, and he also gave the impression to Mrs. Wakefield that he had never worked for Lord Darlington. He reiterates that he is proud to have worked for Lord Darlington, and that his reticence stems only from not wanting to hear any more "nonsense" about his former employer.

The next day, sitting at a tearoom in Taunton, Stevens thinks about accusations that began to be leveled at Lord Darlington after the war—accusations of anti-Semitism (including not allowing Jewish staff members to work at Darlington Hall), and

association with fascists. Stevens roundly dismisses such notions: he takes pride in having served someone as morally upright as Lord Darlington. He admits that such unfounded rumors may have gotten started as a result of the short-lived influence of one of Darlington's friends in the early 1930s. After spending time with that friend (who was part of a fascist group), Lord Darlington began to make disparaging comments about Jews. At one point, he called Stevens into his office to tell him that they mustn't have Jewish people on staff; Stevens would have to dismiss the two Jewish housemaids, Ruth and Sarah. Though Stevens claims to have hated the idea of dismissing the girls, he didn't hesitate to fulfill his employer's order. Miss Kenton, though, was appalled; while she objected strongly, saying she'd quit before agreeing to do so, Stevens said it wasn't their place to say what was and wasn't right. Miss Kenton never did quit, and Stevens began to tease her about it; months later, though, she admitted that she was quite close to quitting and felt cowardly, but realized she'd have nowhere to go if she left. A year later, Lord Darlington had severed all connections to his friend and he asked Stevens if he could figure out what happened to Ruth and Sarah, as it had been wrong to dismiss them. Stevens eagerly told Miss Kenton what he'd said, as part of the evening meetings with cocoa that they regularly held in her parlor. But she was distraught that Stevens had never thought to share that he too didn't agree with the dismissals; he couldn't figure out how to explain to her why he hadn't.

Now, Stevens finds himself in the private family home of the Taylors; earlier that day his car ran out of gas, and the Taylors were kind enough to invite him to stay the night. He thinks back, now, to the daily parlor meetings with Miss Kenton, wondering how they came to end. He wonders if it has to do with the time Miss Kenton interrupted him in his parlor reading a sentimental love story and teased him about it; he immediately grew cold and distant, deciding he'd have to reassert their relationship on more professional grounds. He recalls, too, that Miss Kenton began to receive letters and visit a suitor in a nearby town. Once she asked him, now that he was at the top of his profession, if he'd ever want anything else in life; he couldn't imagine what she meant, and he said he'd never be fulfilled until seeing Lord Darlington through all *his* goals. Not long after, Miss Kenton seemed cool and distant at one of their parlor talks, and Stevens suggested they stop meeting. She protested but he insisted, and the evenings came to an end. Now he wonders if things might have turned out otherwise had he not insisted; but he notes that only with the benefit of hindsight can one see turning points everywhere. He relates a few more failures of communication between himself and Miss Kenton, including once shortly after her aunt's death when he heard her crying on the other side of her parlor door, but didn't enter; but he reiterates that it's useless to speculate too much on the past.

Stevens thinks about the events of earlier this evening, when a number of villagers came to visit him, impressed by his gentlemanly manners. Stevens began to refer to his past involvement in foreign policy, giving the impression that he'd personally known people like Lord Halifax and Mr. Churchill (both of whom had visited Darlington Hall). He's now embarrassed, not sure how or why he gave such an impression. He also thinks about one particular strain of the conversation, when one villager, Mr. Harry Smith, pronounced that dignity is something that every English citizen can have as part of their democratic participation in politics. Stevens doesn't agree: he thinks ordinary people can't expect to have such strong opinions, and that politics should be the realm of aristocratic gentlemen. He reiterates his loyalty to Lord Darlington, loyalty being a quality he continues to believe in. Even if Darlington was misguided and made mistakes—even if his life now looks like a waste—there's nothing undignified in Stevens's loyalty to him, no reason for him to feel regret or shame.

The next day finds Stevens sitting in the Rose Garden hotel, waiting for Miss Kenton. He recalls a memory that he's already related, about Miss Kenton crying on the other side of the door; but now he thinks this event may have taken place months later. It was during a visit from Mr. Cardinal, Sir Cardinal's son, who was Lord Darlington's godson. He came to visit unexpectedly, when Lord Halifax and Herr Ribbentrop were also expected, so Lord Darlington asked Mr. Cardinal to wait alone. Frustrated, Mr. Cardinal had too much to drink and told Stevens that the Nazis were playing Darlington: they were manipulating his gentlemanly spirit and sense of decency to string England along, buying themselves time. Darlington, he said, was a pawn of the Nazis, and he asked if Stevens hadn't seen it—Stevens said he hadn't.

Meanwhile, Miss Kenton announced to Stevens that she was going to accept her suitor's proposal of marriage. He barely responded, and she grew upset, asking if he had nothing more to say to her after so many years. He simply congratulated her and hurried back to the main rooms, telling her that she was keeping him from important events. Upset and angry, Miss Kenton told him that she and Mr. Benn often amused themselves telling anecdotes about Stevens's habits; he didn't respond. A little later she apologized, but he said he could barely recall what she was talking about, given the significant events going on upstairs. That evening, he now realizes, was when he heard Miss Kenton crying inside her parlor. Nonetheless, he feels a certain triumph when he thinks about that night, too, given how well he balanced all his responsibilities. Again, he emerged with dignity from trying circumstances.

Two days later, Stevens is sitting on the pier of the seaside town of Weymouth, reflecting on his meeting with Miss Kenton. At first, they exchanged pleasantries, but then became comfortable with each other and began reminiscing about their

days together at Darlington Hall. They discussed Lord Darlington's ruined postwar reputation, and Stevens tells Miss Kenton that Darlington's final days were solitary and silent, and it was tragic. As he drove her to the bus station, he ventured to ask her if she was being well-treated, given the unhappiness he sensed in some of her letters. Saying that she felt she could be honest with him, Miss Kenton told him that she initially thought of her engagement and marriage as another ruse to annoy him, not something she'd actually go through with. At first she was very unhappy, but over the years she came to love her husband. At times she still grows frustrated, imagining another life she could have had—a life with Stevens, for instance—but then she remembers that her place is with her husband, and that she can't live entirely in the past. Stevens relates that his heart was breaking then, but he remained calm and cheerful with Miss Kenton as he said goodbye.

Now, Stevens thinks back to a discussion just a few hours ago that he had with another man on the bench beside him. It turned out the man was a butler himself before his retirement, so Stevens began to tell him about Darlington Hall, before confessing that he's begun to make more and more trivial errors, and he worries he doesn't have much left to give. He told the man that Lord Darlington was not a bad man; at least he made his own mistakes, which isn't something Stevens can say for himself. He began to cry, and the man tried to comfort him by telling him to keep looking forward. Now Stevens reflects that the man is right, and that all he can do is to put his fate in the hands of great gentlemen like those he serves. He thinks of Mr. Farraday's bantering, and resolves to work harder to fulfill that professional requirement as best he can.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Mr. Stevens – The narrator and protagonist of the book, Stevens is an older man who has spent his entire life as a butler, just as his father was. After spending most of his career serving an aristocrat, Lord Darlington, he now is employed by an American, Mr. Farraday. Stevens's identity is inextricable from his position as butler: this is how he has always defined himself, and the requirements of his position seemed to have shaped, if not determined, his character. Because being a butler for an aristocratic household requires calmness and discretion, for instance, Stevens cannot imagine being anything other than cool and private in his personal life. The formality required of him in his professional position also makes him deeply formal at all times, and he finds it difficult to speak casually, to act relaxed, or to express his feelings to those around him. This has profound effects on his life; for example, Stevens is never able to express his feelings for Miss Kenton, which brings him some regret. While Stevens is extremely thoughtful, he is not always honest with himself; as he himself comes to realize over the course of his motoring trip, he implicitly or subconsciously tweaks his recollections of past events in order to fit a certain narrative. Earnest and profoundly loyal, Stevens does begin to question this narrative, in what seems like a valiant attempt to face the past more frankly than he has done before. What enables him to do so is perhaps, in part, the fact that the identity he has claimed for himself is dwindling with the decline of the aristocracy following World War II.

Miss Kenton (Mrs. Benn) – The lead housemaid at Darlington Hall, Miss Kenton is intelligent, headstrong, and stubborn. Like Stevens, she takes a great deal of pride in her work and in her position, but she also possesses a more independent streak than Stevens, which allows her to disagree not only with him but also with the decisions made by Lord Darlington. Miss Kenton has a strong moral sense—she doesn't hesitate to object strongly to the Jewish maids being dismissed, for instance—but she also recognizes her fragility as a woman alone and without resources in a society that still requires women either to be married or beholden to life as a servant. It gradually becomes clear that Miss Kenton is in love with Stevens, though she simultaneously finds him infuriating, and her decision to leave Darlington Hall is in part due to her frustration with his lack of response, as well as to her general impulsiveness. Miss Kenton, now Mrs. Benn, seems better suited than Stevens to face her "remains of the day" outside the realm of aristocratic country houses, but she too struggles to find a place for herself in a changing world.

Lord Darlington – The owner of Darlington Hall, which has been in his family for hundreds of years, Lord Darlington is described by various characters as a true old gentleman. After fighting in World War I, Lord Darlington was inspired to get involved in politics and attempt to ease relations between Britain and Germany during the 1920s and 1930s, as the Nazis were growing in power. Over the course of the novel, it becomes clear that Darlington is at the center of the historical movement for "appeasement," and he even welcomes collaboration with major Nazi figures. Since Lord Darlington is described through the eyes of Stevens, it's difficult to tell just how much he bought into Nazi rhetoric; whether his anti-Semitism, for instance, was a true belief he held or, as Stevens says, something that he embraced only for a time as a result of the nefarious influence of others. The novel does seem to make clear that Lord Darlington's status as a "gentleman," with an earnest belief in congeniality, cooperation, and polite discussion, is more naïve than evil, but also entirely unsuited to the political requirements of the time. He finds himself as a result on the wrong side of history, as Stevens only gradually comes to admit to himself.

Mr. John Farraday – The new owner of Darlington Hall, Mr. Farraday is one of a number of wealthy Americans who moved to Britain and bought up old country houses after World War II when the estates' original owners were ruined financially or (as

in Lord Darlington's case) by public opinion. Farraday is more informal and jocular than what Stevens is used to, but at the same time Farraday is fascinated by Stevens as a relic of a former age—an age he wants to be able to purchase, in some way, for himself. Matching Farraday's witty banter, nonetheless, is Stevens's professional challenge for much of the book.

William Stevens, senior (Stevens's father) – A butler all his life, Stevens's father works for a man named Mr. John Silvers until Silvers' death, when Stevens senior comes to work with Stevens at Darlington Hall. Stevens models himself after his father, considering Stevens senior as the embodiment of dignity and professionalism. As a result, though, the narrator also has learned to maintain his formal role even when alone with his father, including at his father's deathbed. Stevens senior, too, finds his identity wrapped up in his position as butler, such that, as he approaches death, he is most troubled by his increasing inability to fulfill the tasks required of him.

Mr. Graham – An old friend of Stevens and a fellow butler, who appears only in Stevens's reminiscences. Mr. Graham believes, unlike Stevens, that dignity is something one cannot hope to define; they have a number of lively discussions about this aspect of their profession. The fact that, as Stevens repeats several times, he seems to have lost touch with Mr. Graham underlines the dwindling nature of the profession after the war.

Sir David Cardinal – A close friend of Lord Darlington who works with him to gather together important figures in order to attempt to ease relations between Britain and Germany. Sir Cardinal is another example of an earlier generation of aristocrats that are dying off by the 1930s. While their polite and unofficial way of doing politics is falling out of vogue, they still strive to maintain their power and traditions.

Mr. Lewis – An American senator who attends the unofficial international "conference" organized by Lord Darlington and Sir David Cardinal in March 1923 to attempt to ease reparations requirements for Germany. Mr. Lewis ultimately reveals himself to be disdainful of this attempt, diagnosing the gentlemen in attendance as amateurs, while modern politics requires professionals. Although his remarks are not taken seriously at the time, Mr. Reginald Cardinal, many years later, admits that Lewis was right.

M. Dupont – A Frenchman whom Lord Darlington and Sir David Cardinal manage to convince to attend their unofficial international "conference" in March 1923. It seems initially that he is under the influence of Mr. Lewis, but he ultimately reveals himself to be a gentleman of an older persuasion, who finds Mr. Lewis's attempt to sway him unsportsmanlike.

Lisa – A young housemaid hired by Stevens and Miss Kenton after the dismissal of Ruth and Sarah. While she arrives with dubious references and without much motivation, Miss Kenton takes it upon herself to teach and "improve" her; she seems to succeed, but eventually Lisa runs away with a footman to get married, severely disappointing Miss Kenton.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Mrs. Clements – One of the only servants to stay on at Darlington Hall after Lord Darlington's death.

Mr. Jack Neighbours – A butler well-known throughout the service profession in the 1920s and 1930s who was popular and widely copied in his methods and manners. Stevens dismisses him as lacking true greatness (even though it also seems he may be slightly envious of Mr. Neighbours's clout).

Mr. David Charles – An aristocrat who is a frequent guest of Lord Darlington and who tells Stevens anecdotes about the great professionalism of Stevens senior.

Dr. Meredith – The doctor on call for Darlington Hall who presides over the death of Stevens's father.

Mr. Reginald Cardinal – Sir David Cardinal's son and Lord Darlington's godson. Also a member of the aristocratic class, Mr. Cardinal adapts better to modern society, writing a witty newspaper column and recognizing, eventually, just how much Lord Darlington had been deceived and become a pawn of the Nazis.

Mrs. Mortimer – The cook at Darlington Hall.

Mr. and Mrs. Wakefield – An American couple who come to visit Mr. Farraday, and who have also recently bought an old English country house.

Lord Halifax – Lord Halifax is a real historical figure, Britain's foreign secretary in the 1930s through 1944. In the novel, Halifax is a frequent visitor to Darlington Hall, and Lord Darlington attempts to convince him to appease the Nazis.

Herr Ribbentrop – Ribbentrop is a real historical figure, the Foreign Minister of Nazi Germany. In *The Remains of the Day*, Ribbentrop is also a frequent guest at Darlington Hall and he is at the center of attempts to have Britain leave the Nazis alone for as long as possible.

Mrs. Carolyn Barnet – An intelligent, middle-aged woman who visits Darlington Hall often for several months one summer, and who influences Lord Darlington into adopting anti-Semitic views.

Ruth and Sarah – Two Jewish housemaids at Darlington Hall, whom Stevens dismisses after Lord Darlington tells him he doesn't want Jewish people on his staff.

Mr. and Mrs. Taylor – A couple that hosts Stevens in their home in a village called Moscombe after his car runs out of gas.

George Andrews – A villager in Moscombe and friend of the Taylors who is impressed by Stevens.

Trevor Morgan – Another Moscombe villager and friend of the Taylors.

Mr. Harry Smith – Also a resident of Moscombe, Mr. Smith is

involved in local politics and believes fiercely in democratic action and the involvement of British citizens in their national affairs. He provokes some contemplation by Stevens on the nature of dignity.

Mrs. Smith – Mr. Smith's wife, who is quite impressed by Stevens.

Dr. Carlisle – The local doctor in Moscombe, who moved to the village as an idealistic socialist, but who seems to have lost those views.

Mr. Spencer – A gentleman who, as a visitor to Darlington Hall, asks Stevens a number of questions about specific political news, with the intent of showing his companion that it is useless to expect intelligent political opinions from people of lower classes.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

DIGNITY AND GREATNESS

Although Stevens has, by his own account, spent his life attempting to embody dignity, he also spends much of the novel pondering what precisely that means. To be a great butler, in Stevens's terms, is to have dignity, but there is never one single definition of dignity given: instead, Stevens offers a number of examples and anecdotes as he feels his way towards an understanding of how he has structured his own life.

Stevens's father is offered as one model of dignity. He is utterly committed to his work and refuses to allow personal affairs to get in the way of his professional requirements: even when he collapses while pushing a trolley, an event that will lead to his death, he continues attempting to push it from the floor. Stevens adopts this mode of discretion and professionalism, which he doesn't link to the status of a credentialed expert (in fact, he's skeptical of this definition), but rather to the necessity of following the duties of one's position. Calmness, tact, and circumspection are especially important for a butler, who is meant to act as if invisible in the presence of employers: Stevens sometimes reflects on the need to balance a sense of constant availability with invisibility, especially when he's serving only Lord Darlington and a friend in the massive dining room, for instance.

Towards the end of the novel, Harry Smith proposes another definition of dignity: that dignity is inherent to every British citizen, who—as a member of a democracy—has both the privilege and the right to contribute to the country's progress. Stevens thinks that Smith is overly idealistic—another aspect of dignity, in Stevens's view, is precisely that it needs to be attached to specific circumstances and positions. He obviously doesn't think that a butler cannot have dignity and pride, but it is a specific kind of dignity—one that can and should be distinguished from the dignity attached to someone like Lord Darlington. Indeed, much of Stevens's sense of dignity has to do with the moral status of his employer. He constantly insists on Lord Darlington's morals, although he sometimes seems to collapse his employer's ethics with the external, social qualities of being a "gentleman."

Stevens and Ishiguro both show a certain insecurity throughout the novel as to whether dignity is helpful, or conversely, whether it can be harmful and even dangerous. The same coolness and detachment that Stevens has learned to embody from his father makes him unable to attend to his father at his deathbed, or to express vulnerability to Miss Kenton. Lord Darlington's dignity, meanwhile, comes to seem more suspicious in light of his earnest belief that Britain and Germany can just "work things out" like two gentlemen having an argument at a dinner party. As the senator Mr. Lewis warns during the international conference, this belief in the inherent dignity of people—and especially in the relevance of personal dignity in international politics—is naïve and may well prove devastating to European politics. On the other hand, Stevens himself, when faced with Harry Smith's definition of dignity, comes to express uncertainty as to whether or not dignity should be democratic. Even if he ultimately insists that Smith is wrong, Stevens's own uncertainty signals the ambiguous role that dignity plays throughout the novel, as something to aspire to but also in many ways a relic of a past in which "great" countries were ruled like gentelmen's clubs. The novel treats Stevens's view of dignity as admirable, in some senses, but also as tragically limited, in ways that Stevens largely—though not entirely—remains unable to see.

HISTORY, RETROSPECTION AND REGRET

It is difficult to tell where Stevens's professional commitment to discretion ends, and where the trouble he has with expressing his feelings in a private setting begins. Regardless of their origin, his shyness and social awkwardness become a source of regret as Stevens looks back on his life throughout the novel, and much of his regret has to do with things that went unsaid and events that could have gone otherwise—although how they could have, given the rigidness of his character, remains in doubt.

The retrospective, flashback-heavy structure of *The Remains of the Day* makes it well-suited to such questions of regret stemming from contemplation of the past. In the present time of the novel, Stevens is driving to see Miss Kenton, whom he

hasn't seen in many years, but he is also recalling a number of events related to her, and related to their lives at Darlington Hall more generally. Many of Stevens's regrets have to do with his relationship to Miss Kenton; only at the end of the novel is it mentioned explicitly that she would have liked to marry him, but this has been clear long before, though the extent to which Stevens knew this, or understood even subconsciously, remains ambiguous.

This ambiguity is key to the novel's ideas about a person's relationship to the past. All past events in *The Remains of the Day* are told in flashbacks from an unreliable narrator who tends to tell a convenient story and then only partially correct himself. As a result, it's unclear what Stevens really understands or knows about his own past. Does he know that he loves Miss Kenton, for example, or has he repressed this even from himself? And, more to the point, is Stevens's extreme repression emblematic of a more general tendency for memory to be provisional, partial, and malleable? The novel implies that the answer to the latter question is yes, in no small part because a person's life is not just difficult to understand in retrospect—it's impossible to understand as it happens in the present, too, and so memory will always be cobbled together and partially invented. When Stevens relates how he responded to the news of the death of Miss Kenton's aunt, for instance, it is obvious that his actions were deeply hurtful to her. But Stevens struggled to understand that at the time, and thus, even in retrospect, he is unable to see how he might have acted differently.

These questions take on larger importance as the vagaries of personal memory become inextricable from the larger movements of history; Stevens's troublesome reflections encompass not only on his own memories, but also historical events that led to Britain's role in World War II. Stevens is unable to admit—at the time, or in retrospect—that his employer's political dealings aided the Nazis. Likewise, many important politicians and aristocrats in England failed to truly see what was happening before their eyes as Nazi Germany rose to power. The novel suggests that one of the pitfalls of memory and history is the tendency to impose a coherence and inevitability onto events that did not exist when they were unfolding—to look back, that is, on the events leading up to World War II and assume that the war "had" to happen. At the same time, though, the novel can also be understand as a damning indictment of the naïveté and historical blindness of key factors in British history: a blindness only enabled by the ways in which wealthy Englishmen lived, cloistered away on their ancient estates. By linking Stevens's personal retrospection to the political one, the novel explores the ways in which telling a story can both clarify what was at stake, and also show how impossible it is to recognize this without the benefit of hindsight.

CLASS DIFFERENCE AND SOCIAL CHANGE

The world of English mansions, lords and ladies, butlers and maids, still exists at the time at which the novel takes place, but it's a dying world. Indeed, Darlington Hall is emblematic of one shift that has taken place, as Englishmen still with titles but with their money gone have been forced to sell their estates to rich Americans like Stevens's new employer. The acute awareness of social class and class difference that Stevens evinces in his narrative, and in the way he and the other servants act in the flashback scenes, thus coexists with a sense that those differences are now eroding.

For Stevens, it is a given that, as his father was a butler, he will be one as well, just as the generations of Darlingtons have maintained their social and class status. Stevens doesn't question that his employer has so much more money, power, and comfort than he does; Stevens considers it a fact of life. Within the strict social hierarchy, from aristocracy down to the servant class, there can also be subtler differentiation, such as between a footman and a butler, or between an under-butler and a housekeeper; it's the latter that causes the first major disagreement between Stevens and Miss Kenton, who takes issue at being asked to address Stevens's father formally despite the higher status of her position. This world is clear, ordered, and (to Stevens's mind) sensible, even while it is also rigid and leaves little room for social mobility. After the war, however, it is clear that such hierarchies are shifting. Stevens is often treated as a relic of a former time by other people he encounters. He's even considered a "gentleman" by some people, a term that would normally be reserved for someone of Lord Darlington's social status.

Part of the novel's pathos lies in showing how social mobility and change, which is usually thought of as positive and progressive, can also be disruptive and frightening. This is the case even for someone like Stevens who would presumably benefit from being able to adopt a new way of life, but who is afraid to be overwhelmed by the new social realities that are approaching just as his own career is winding down.

POLITICS AND LOYALTY

The Remains of the Day is a deeply personal account of Stevens's life that is staged alongside the histories of Great Britain and Europe in the years preceding and following World War II. Just as Stevens sometimes recalls his personal memories incorrectly to preserve a narrative to which he is attached, his staunch loyalty to Lord Darlington reveals a disjuncture between Stevens's own characterization of certain political events and how those events appear to anyone who knows the broader political history of the time.

From the beginning, Stevens acknowledges that the reputation of Lord Darlington has suffered—if not been destroyed—following the war. It slowly becomes clear that Lord Darlington spent much of the 1930s attempting to promote cooperation and good feeling between England and Germany under the Nazis. From Stevens's account, this attempt was entirely benign, evidence of Lord Darlington's character as a gentleman who truly believed that polite conversation over dinner could solve any disagreement. Yet Lord Darlington's assurances that Nazi atrocities were a "misunderstanding" are at best naïve and at worst actively harmful, and Stevens's insistence that Lord Darlington was never anti-Semitic—while still recounting Darlington's explicitly anti-Semitic comments and acts—comes to seem similarly troubling. Because he is so loyal to Lord Darlington, Stevens himself contributes to this norm by firing two Jewish maids under his employer's orders. While he's uncomfortable with this action, he never questions whether or not he should follow the order, and he's shocked that Miss Kenton would think of disobeying on moral grounds. One's own beliefs and opinions, he thinks, should never get away from the only ethical requirement he finds worth following: that of fidelity.

There is a parallel between the personal and the political that is constructed throughout the book, in the argument that it is always easier to understand the truth in retrospect rather than in the process of living. But there is also an unmistakable difference between Stevens's misunderstandings, and the choices that the wealthy aristocrats around Lord Darlington made (whether actively malicious or simply misguided)—a difference that turns on the power that these men continued to wield at a perilous time in British politics. Only gradually does Stevens begin to wonder if the fierce loyalty he showed to Darlington was correct. At the same time, Stevens is rather quick to forgive Lord Darlington for his own political choices. Even if Darlington chose a certain political path of collaboration with true evil, Stevens ends up blaming himself, not necessarily for helping Darlington do so, but for failing to make his *own* decisions and his own mistakes. It's unquestioned loyalty more than politics that Stevens begins only belatedly to question—and only fleetingly, as he almost immediately returns to thoughts of how to be loyal to his new boss, Mr. Farraday.

AUTHENTICITY, PERFORMANCE, AND SELF-DECEPTION

Stevens thinks of his identity as a butler as his full, authentic self. But there is also a deeply performative aspect to his role as a servant at Darlington Hall, as well as to the roles of the other employees at the estate. The novel examines how performance and authenticity are not, in fact, always in opposition: indeed, Stevens is an extreme case of the notion that performing a certain self can lead to becoming that person.

The performances required to maintain formality and dignity in the aristocratic household lead to some of the few moments of humor in an otherwise nostalgic, even tragic novel. For example, when Stevens is asked to instruct Lord Darlington's godson in the facts of sex, he struggles to figure out how to do so while continuing to perform his regular duties of discretion and dignity. Other servants, like Miss Kenton, tend to think of their duties more as performances than as identities; that is, they can turn off their work behaviors once they are alone or away from the extravagant public spaces of the house. The duties they perform are not their "real" selves.

In some ways, Stevens's view is more "authentic," in that he cannot be one person in some situations and another person in others. But while that might mean he is always his real self, it might also mean that he is deceiving himself by always performing—and, more troubling, that he cannot tell the difference between the two. Miss Kenton, in particular, strives to unmask Stevens's prim, proper exterior, yearning to connect with him on a deeper level. At certain points, Stevens, too, seems to want the same thing. But his difficulty in communicating with Miss Kenton ultimately seems to stem from the fact that the only way he knows how to act (or to be at all) is through the performance of his professional role.

Stevens continues his performance even to the reader. Although the novel is structured as a diary, Stevens often addresses the reader as "you," as if asking the reader to confirm the way he views his own past and the conclusions he's drawn from it. This narrative choice allows Stevens to avoid confronting his memories alone, on their own terms, as he seems to prefer to address the past in the presence of an audience, which indicates a troubling insecurity. Even when Stevens remains within a first-person narration, he toggles between self-knowledge and self-deception. Stevens sometimes relates a memory through his own eyes, inviting the reader to believe him, but then later acknowledges that things actually happened differently. Without an "objective" source other than the narrator, it's difficult to know how much to take Stevens at his word, even though he seems to yearn for greater honesty over the course of the novel. This yearning—and his difficulty in fulfilling it—seems damning to the role he has played for so many years, implying that it has irrevocably shaped him into someone unable to confront (or even identify) reality and without a deeply-rooted self.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

BANTER

As Stevens grows accustomed to Mr. Farraday, his new American employer, he finds himself needing to address what he sees as the new requirements of his position. Mr. Farraday is much more informal than Lord Darlington, and he tries to banter casually with Stevens, who is taken aback. Banter thus begins to take on a special importance to Stevens, as it is emblematic of the way the modern world is shifting. Stevens tries to study banter as one might learn to polish silver—through constant practice. In the novel, Stevens's studiousness about banter has a humorous effect on the reader, though (or perhaps because) Stevens takes his task so seriously. Stevens's anxiety about banter and his inability to adapt to a demeanor that, among foreigners and younger Britons, is perfectly natural signals the way in which Stevens's beloved aristocratic society of great country houses is crumbling around him. In response, he lives increasingly in the past, in the recollections that make up the bulk of the novel. However, at the end of the novel banter presents itself as something that Stevens might be able to learn, which gives him one possible way to face the "remains of the day."

THE ENGLISH LANDSCAPE

The physical journey that Stevens takes in his employer's Ford mirrors the psychological journey he undergoes in returning to his past and knitting together a narrative. Similarly, the landscape that Stevens encounters becomes a confirmation of the way Stevens sees the world, as well as a reminder that his world view—including the reminiscences he pieces together—is constructed through a certain perspective and through certain narrative choices. That is, when Stevens looks out at the English landscape that he encounters during his trip, he doesn't just see a beautiful view. He sees a confirmation of English "greatness"—arguing, indeed, that England's landscape is *more* spectacular than the magnificent vistas elsewhere in the world precisely because it is subtle and modest. This understanding of greatness is closely related to Stevens's understanding of the defining trait of a great butler: the ability to be discreet, private, and unassuming. Indeed, this is a worldview that traditionally defined the English aristocracy, with the values of decency, fair play, and polite gentility promoted above all. There is a certain national pride, then, associated both with these values and with the English landscape. This connection can perhaps clarify the appeal of extreme nationalism in the form of Nazi fascism to people like Lord Darlington, who see nationalism as an extension of proper national pride and tradition. Stevens seems to have internalized this link, and indeed, over the course of the novel the troubling underpinnings of something as benign as landscape become increasingly clear.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Vintage edition of *The Remains of the Day* published in 1990.

Prologue: July 1956 Quotes

> It is quite possible, then, that my employer fully expects me to respond to his bantering in a like manner, and considers my failure to do so a form of negligence. This is, as I say, a matter which has given me much concern.

Related Characters: Mr. Stevens (speaker), Mr. John Farraday

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 16

Explanation and Analysis

Stevens is attempting to describe his relatively new American employer Mr. Farraday, and to explain how he differs from Stevens's former employer, Lord Darlington. Mr. Farraday is far more informal and far less interested in keeping up a certain social distance—one based on inevitable difference of class and status—between himself and his butler. Instead, he jokes and seems at ease with Stevens, who responds with confusion rather than relief.

Part of the humor of this passage lies in the way in which Stevens treats banter—something that's meant to be easy and natural—as a difficult professional task to be mastered. Stevens is uncomfortable in this new post-war world, one that has increasingly little place for rigid class hierarchies and the kind of formal service that he's spent his entire life mastering. But Stevens faces this new set of expectations earnestly, in the only way he knows how: by working on an arsenal of professional skills, which newly include banter, in order to serve his employer as well as possible.

> Such difficulties as these tend to be all the more preoccupying nowadays because one does not have the means to discuss and corroborate views with one's fellow professionals in the way one once did.

Related Characters: Mr. Stevens (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 17

Explanation and Analysis

In continuing to wonder how he might develop the "professional" skill of bantering, Stevens thinks back to an earlier time, when the many guests that came to Lord Darlington's home were accompanied by a full staff. Though he frames his interactions with other staff as an opportunity for professional development, this is an early example of Stevens's reticence (and even repression) when it comes to his own desires—clearly, he misses having a livelier social life, and is lonely working for Farraday with a skeleton staff. However, he is only comfortable acknowledging his personal life and desires when they are framed through a professional lens.

This passage also helps to set up the book's structure as divided into two broad historical moments: before the war and after the war. World War II is, of course, central to this structure, even though it's never directly addressed throughout the novel. Instead, the war's function is to create a historical rift in the parts of society that more directly affect Stevens—in the decline of the service class of butlers and housemaids.

Day One: Evening Quotes

❝ And yet what precisely is this "greatness"? Just where, or in what, does it lie? I am quite aware that it would take a far wiser head than mine to answer such a question, but if I were forced to hazard a guess, I would say that it is the very *lack* of obvious drama or spectacle that sets the beauty of our land apart.

Related Characters: Mr. Stevens (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 28

Explanation and Analysis

During his visit to the English countryside, Stevens has the opportunity to reflect on what is so appealing to him about these views, as well as what that might say about the country he's proud to call his own. Here, Stevens contrasts the view of the English landscape to landscapes from other countries, of "Asia and Africa," for instance, which he's seen in *National Geographic* magazines and which are more obviously spectacular. Stevens's insistence that, in fact, the lack of such magnificence is precisely what makes England *more* beautiful might easily come off as pompous or hopelessly contrarian. He seems blithely confident in twisting the facts in order to support his own nationalistic views.

At the same time, however, it is important that Stevens associates greatness with discretion and subtlety. These qualities are also values that he holds as a butler, and which he associates with gentlemanly behavior. It's apparent even in his wording of his claim—he ventures his opinion only after discrediting himself as unworthy of reflecting definitively on the matter. For Stevens, then, there is a continuum between the landscape and its inhabitants, between England as a space and the English as a people. As he recognizes the demise of the social milieu of the aristocratic gentlemen like Lord Darlington whom he's long served, Stevens tries to insist on this social world's longevity by linking it to the landscape, which is far more long-lasting.

❝ And now let me posit this: "dignity" has to do crucially with a butler's ability not to abandon the professional being he inhabits. Lesser butlers will abandon their professional being for the private one at the least provocation. For such persons, being a butler is like playing some pantomime role; a small push, a slight stumble, and the façade will drop to reveal the actor underneath. The great butlers are great by virtue of their ability to inhabit their professional role and inhabit it to the utmost. […] They wear their professionalism as a decent gentleman will wear his suit: he will not let ruffians or circumstance tear it off him in the public gaze; he will discard it when, and only when, he wills to do so, and this will invariably be when he is entirely alone.

Related Characters: Mr. Stevens (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 42-43

Explanation and Analysis

Stevens has asked himself what dignity means, which is hardly a new question for him, since he and other butlers have debated it for decades. Here he relates dignity to professionalism. In a complex extended metaphor, Stevens makes two comparisons: one between being a butler and playing a pantomime part, and the other between being a butler and wearing a comfortable suit. In the first case, he claims, there is something unnatural and artificial about "lesser" butlers. Their true self is underneath their mask or

role, and it easily slips off when acting the part becomes too complicated.

Of course, Stevens could also be seen to be playing a role. But he wants to insist that, for him, there's nothing artificial about it. It's significant that Stevens chooses the suit of a "decent gentleman" as his point of comparison: this is the world with which he feels the greatest affinity. It's worth noting, too, that there's a certain sadness in this metaphor. In Stevens's imagination, a gentleman only takes his suit off when utterly alone—this assumes a solitude and lack of intimacy that characterizes Stevens's life, but would not necessarily characterize the lives of the gentlemen he emulates. In this way, Stevens's suit metaphor points to his notion of dignity as being either a cause of or an excuse for his inability to be vulnerable with others.

Day Two: Morning Quotes

❝ Of course, if two members of staff happen to fall in love and decide to marry, it would be churlish to be apportioning blame; but what I find a major irritation are those persons – and housekeepers are particularly guilty here – who have no genuine commitment to the profession and who are essentially going from post to post looking for romance. This sort of person is a blight on good professionalism.

Related Characters: Mr. Stevens (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 51

Explanation and Analysis

Stevens makes an aside while reflecting on the reason for both hiring Miss Kenton and for bringing his father to live in Darlington Hall: the marriage of two members of the staff. Here Stevens makes clear the priorities that have guided his thinking all his life. He firmly places the professional over the personal, seeing little place for something like love or marriage within this hierarchy—at least for people like himself who are part of the service industry. Stevens's high concern for professionalism, of course, has already been made clear, but his particular disdain for people "looking for romance" in this passage seems rather strong. In the context of the rest of the novel, it might be said that there's a certain defensiveness in Stevens's position here. Had things been otherwise, he, too, could potentially have married and left his position. But given the arc of his life, he finds it vital to defend to the utmost his own life trajectory and the values on which it is based.

❝ But now that I think further about it, I am not sure Miss Kenton spoke quite so boldly that day. […] I am not sure she could actually have gone so far as to say things like: "these errors may be trivial in themselves, but you must yourself realize their larger significance." In fact, now that I come to think of it, I have a feeling it may have been Lord Darlington himself who made that particular remark to me that time he called me into his study some two months after that exchange with Miss Kenton outside the billiard room.

Related Characters: Mr. Stevens (speaker), Lord Darlington , Miss Kenton (Mrs. Benn)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 60

Explanation and Analysis

Stevens has been relating a series of anecdotes about clashing with Miss Kenton, mostly on the subject of his father's declining powers. He has concluded by quoting Miss Kenton as claiming that Stevens senior's "trivial" errors add up, altogether, to something more significant. But here, for the first time, Stevens acknowledges that his memory may well be slightly flawed—that it may not have been Miss Kenton at all who said such a thing, but his own employer.

On one hand, this admission underlines the limitations of the first person: Stevens controls the narrative, and what seems to be frank confession might also be limited. In addition, though, this "mistake" suggests that Stevens might have reasons for choosing (even if subconsciously) to remember things in a certain way. Remembering that Miss Kenton, not Darlington, said this about his father allows him to fit that statement into a larger argument, justifying his irritation with Miss Kenton, while also painting Lord Darlington in a more favorable light. Throughout the novel, there is a constant push and pull between frankness, honesty, and dissimulation regarding how Stevens presents his past.

❝ "He is an amateur and international affairs today are no longer for gentleman amateurs. The sooner you here in Europe realize that the better. All you decent, well-meaning gentlemen, let me ask you, have you any idea what sort of place the world is becoming all around you? The days when you could act out of your noble instincts are over. Except of course, you here in Europe don't yet seem to know it."

Related Characters: Mr. Lewis (speaker), Lord Darlington

Related Themes:

Page Number: 102

Explanation and Analysis

It's the end of the unofficial international conference that Lord Darlington has organized with Sir Cardinal in March 1923, and M. Dupont—who, earlier, seemed like he was in cahoots with the American senator, Mr. Lewis—has openly condemned Mr. Lewis's attempts to sway him. In response, Mr. Lewis stands up and presents a toast that belittles Lord Darlington's attempts to deal in international politics. By calling Darlington an amateur, unlike the professional politicians in America, Lewis promotes a different definition of professionalism than Stevens's definition: for Lewis, a professional is not someone who acts with a certain level of dignity, but rather someone who possesses specific credentials and skills, in this case relating to politics.

In light of the rest of the novel, Mr. Lewis's comments seem prescient. Lord Darlington's attempts at noble, gentlemanly cooperation will not only fail; they will come to seem naïve, even dangerous, with the passage of time. In the context of the conference, Mr. Lewis's speech fails to gain traction, but he does diagnose a certain aristocratic over-confidence that will become increasingly out of step with the way international politics is changing.

❝ Even so, if you consider the pressures contingent on me that night, you may not think I delude myself unduly if I go so far as to suggest that I did perhaps display, in the fact of everything, at least in some modest degree a 'dignity' worthy of someone like Mr. Marshall—or come to that, my father. Indeed, why should I deny it? For all its sad associations, whenever I recall that evening today, I find I do so with a large sense of triumph.

Related Characters: William Stevens, senior (Stevens's father)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 110

Explanation and Analysis

Stevens is concluding his reflection on dignity, which detoured into an account of the night of Lord Darlington's conference, also the night of Stevens's father's death. Stevens's father's death is presented here as an object lesson in dignity and professionalism—playing one's part to the utmost without revealing any weakness or personal issues—rather than an emotional experience. Stevens's expression of triumph might seem odd, even troubling, in light of the grief or even perhaps disdain for aristocratic pettiness that one might expect. But while the novel itself has suggested such a critique through this juxtaposition, Stevens cannot imagine feeling anything other than pride in the importance of his employer's actions. The fact that he actually was deeply upset at his father's death—at one point someone remarked that he seemed to be crying—makes Stevens feel even prouder that he was able to fulfill his duties seamlessly.

Day Two: Afternoon Quotes

❝ To us, then, the world was a wheel, revolving with these great houses at the hub, their mighty decisions emanating out to all else, rich and poor, who revolved around them. It was the aspiration of all those of us with professional ambition to work out way as close to this hub as we were each of us capable. For we were, as I say, an idealistic generation for whom the question was not simply one of how well one practiced one's skills, but *to what end* one did so; each of us harboured the desire to make our own small contribution to the creation of a better world, and saw that, as professionals, the surest means of doing so would be to serve the great gentlemen of our times in whose hands civilization had been entrusted.

Related Characters: Mr. Stevens (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 116

Explanation and Analysis

Stevens compares two different conceptions of the world, one of his father's generation and one that he and other butlers in his generation espouse. The earlier generation thought of the world as a ladder which one should climb to ever greater professional success, while men of his age, Stevens argues, were more idealistic in their conception of society as a wheel. Idealism, though, is described in a perhaps unusual way. Stevens's desire to contribute to "the creation of a better world" is, indeed, idealistic, putting progress at the heart of his life and his profession.

But Stevens doesn't think that contributing to human progress has anything to do with his own political or social decisions. Instead, his role is to *enable* those decisions to be made by other people—by the aristocratic "gentlemen" who, he believes, can really change the world. The role of a butler

is thus vital, but only, according to Stevens, in an indirect way, in creating a comfortable, private space for real change to happen. This belief requires absolute loyalty and trust in the decisions of a few important people—it's a politically conservative opinion, even while Stevens does think ordinary people do have a role (just a limited one). Although this belief is tested, over the course of the book and in Stevens's recollections, he never fully sheds it, even while the novel implicitly suggests the limitations of such a view.

❝ Let me say that Lord Darlington was a gentleman of great moral stature—a stature to dwarf most of the persons you will find talking this sort of nonsense about him—and I will readily vouch that he remained that to the last. Nothing could be less accurate than to suggest that I regret my association with such a gentleman. Indeed, you will appreciate that to have served his lordship at Darlington Hall during those years was to come as close to the hub of this world's wheel as one such as I could ever have dreamt.

Related Characters: Mr. Stevens (speaker), Lord Darlington

Related Themes:

Page Number: 126

Explanation and Analysis

Stevens has been forced to reckon with the fact that he's now twice, though without quite meaning to, sought to hide the fact that he used to work for Lord Darlington. In seeking to explain why, he argues that such a response simply allows him to avoid hearing the "nonsense" that's now being said about his former employer. Here as elsewhere in his narrative, Stevens mounts a forthright defense of Lord Darlington, arguing not that he was misguided—as he will come to admit, even if only obliquely later on—but that he was actually a towering moral figure.

By referring once again to the metaphor of the wheel, Stevens again underlines the importance he places in having been at the center of significant international and national affairs. Part of his continued loyalty to Lord Darlington, indeed, lies in the fact that he wants to continue to be able to think about his own past in an unblemished way. But his extended, insistent defense raises the question of what Lord Darlington needs to be defended so stridently. By merely expressing the potential of regret—even while then denying that he feels it—Stevens's words imply that he may not be entirely honest with himself about his own and Lord Darlington's past.

Day Three: Morning Quotes

❝ I had been rather pleased with my witticism when it had first come into my head, and I must confess I was slightly disappointed it had not been better received than it was. I was particularly disappointed, I suppose, because I have been devoting some time and effort over recent months to improving my skill in this very area. That is to say, I have been endeavouring to add this skill to my professional armoury so as to fulfil with confidence all Mr. Farraday's expectations with respect to bantering.

Related Characters: Mr. Stevens (speaker), Mr. John Farraday

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 130

Explanation and Analysis

Stevens has tried out a pun on the other guests at the inn where he is staying, and although they seem friendly, the witticism has fallen somewhat flat. Here Stevens returns to the question of banter, a "skill" that he's been trying to work on in order to best serve Mr. Farraday, his new employer. Once again, there's a comic element here, at the expense of Stevens himself, in his eagerness to consider even something like banter, like casual conversation, only in terms of professional requirements. This passage also underlines how out of place Stevens is in general outside the very specific context of the great English country house. His formal way of speaking, his rigorous professionalism, both make it difficult for him to connect with other people in a modern world where he feels out of place.

❝ And then again, you will hear these same persons talking as though Lord Darlington did something unusual in receiving hospitality from the Nazis on the several trips he made to Germany during those years. […] The fact is, the most established, respected ladies and gentleman were availing themselves of the hospitality of the German leaders, and I can vouch at first hand that the great majority of these persons were returning with nothing but praise and admiration for their hosts. Anyone who implies that Lord Darlington was liaising covertly with a known enemy is just conveniently forgetting the true climate of those times.

Related Characters: Mr. Stevens (speaker), Lord Darlington

Related Themes:

Page Number: 136-137

Explanation and Analysis

This is the first time Stevens says anything specific regarding the reasons why Lord Darlington's reputation has been ruined since the end of the war. He introduces it, though, defensively, beginning by making an explicit comparison between Lord Darlington's behavior and that of all the aristocratic gentlemen and their families of the time. Stevens seems to recognize that any association with the Nazis will sound damning to a postwar public, so he'll need to make Lord Darlington's past seem as palatable as possible in order to justify his own loyalty to and respect for his former employer.

The irony of this passage and others like it is that Stevens insists on historical accuracy, on doing due justice to the standards of the time rather than reading back into the past based on what we know today; but at the same time, his own retrospective narrative molds, presses, and shapes the past according to the trajectory that he wants to lay out. That narrative is often told in a way that's most "convenient" to Stevens—even as Stevens does seem to *want* to be honest, and does grow increasingly frank regarding his narrative.

Day Three: Evening Quotes

"Does it not occur to you, Mr. Stevens, that to dismiss Ruth and Sarah on these grounds would be simply—*wrong*? I will not stand for such things. I will not work in a house in which such things can occur."
"Miss Kenton, I will ask you not to excite yourself and to conduct yourself in a manner befitting your position. This is a very straightforward matter. If his lordship wishes these particular contracts to be discontinued, then there is little more to be said."

Related Characters: Miss Kenton (Mrs. Benn), Mr. Stevens (speaker), Ruth and Sarah

Related Themes:

Page Number: 149

Explanation and Analysis

In this exchange, Stevens is relaying to Miss Kenton the orders he's received from Lord Darlington to dismiss two housemaids, Ruth and Sarah, based on the fact that they're Jewish. Darlington has, according to Stevens, fallen under the sway of Mrs. Barnet, a fiercely anti-Semitic woman associated with a fascist organization in Britain, the "blackshirts." The exchange underlines the different priorities and viewpoints held by Stevens and Miss Kenton regarding the relationship between duty, professionalism, and one's own actions. She immediately objects to the dismissals by recurring to her moral sense, expressing shock and dismay that such decisions could be taken in a household with which she is associated.

Stevens, in turn, says nothing about the morality of the issue. Indeed, he never tells Miss Kenton what he thinks or feels about the order at all. Instead, he uses a simple logic of duty and loyalty: if Lord Darlington wishes something to be done, it must be. He doesn't consider it his place even to wonder if the order is morally right, or what he might have done differently. This lack of independence is quite different from Miss Kenton's stubbornness, even though she too places a high deal of importance on her professional duties. Stevens's commitment never to waver from his loyalty to Darlington, though, even with Miss Kenton, becomes one element of their tragic failure to communicate.

A butler of any quality must be seen to *inhabit* his role, utterly and fully; he cannot be seen casting it aside one moment simply to don it again the next as though it were nothing more than a pantomime costume.

Related Characters: Mr. Stevens (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 169

Explanation and Analysis

Stevens is reflecting not just on what it means to be a butler, here, but on the difference between "great" and lesser butlers. For him, this distinction turns on the success or failure of the performance of professionalism. While a lesser butler might be compared to a pantomime actor, a truly great butler, Stevens argues, wears his role like a gentleman wears a suit—comfortably and with ease, rather than artificially or unnaturally.

Importantly, in both cases there is a certain level of performance at stake. When one is alone, Stevens admits, it's possible to stop performing the role of butler. But he at least is rarely alone, and he spends so much time acting the

part of butler that it becomes difficult for him not to act that way. What might be thought of as an inauthentic performance, that is, becomes for him the most authentic way of being, such that the qualities of being a good butler, including discretion, formality, and a lack of emotional involvement, come to define his character in general.

Naturally—and why should I not admit this—I have occasionally wondered to myself how things might have turned out in the long run had I not been so determined over the issue of our evening meetings; that is to say, had I relented on those several occasions over the weeks that followed when Miss Kenton suggested we reinstitute them. I only speculate over this now because in the light of subsequent events, it could well be argued that in making my decision to end those evening meetings once and for all, I was perhaps not entirely aware of the full implications of what I was doing.

Related Characters: Mr. Stevens (speaker), Miss Kenton (Mrs. Benn)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 175

Explanation and Analysis

Stevens has expressed uncertainty regarding how his nightly meetings with Miss Kenton in the parlour came to an end, but now he acknowledges, or "remembers," what led to their end: after Miss Kenton was distant and moody one evening, he suggested—over her protests—that they stopped meeting. It becomes clear that he only did so out of spite, not quite realizing that their relationship would change irrevocably, and indeed, that this decision may well have led to her eventual marriage and departure from Darlington Hall.

Stevens has, earlier, argued that regret is useless, that one must not live in the past. But here he is more frank and honest in admitting that he's had, if not regrets, then at least thoughts about how he might have acted differently. This passage is also a tacit admission that Stevens did have feelings for Miss Kenton, even if he never or only barely admitted them even to himself. His reflections on his own past, however, can also be understood as a more general statement on the passage of time, on the ways in which certain choices turn out to be irrevocable turning points, even though they seem easily undoable at the time.

There is, after all, a real limit to how much ordinary people can learn and know, and to demand that each and every one of them contribute "strong opinions" to the great debates of the day cannot, surely, be wise. It is, I any case, absurd that anyone should presume to define a person's "dignity" in these terms.

Related Characters: Mr. Stevens (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 194

Explanation and Analysis

Stevens is reflecting on the conversation he's had earlier this evening with Mr. Harry Smith and a number of other villagers in Moscombe, in which the question of dignity came up. Mr. Smith argued that every free citizen in England has proper dignity, and expresses it by involving him- or herself in the political life of the nation. His is a deeply democratic view—one that cuts against the assumptions of someone like Lord Darlington, who was always suspicious of democracy and preferred the idea of a few privileged figures directing the affairs of the masses.

Stevens has internalized such views, even though they imply a sense of suspicion and even disdain for the opinions of "ordinary people" like himself. But, having lived his life steeped in the opinions of his employer, and believing it his duty to remain loyal to Lord Darlington in everything, Stevens does earnestly believe that his own opinion should count for less. His view of dignity, the book invites us to see, is in many ways incompatible with modern ideals of democratic involvement.

Throughout the years I served him, it was he and he alone who weighed up evidence and judged it best to proceed in the way he did, while I simply confined myself, quite properly, to affairs within my own professional realm. And as far as I am concerned, I carried out my duties to the best of my abilities, indeed to a standard which many may consider "first rate." It is hardly my fault if his lordship's life and work have turned out today to look, at best, a sad waste—and it is quite illogical that I should feel any regret or shame on my own account.

Related Characters: Mr. Stevens (speaker), Lord Darlington

Related Themes:

Page Number: 201

Explanation and Analysis

As Stevens continues to reflect on Lord Darlington's decisions and actions throughout the 1920s and 1930s, and his own involvement in them, he relates those recollections to his own belief in duty, dignity, and professionalism. For him, these duties involve internalizing and expressing the viewpoints of his employer to the utmost degree. Part of his professional position, to him, involves lacking any strong opinions of his own—rather, doing everything he can so that his employer's opinions can reach the widest audience possible.

Nonetheless, this is the strongest language Stevens has yet used in characterizing how Darlington's actions now seem, no longer "misguided" but a "sad waste." In insisting that he holds no responsibility for this conception, Stevens continues to maintain his certainty that too much regret or retrospection is unnecessary (ironically, as retrospection takes up almost all of the novel). His repeated claims that he has no reason for regret, nevertheless, seem only to make sense if he feels on some level that such reasons might be justified.

Day Four: Afternoon Quotes

❝ It occurs to me that elsewhere in attempting to gather such recollections, I may well have asserted that this memory derived from the minutes immediately after Miss Kenton's receiving news of her aunt's death; that is to say, the occasion when, having left her to be alone with her grief, I realized out in the corridor that I had not offered her my condolences. But now, having thought further, I believe I may have been a little confused about this matter; that in fact this fragment of memory derives from events that took place on an evening at least a few months after the death of Miss Kenton's aunt.

Related Characters: Mr. Stevens (speaker), Miss Kenton (Mrs. Benn)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 212

Explanation and Analysis

Stevens returns to an anecdote that he has already recounted, one that includes the image of Miss Kenton's parlor door, with his sense that she was crying on the other side of it. This is another instance at which Stevens is forced to modify an earlier part of his narrative. He will go on to relate that this moment took place after Miss Kenton told Stevens she would soon be married, and was hurt and angry by his lack of emotional response to her announcement. As in earlier instances, this shift raises the question of Stevens's reliability as narrator of his own past. It also prompts the question of why Stevens was unwilling, consciously or not, to relate the true source of Miss Kenton's tears—suggesting that he continues to feel strongly about that event, even if he cannot or will not bring himself to explain why.

❝ I remember this American chap, even drunker than I am now, he got up at the dinner table in front of the whole company. And he pointed at his lordship and called him an amateur. Called him a bungling amateur and said he was out of his depth. Well, I have to say, Stevens, that American chap was quite right. It's a fact of life. Today's world is too foul a place for fine and noble instincts.

Related Characters: Mr. Reginald Cardinal (speaker), Lord Darlington , Mr. Stevens

Related Themes:

Page Number: 224

Explanation and Analysis

Mr. Cardinal has paid an impromptu visit to Lord Darlington, who is about to host Lord Halifax and Herr Ribbentrop, in an attempt to promote a visit by the British Prime Minister to Nazi Germany. Frustrated and upset, Mr. Cardinal begins to drink too much, and speaks to Stevens, recalling the conference from March 1923 when Mr. Lewis made a drunken speech of his own. At the time, the senator's speech was openly condemned by the crowd. Now, though, midway through the 1930s, Mr. Cardinal recognizes that Lord Darlington is being manipulated by the Nazis, that he's their "pawn," as he says. He sees the decline of the aristocracy, with all its sense of gentlemanly discussion and "decency" in both private and public, political affairs, as imminent and inevitable—even though Darlington is incapable of seeing so.

Mr. Cardinal wants Stevens to recognize this too; it's somehow important to him that Stevens sees what he sees. Stevens, though, cannot be swayed by Mr. Cardinal; he believes, having internalized Darlington's own views, in those "fine and noble instincts," and cannot imagine a world where they are insufficient and even dangerous to society.

Day Six: Evening Quotes

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's 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's no turning back the clock now. One can't be forever dwelling on what might have been.

Related Characters: Miss Kenton (Mrs. Benn) (speaker), Mr. Stevens

Related Themes:

Page Number: 239

Explanation and Analysis

As his meeting with Miss Kenton comes to a close, Stevens has asked her—with uncharacteristic frankness—if she's really happy, given the desperate-seeming tone of some of her letters. Miss Kenton responds with equal honesty, since, as she reflects, it's quite likely they may never see each other again, or at least for a long time. Here she tells Stevens for the first time that she would have liked to marry him, or at least to imagine a life together with him. Like Stevens, she too seems to live in regret, though Miss Kenton appears to be more honest about her regrets than he is. At the same time, she recognizes that the nature of one's life is that it's impossible to "turn back the clock." In order to have any hope of being happy, she's had to put a limit on such regrets and retrospection. Still, she acknowledges that such limits are not always easy to hold to—that she continues to struggle with them even now.

"Lord Darlington wasn't a bad man. He wasn't a bad man at all. And at least he had the privilege of being able 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 can't even say I made my own mistakes. Really—one has to ask oneself—what dignity is there in that?"

Related Characters: Mr. Stevens (speaker), Lord Darlington

Related Themes:

Page Number: 243

Explanation and Analysis

In a very uncharacteristic manner, Stevens is expressing personal thoughts and concerns—and not just to anyone but to an utter stranger on the pier at Weymouth. For almost the first time, Stevens bespeaks here a level of self-awareness, honesty, and regret for his past actions. Rather than continuing to insist that he shouldn't have regrets, that he couldn't possibly have acted differently, he criticizes himself for having trusted absolutely and followed blindly in another person's wake. His regrets, fundamentally, are about his inability to call even his regrets his own.

At the same time, though, Stevens refuses to give up on his loyalty to Lord Darlington. He doesn't criticize his former employer here—he continues to identify Darlington's actions as brave, even if misguided—but rather condemns his own actions. Stevens clings to the ideal of dignity, and for him the greatest tragedy would be acting in an undignified way—something he worries, now, is the case. In this brief but dramatic, climactic moment, Stevens lifts a veil from the careful construction of his own narrative, wondering if his entire life was meaningless.

After all, what can we ever gain in forever looking back and blaming ourselves if our lives have not turned out quite as we might have wished? The hard reality is, surely, that for the likes of you and I, there is little choice other than to leave our fate, ultimately, in the hands of those great gentlemen at the hub of this world who employ our services.

Related Characters: Mr. Stevens (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 244

Explanation and Analysis

Stevens has just finished relating a final anecdote, a discussion he had with a stranger who happened to sit next to him on a bench at the Weymouth pier. Uncharacteristically, Stevens began to confess personal details to the man, even admitting that while Lord Darlington's mistakes were his own, he can't even claim that he made his own mistakes or can have his own regrets. Here, he ostensibly reflects on the advice that the man gave him; but his conclusions seem somewhat different from what the man actually said, which was that one must keep looking forward rather backward, especially after having

worked for a full lifetime.

Stevens accepts that thought but then returns to the belief that has driven him throughout life—the belief not just that he must live in the present, but that he should put his faith and loyalty in other people, in "great gentlemen." In some ways, it seems like Stevens has learned a great deal about himself over the course of the journey, and the recollections he's immersed himself in throughout the trip—as well as his meeting with Miss Kenton. But this final scene seems to suggest that there will be no great epiphany or change of heart for Stevens; that, instead, he is still a man of prewar, aristocratic Britain, who is unable to shake himself of that identity and everything that goes along with it.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

PROLOGUE: JULY 1956

The narrator, Stevens, resolves to take an "expedition" by himself. He will borrow his employer Mr. Farraday's car and travel from Darlington Hall, where he works, through the **English countryside**. In fact, he acknowledges, it was Mr. Farraday's idea that he take a break while Mr. Farraday returned to his homeland, the United States.

It's clear from the start that the idea of taking a trip for pleasure is a strange one for Stevens. Since the trip is his new American employer's suggestion, the opening already implies changed expectations from the past.

Stevens had been taken aback by this suggestion, and also by Mr. Farraday's remark that butlers like Stevens are always cooped up in these houses. Stevens said he'd seen the best of England within the walls of the house, but his employer didn't seem to understand him.

While Stevens hasn't traveled, he takes pride in having hosted many great gentlemen at Darlington Hall, men whom he associates closely with the nation overall.

It was the arrival of a letter from Miss Kenton, who used to work at Darlington Hall, that made Stevens begin to reconsider. He acknowledges that he's begun to make a few errors in his duties over the past few months, something that he knows is his fault, even though he's running short on staff.

Throughout the book, Stevens will seem to disclose weaknesses in full honesty, although there is always a push-and-pull between honesty and posturing to which the reader must remain alert.

His errors included one particular incident shortly after Mr. Farraday bought Darlington Hall from the Darlington family, who had owned it for two hundred years. Mr. Farraday was eager to keep on the staff of his predecessor, although there was only a skeleton staff of six that remained through the sale; all but Mrs. Clements left shortly thereafter. Mr. Farraday enlisted Stevens to hire a full new staff, but Stevens had trouble finding more than two young women.

Stevens references a trend that is based in historical reality: after World War II many old aristocratic families had to sell their estates to people who could afford them, often wealthy foreigners. Stevens's troubles in finding a staff reflect the fact that the service industry itself is now dwindling, too.

Mr. Farraday told Stevens to draw up a staff plan, a kind of rota, which he found daunting. He'd once led a team of seventeen at this house, but Stevens admits that there's no use clinging to tradition for its own sake, given that with electricity and modern heating, there's no need for such a large staff. Mr. Farraday also planned to hold few large parties and events of the kind that Lord Darlington had often hosted. Stevens worked long and diligently on the staff plan, finally coming up with a schedule that would allow the most important parts of the house to remain operable.

Ostensibly, Stevens positions himself as someone who can happily look toward the future rather than remain caught up in the past. Yet he can't help but compare his troubles now (having to manage a skeleton staff for a country house that used to over a dozen employees) to the standards from before the war. Stevens is eager, though, to embrace this new challenge as part of his duties.

Stevens claims that while he'd still consider the final product a decent plan, it perhaps did not have the greatest margin of error. He was mindful not to let the three other employees take on too much, with the result that he failed to acknowledge his own limitations, leading to several mistakes (which remain, for now, unnamed). When Miss Kenton wrote a letter, seeming quite nostalgic for Darlington Hall, it occurred to him that it would be obvious for Miss Kenton, with her professionalism and conduct almost impossible to find today, to return to the estate. He could take advantage of Mr. Farraday's offer to call on Miss Kenton during the trip.

Given his use of the reserved, formal style typical of English butlers, Stevens's attempts at frankness often read as humorously out of joint. Stevens, though, takes his responsibilities quite seriously; it seems that he spends most of his time and thought wondering how best to serve his new employer. Even the opportunity for a pleasure trip becomes a way for him to imagine how he might improve the service at Darlington Hall.

Stevens nonetheless continued to muse over the logistics for several days, pondering what the cost might be of accommodation and meals, and what he might wear, as he had no suitable traveling clothes. Finally he calculated that his savings would allow him to afford the trip, and even buy a new suit for the journey: he hopes his reader doesn't think he's vain, but he wishes to be worthy of his position.

This passage helps to sketch in several more aspects of Stevens's character: he is thoughtful and brooding to the point of fastidiousness. He plans and organizes everything down to the last detail, approaching all aspects of his life as he approached the staff plan for his employment.

In order to get a sense of Miss Kenton's new home in her married life, Stevens perused Mrs. Jane Symon's volumes on *The Wonder of England*. Though the books were from the 1930s, Stevens considered them to be far from out of date.

Mrs. Jane Symons's books are an emblem of Stevens's past: they may be out of date, but he feels far more at home in work from that decade.

Stevens was a bit concerned about bringing up the matter of the trip again with Mr. Farraday, even though his employer didn't seem inconsistent. Finally he decided it would be most prudent to approach Mr. Farraday during afternoon tea when he tended not to be engrossed in reading. But Stevens didn't account for the fact that Mr. Farraday appreciates jocular, lighthearted conversation at that time of day. Stevens began to mention the subject of a former housekeeper whom he might like to visit, but then halted, realizing it would be inappropriate to go further: he hadn't even mentioned the topic of adding another person to the staff. Mr. Farraday laughed and teased Stevens about his "lady-friend," deeply embarrassing Stevens.

Stevens is still growing accustomed to the habits and character of his new employer: he is eager to adapt his own attitude to Mr. Farraday's, and to predict in advance how Mr. Farraday might respond or react to any novelty. At the same time, while Stevens doesn't give any credence to Mr. Farraday's teasing, his awkwardness and halting manner are the first intimations that there may be more to his relationship with Miss Kenton than he has expressed.

Stevens acknowledges that such **banter** is perhaps more common between employer and employee in the U.S., and it has certainly characterized Mr. Farraday's attitude toward him, but he's found himself at a loss for how to respond to it, never knowing exactly what is expected of him. His failure to respond properly, he worries, may well mean a shirking of his duties. Once, though, he tried to make a witty remark in response to one of Mr. Farraday's joking questions, and his employer had little idea what he was talking about: only belatedly did Stevens realize he missed the mark.

Stevens chalks up Mr. Farraday's bantering attitude to cultural differences, although it's also implied that banter is something that reflects a new, more modern way of associating between people, one with which Stevens, with his formality, reserve, and politeness, is unfamiliar. His insistence on treating banter as a professional task is also meant to be humorous.

Today, such concerns are a greater issue for Stevens, because he cannot hope to confer with fellow professionals as he used to, especially when visitors would come to stay with Lord Darlington with their staff in tow. On those occasions, the "finest professionals in England" could be found talking late into the night by a fire. Rather than gossip, they discussed the great political affairs also being discussed upstairs, as well as aspects of their vocation. Stevens lists a number of particularly well-known (at least according to him) valet-butlers and their employers, adding that there was a true camaraderie between them.

For Stevens, being a butler is not just a job like any other; it places him into an illustrious profession, one to which he feels a deep sense of belonging. Indeed, service work to him is a "vocation," and the conversations he recalls among other butlers were, he found, just as professional and profound as those sustained by their employers upstairs.

Recently Stevens learned that Sir James Chambers would be visiting Darlington Hall, and he looked forward to seeing Chambers's butler, Mr. Graham, whose company he always enjoyed. But Chambers arrived alone, and Stevens learned, disappointed, that he no longer employed any staff at all.

Another reminder that the world of gentlemen aristocrats and their household staff is ebbing away, and the times when Stevens enjoyed the company and conversation of those like Mr. Graham is past.

Returning from his digression, Stevens continues recounting his request for travel to Mr. Farraday, a request to which the latter promptly agreed. Stevens recognizes that there will be many affairs to attend to before he leaves, but he cannot see any reason why he shouldn't take the trip.

For a relatively short trip to the country, Stevens has spent a great deal of time and energy pondering his plans—lending the narration some humor, to be sure, but also underlining the fastidiousness of his character.

DAY ONE: EVENING

Stevens is lodging in a guest house in Salisbury after his first day of travel, having left Darlington Hall along with Mrs. Clements and the two maids—leaving it empty for the first time this century. At first, he did not feel excitement, perhaps because he was familiar with the area, despite having traveled so little. But then the surroundings became unfamiliar: he was entering new territory, and initially felt a sense of alarm, like he was entering a wilderness.

Stevens underlines once again how strange and different it is to be leaving Darlington Hall, something he's never done for any great length of time. Stevens feels that his very identity is so associated with his place of employment that leaving it causes not just excitement but alarm, as he ventures into the unknown.

Stevens stopped to stretch his legs and he walked up a hill where he saw an old, white-haired man smoking his pipe, sitting on a large stone on the footpath. The man asked if Stevens had fit enough legs to continue up the hill, because there's no better view of the English **landscape**. The man said Stevens would be sorry if he doesn't take that walk, since in a few more years it might be too late.

Throughout Stevens's journey, as well as in his recollections, he will encounter different figures who will suggest to him the importance of acting before it's too late, of preempting any possible regrets—though this make take the form of an oblique hint, or humor, as is the case here.

Later, it would occur to Stevens that the man might have meant this as a **bantering** remark, but he felt that he couldn't offend him, so he continued on. He was happy he did, as he was presented with a magnificent view of rolling fields with hedges, trees, and a church tower in the distance. For the first time he felt anticipation, and a renewed sense of resolve in facing his professional task with Miss Kenton.

No longer does Stevens define banter as a cultural characteristic; he recognizes that this is something that can often define interpersonal relationships, even if he struggles to find his place within those requirements. The English landscape he sees allows him to replace alarm with comfort and anticipation.

Now Stevens finds himself in a modest but clean establishment: the beds have been well made and the basin is clean. In the afternoon he ventures into Salisbury, strolling throughout the charming city and visiting the cathedral, which Mrs. Symons had highly recommended. Still, he finds what remains with him now is not the city sights but the magnificent view of the English countryside. While he admits that other countries may have spectacular scenery, he claims that **English landscapes** possess something special: he felt, that morning, in the presence of greatness.

Stevens can't help himself from judging the establishment where he is lodging according to his own standards as the head of a household himself. Stevens's insistence that the English countryside is more special than other countries' landscapes is related to his particular pride in England and his embrace of "Englishness," which for him is closely connected to human greatness, as well.

Stevens asks what this "greatness" might mean, and suggests (though acknowledging that wiser men might be able to define it better) that it has to do with the lack of spectacle, with a sense of restraint, rather than an obvious demonstrativeness.

Stevens's understanding of English greatness is slightly funny in its stubborn exceptionalism, but it also helps make clear his own character and values.

This question reminds Stevens of a constant debate in his profession, on what makes a great butler—a topic often discussed around the fire at the servants' hall. There was no question *who* the generation's greatest butlers were, but how to define *what* made a great butler was still a difficult question.

The greatness of the English countryside is, as this passage shows, closely connected in Stevens's mind to the greatness of aristocratic gentlemen and the butlers who serve them.

Stevens often had to host employees of various degrees of perception, and he recalls anecdotes about Mr. Jack Neighbours (who was very popular among servants for a time) being swapped frequently at the servants' hall. Stevens notes that Neighbours may have had solid organizational chops, but he was far from a great butler; he was merely on everyone's lips for awhile, before one trend yielded to another. Still, other servants, like Mr. Graham, never stooped to such gossip.

In reflecting on butlers he knew in the past, Stevens seems to be striving to be as objective as possible. Despite this, it's impossible not to see, here, a bit of posturing—perhaps even a slight sense of envy toward someone who was as celebrated as Mr. Neighbours. Stevens's judgment, however, also stems from his own particular definition of greatness.

Returning to the question of what makes a great butler, Stevens is reminded of the Hayes Society as an example of a group that had attempted a definition. The society was influential in the 20s and 30s for only admitting butlers "of the very first rank." It had between ten and thirty members at any time, and was rather secretive, but it did once publish prerequisites for membership in the *Quarterly for the Gentleman's Gentleman*, writing that a butler must be a member of a "distinguished" household, not including those of businessmen or the newly rich. This provoked some controversy, and finally the Society clarified that the applicant had to "be possessed of a dignity in keeping with his position" (Stevens attempts to quote from memory). Though he has his differences with the Society, Stevens finds this to be true.

The Hayes Society serves as a kind of benchmark for Stevens, giving him one possible definition of greatness in reference to which, or even against which, he can define his own. The Hayes Society, in this description, is open about its elitism and adherence to an older sense of class, one that has to do less with income or wealth than with birth and nobility. It's clear that, despite "attempting" to quote the Society's definition from memory, Stevens has in fact entirely internalized that definition of greatness and its association with dignity.

Nonetheless, the question then arises of what dignity entails. Mr. Graham always viewed dignity as something like a woman's beauty—impossible to analyze—while Stevens objected that one could strive to have dignity; it was not a fluke of nature like beauty. He and Mr. Graham never came to any agreement, but their discussions allowed Stevens to better understand his own views.

The disagreement between Stevens and Mr. Graham helps to establish the parameters for a debate that Stevens will take up again and again throughout the novel. Even though he claims to have settled on a particular definition of dignity, this definition nonetheless undergoes a number of shifts.

Stevens proposes that his own father was the embodiment of "dignity." Though he lacked some aspects of being a great butler, like a good accent and general knowledge, Stevens considers these issues to be superficial. Besides, those requirements of eloquence and the like only came to be valued for a later generation, when employers sometimes even had butlers study encyclopedias and then show off their trivial knowledge to visitors.

Stevens insists that his understanding of dignity and greatness is more than superficial qualities masquerading for deeper ones—a difference in emphasis that Stevens links to a generational shift, with later households coming to value the superficial and performative more and more.

Stevens thinks of one anecdote in particular, which his father often repeated over the years: since he didn't often relate anecdotes, Stevens sees this as a kind of critical reflection by his father on his profession. The story was one of a butler who had traveled with his employer to India. One day he came to inspect the dining room and saw a tiger under the table. He calmly went on to the drawing room, whispered in his employer's ear, asking him if he might use the twelve-bore, and a few moments later three gun shots were heard from the other room. When the butler reappeared, he informed his employer that no "discernible traces of the recent occurrence" would be left by dinner. Stevens's father always laughed at that part of the story especially. He always insisted that it was the utmost truth.

While Stevens introduces this anecdote as one of his father's favorites, the story is also helpful in clarifying Stevens's own conception of his profession and of the qualities required of him as a butler. The story's setting, in colonial India, serves as a reminder that what Stevens is nostalgic for—the decades during which he was at the top of his career—were also the final decades of Britain's status as a true global empire, one in which qualities of British greatness, including the discretion and professionalism of its butlers, were equally present all over the empire.

Stevens now sees that his father must have striven for years to become that butler, and he believes that his father succeeded. Once, for instance, a certain Mr. David Charles visited Darlington Hall and told Stevens he'd met his father years earlier at Mr. John Silvers's home, where Stevens's father worked. Mr. Charles had drunk too much in the company of two other guests, and after about an hour these men decided to go for an afternoon drive and enlisted Stevens senior as driver. They began to yell and sing, acting like schoolboys and ordering Stevens senior around, then proceeding to tease and insult him. While Stevens senior remained calm, the men subsequently began gossiping about their host, Mr. Silvers. After one particularly offensive remark, Stevens senior brought the car to a halt, opened the rear door, and stood there in silence. Severe and silent, he unnerved the two men, who immediately felt overcome by guilt. At last one of them muttered an apology. Stevens's father closed the door and got back into the car, where the drive was completed in near silence.

Like the anecdote with the tiger in India, this story—which involves Stevens's father personally—is meant to underline the values of dignity and greatness that Stevens saw in his father, and which he has tried to embody himself. The emphasis in this anecdote, however, is slightly different, hinging on the necessity of loyalty to one's employer. In this case, Stevens senior's acknowledgment of the importance of treating gentlemen in general with dignity and respect clashes with such loyalty; he responds with classic cool and discretion, qualities that, according to Mr. Charles's telling, are powerful enough to chasten the men involved. Stevens sees this as a true triumph of the best values of his profession.

Stevens also remembers another anecdote that makes clear his father's dignity. Stevens's brother was killed in the Southern African War, not gloriously but in an "un-British" attack on civilian Boer settlements, under the direction of a certain general who barely escaped being court-martialed. Ten years later, "the General," as Stevens calls him, was to visit Mr. Silvers's household in his new profession as businessman. The General proved an unpleasant man with unrefined manners, and since his own valet had taken ill, Stevens senior had to swallow his loathing and perform his duties, but he did so well that the General actually complimented Silvers on his service.

In this final anecdote, Stevens also refers to another setting of the British empire, South Africa. While acknowledging some of the atrocities that the British enacted there, he resolves the contradiction between those atrocities and his belief in British greatness by simply identifying the acts as "un-British. The story underlines the value of professionalism above all else, even or especially personal feeling, that Stevens learned from his father. The story also shows Stevens's ability to deceive himself when it's convenient.

Stevens concludes that in these anecdotes the difference between a competent butler like Mr. Neighbours and one of dignity like his father becomes clear: it's the butler's ability to maintain professionalism at all times, rather than abandon his professional being at any provocation. Stevens compares the role of lesser butlers as being like a pantomime: at the slightest push, the façade will drop off, whereas great butlers wear their professionalism like a suit. Stevens tends to believe that true butlers only exist in England, as other races are incapable of such emotional restraint. Mr. Graham might counter that a great butler could thus only be identified through a severe test, but Stevens would respond that after a long time in the profession, one can judge the depth of a butler's greatness. He thinks it's important not to be defeatist and give up on any attempt to analyze or define dignity or greatness: only by thinking deeply about it can one strive towards dignity oneself.

In returning to his initial depiction of Mr. Jack Neighbours, Stevens argues that profound dignity, as opposed to superficial manners, is the marker of a butler's success (though this definition is somewhat ironic, given that Stevens himself seems to perfectly embody such manners). The simile of a pantomime and a suit reflects the ambivalent status of performance in Stevens's conception of a butler's greatness. Perhaps a great butler is one who manages to perform his role best; but it's also implied that a butler actually inhabits his role like a comfortable piece of clothing, which would erase any connotations of inauthenticity from the performance.

DAY TWO: MORNING

Stevens awakens to a morning filled with mist and no one visible from his window. He goes over passages from Miss Kenton's letter, admitting that she has properly been Mrs. Benn for twenty years, but he hasn't seen her since she married. Her letter suggests, too, that her marriage is at an end: she's moved out of Mr. Benn's house. Stevens wonders if the thought of Darlington Hall might be a comfort to her at this tragic time. For Stevens, too, her return would solve a problem—that is, a series of minor, only trivial errors on his part.

This is one of the clearest examples yet of how Stevens in many ways continues to live in the past. Twenty years is a long time to be married, and yet because Stevens continues to think about his former colleague during the time before she left, he can only refer to her as Miss Kenton. Indeed, he even seems to hope that she'll revert to that status.

In one part of the letter Miss Kenton writes, "The rest of my life stretches out as an emptiness before me." But most of the letter is more generally nostalgic, recalling the **landscape** from the second floor of Darlington Hall, for instance. She asks if Stevens remembers standing with her to watch his father walk back and forth outside the house. He too remembers, and he wishes to explain why it has stuck in his mind.

Like Stevens, Miss Kenton seems to enjoy reminiscing about the times they used to spend together at Darlington Hall. The views from the house onto the beautiful English landscape, are, for Stevens, part of the greatness of the place and of its inhabitants.

In the spring of 1922 Stevens had lost his housekeeper and under-butler at the same time when they decided to marry—hardly unexpected, but always a threat to household order, he found. Miss Kenton arrived around the time Stevens's father was left without a position, after Mr. Silvers's death. Stevens thought he would ask him to join the staff at Darlington Hall.

Stevens tends to view personal relationships in terms of their professional implications—something he seems to have done in considering the possibility of Miss Kenton's return to Darlington Hall, as well.

Shortly thereafter, Stevens was sitting in his pantry when Miss Kenton arrived with a vase of flowers, smiling and saying they might brighten his parlor. Taken aback, Stevens said he'd prefer distractions kept to a minimum. While she was there, he added, he asked if she might refrain from calling his father "William," instead addressing him as "Mr. Stevens senior." After a moment, she said that she had always called under-servants by their Christian names and saw no reason to change.

The obvious fondness that Stevens seems to have for Miss Kenton makes this initial memory of her seem out of place, as their relationship apparently began somewhat inauspiciously. Miss Kenton is introduced as cheerful, pleasant, and stubborn, while Stevens comes across as slightly awkward and very formal.

Stevens said this was an understandable mistake, but if she considered it she'd realize it would be inappropriate to talk "down" to someone like his father. Miss Kenton continued to assert that her position was in fact above his, even while Stevens insisted she simply must not have been observing his father—otherwise she'd recognize all she could learn from him. Finally he said that she still had much to learn herself, such as what goes where. Put out, Miss Kenton said this was only normal for her first few days. A little sulkily, she agreed to address Stevens's father by his full title: she refrained, too, from putting more flowers in the pantry.

For all his insistence on decorum and proper duty, Stevens also seems willing to disregard such rules in what seems to him an obvious instance of their insufficiency. Miss Kenton is actually more insistent on adhering to proper behavior, claiming a pride of position that Stevens may have otherwise recognized in himself. Still, the importance she places on doing a good job makes her acquiesce to Stevens's criticisms.

Several weeks later, Miss Kenton came to Stevens in the library and said that he'd left a dust-pan in the hall. After dismissing her, he went into the hall, where it lay conspicuously; Stevens realized that his father had been brushing the hall earlier. His irritation soon turned to Miss Kenton for creating a fuss, rather than to his father for leaving the dust-pan. But a week later, Miss Kenton told him that, although she felt quite uncomfortable drawing attention to staff errors, she'd noticed that several pieces of silver had been laid out in the dining room with polish still on them. Polishing silver was a task in which Stevens senior took great pride.

Although she'd attempted to begin their relationship on good terms, Miss Kenton now stubbornly wishes to make clear to Stevens that she, more than Stevens senior, should be given the respect proper to her position. Stevens doesn't want to face the facts to which Miss Kenton is drawing his attention, facts that would seem to suggest his father's dwindling abilities, but she makes it hard for him not to.

Not long afterward, Miss Kenton alerted Stevens to a misplaced "Chinaman" (porcelain object). Stevens said he was busy and would attend to the question shortly, but Miss Kenton continued to request his attention, finally saying she'd wait outside the billiard room. After busying himself with every task he could think of, Stevens thought about leaving through the French windows, but given the stormy weather he decided to stride out of the room rapidly. He flew past Miss Kenton, who quickly recovered and caught up with him, asking him if the Chinaman was not in the incorrect place. Stevens told her she was being ridiculous, so concerned with trivial errors. The errors add up to larger significance, she said: his father was no longer in possession of his former powers. He shouldn't be allowed to carry large trays—she's noticed his hands trembling as he does so.

While Miss Kenton grows increasingly strident in pointing out to Stevens all the mistakes that his father has evidently been making, Stevens grows more and more irritated and stubborn himself, increasingly unwilling to engage with Miss Kenton or to admit that there might be some truth to her statements. As he relates this anecdote from several decades earlier, he attempts to portray Miss Kenton as needling and unpleasant, as unfair to his father in her eagerness to point out the failings due to his old age—a portrayal that is presented as objective and unquestionable.

As he thinks back on it, though, Stevens now wonders if Miss Kenton really spoke so boldly that day. Now that he thinks of it, it may have been Lord Darlington who made the point about the larger significance of trivial errors, several months later.

Suddenly, the objectivity of this account—not to mention everything that has gone before—is put into question, as Stevens admits a possible mistake in his memory.

Sometimes back then Lord Darlington would pretend to be engrossed in a volume of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* in his study before asking Stevens something—a tactic he usually used when embarrassed, allowing him to look down at the book during the conversation. In later years, the man would be accused of egotism or arrogance concerning his role in great political affairs, but Stevens wishes, on the contrary, to signal his shyness and modesty, as well as his essential moral stature—Stevens is proud to have given his best years of service to Lord Darlington.

This initial portrait of Lord Darlington and the way he tended to interact with Stevens is meant to contrast sharply with the easy, informal attitude that Mr. Farraday espouses. Stevens hopes that this portrait shows, too, just how unfounded later accusations against Darlington's politics are. This is one of the first hints that history has not just caused Stevens's memory to blur, but it has also made many people view the past quite differently.

In this instance, Lord Darlington barely glanced up from his book to ask if Stevens's father had made a full recovery from his fall. If it happened on the lawn, it could take place anywhere, at any time: now that Darlington was hosting ever more significant guests, the risk was only increased. It wasn't a question of dismissing the under-butler, he said, just of reconsidering his duties: the errors might be trivial in themselves, but could have larger significance.

Stevens fills in the surrounding context to the quotation that he'd mistakenly attributed to Miss Kenton instead of Lord Darlington. His correction reveals that Lord Darlington sees his staff as reflections of his own power and influence—as a result, the staff is important to his role in national affairs. This sheds light on the importance Stevens places on his job.

A week earlier, Lord Darlington had been entertaining two guests in the summerhouse and had seen Stevens's father approach across the lawn carrying a tray of refreshments, when he fell and scattered everything he was carrying across the grass. By the time Stevens hurried outside, his father was unconscious, laid out by the guests and Darlington on his side. He revived not long before Dr. Meredith arrived, but was deeply embarrassed.

Lord Darlington is evidently embarrassed about asking Stevens to reconsider his father's duties, and this embarrassment is, in part, due to the way Stevens senior's collapse makes him look. Stevens's father, though, is perfectly aware of the need for discretion in his profession and is just as embarrassed.

Over the years, Stevens and his father had come to have fewer and fewer conversations—he was never sure why—so the task of relaying Darlington's request was a tricky one. Finally he judged the best option to be speaking privately to his father in his room.

While Stevens has claimed great admiration for his father, the same traits of discretion and tact he's learned from him have also impacted their personal relationship.

Stevens found his father shaving, and he asked politely if his father wasn't being troubled by his arthritis; his father coldly said that he'd been up for hours already. Stevens said he had something to tell his father, who asked him to be brief. So he told his father that the duties of an under-butler were now beyond his capacities; he'd compromised the household's smooth running, and thus the approaching international gathering. His lordship asked that he not wait at table, with or without guests. His father responded calmly that he'd waited at table every day for the last 54 years, but Stevens simply continued, showing his father a list of tasks he'd now be expected to perform instead.

The relationship between Stevens and his father that is depicted here seems to be one of two professionals far more than a father and son. Like his son—who seems to have learned this demeanor from his father—Stevens senior is careful to show little emotion. But his response reveals a pride in his work and an inability to imagine his own identity outside the tasks he's always completed for his employers.

Stevens's father betrayed no sense of emotion, but said he'd only fallen once because of the crooked steps: Seamus (another servant) should be told to put them right, he said. Stevens responded, "Indeed," and left shortly after. The summer evening mentioned by Miss Kenton in her letter was not long thereafter: now Stevens recalls her figure silhouetted against the window. She was no doubt feeling a sense of guilt, he thinks.

While continuing to remain calm and unfussed, Stevens senior is still obviously unhappy with what his son has ordered. Although Stevens has now admitted that it was Darlington, not Miss Kenton, who made the earlier statement, he wants to blame her rather than his employer.

Stevens knows he'll regret it if he wastes his entire trip wrapped up in such memories, so he wishes to record something of his journey to Salisbury. He'd avoided the major roads, and had been pleased with the **landscape** views. As he approached the city, he had to halt in the middle of the road, as a hen meandered across. It stopped in front of the car, and, exasperated, Stevens began to get out when he heard a woman's voice. A woman in an apron ran down from a farm cottage and thanked him for not running "poor Nellie" over. A few years earlier a tortoise of theirs had been killed on this very spot; Stevens said somberly that that was very tragic.

Again, the idea of regret reemerges, though not in any grand way but rather in the minor context of a trip to the country—a context that nonetheless will come to have great metaphorical significance over the course of the novel. Here Stevens encounters another stranger, not the great English gentlemen whom he is proud of having served at Darlington Hall, but a pleasant inhabitant of the English countryside.

On his way again, Stevens was cheered by the simple kindness of being thanked. Now, though, he wants to correct a possible impression from his earlier story about his father: that he treated his father's declining abilities too bluntly. He had little choice but to approach the matter that way, especially given the important international conference to take place, the first of many to happen at Darlington Hall from March 1923 through the next 15 years. That date, he now thinks, is when he truly came of age as a butler, when he may have attained that quality of dignity.

Now that Stevens feels he's been treated kindly and generously, he's in a more generous frame of mind himself—one that makes him think he needs to better explain why he acted the way he did regarding his own father. At the same time, Stevens is careful to keep justifying his own past behavior rather than express regret or blame himself for anything that happened.

The conference was the result of several years of Lord Darlington's friendship with Herr Karl-Heinz Bremann, a former German officer, who returned many times to Darlington Hall, though looking increasingly impoverished and haunted each time. Darlington had been to Berlin several times beginning in 1920, and returned somber, telling Stevens it was a disgrace to treat a defeated enemy in such a way.

Lord Darlington had, like many Britons, fought against the Germans in World War I, but for him the "gentlemanly" attitude was to treat one's enemy kindly after defeat. Darlington's disapproval refers to the Versailles Treaty, which required harsh reparations from Germany and other difficult concessions in the wake of its defeat.

On one winter's night, Darlington was dining with only one guest—for some reason, they dined in the vast banquet hall, rather than the intimate dining room. Stevens notes that it is difficult to be attentive while providing an illusion of absence when there are just two diners. This time he opted to stay in the shadows. He heard Darlington talk about Herr Bremann, saying he was his enemy but always acted like a gentleman. Darlington had promised they wouldn't be enemies after the war, but this treaty, he said, was making that impossible. Now Stevens feels pleased to recall such heartfelt words, especially given the later foolish talk about his former employer.

Stevens is acutely attuned to the requirements of his position, the careful balance he always needs to strike between remaining available for anything his employer might need, and allowing natural conversation to occur without it seeming like someone is eavesdropping on him. Stevens again alludes to the later fall in Lord Darlington's reputation, using this opportunity to insist on the respectable moral stature of the man.

Not long afterward, it was learned that Herr Bremann had shot and killed himself. In the following weeks, Lord Darlington, distraught, began to devote a great deal of time to the crisis in Germany, inviting great gentlemen to the house, including Maynard Keynes and H.G. Wells, as well as many who came "off the record" and thus whom Stevens cannot mention. He takes pride in the fact that he was privy to many private conversations, and Darlington always told his guests they could say anything in front of Stevens.

Lord Darlington clearly sees a link between Bremann's suicide and the harsh reparations and other conditions of the Versailles Treaty, conditions he considers ungentlemanly. Keynes and Wells are both historical figures, one an economist and another a writer, and Stevens clearly takes pride in the illustrious guest list.

Over the years, Darlington and his friend Sir David Cardinal gathered a group of people convinced that the situation in Germany shouldn't go on, people from Britain and Germany, but also from Belgium, France, Italy, and so on—from diplomats to clergymen and retired officers and thinkers. By 1922, Darlington was committed to gathering the most influential of these men together for an "unofficial" international conference to discuss how to repeal the harshest terms of the Treaty of Versailles, a conference that might have a decisive effect on the "official" ones.

Lord Darlington, motivated for personal reasons to lobby against harsh treatment of Germany, also possesses a good deal of power, despite not being involved in British politics in any kind of official way. He accepts such influence as natural, given his status as a gentleman from an old family, and he seems to take it for granted that a group of similar gentlemen could have great influence on world affairs.

Darlington once confided in Stevens that it was the Frenchmen who proved most intransigent, but that he needed at least one influential French gentleman to be present at Darlington Hall. Finally they secured the attendance of one, whom Stevens dubs "M. Dupont."

Stevens again seems to take great pride in having been a confidant to Lord Darlington, privy to important affairs and able to be trusted with significant information.

Stevens also found pressure on his own responsibilities mounting, aware that it was of vital importance for the guests, 18 gentlemen and two ladies (with all their own staff), to be comfortable. The staff would have to be both diligent and flexible. Stevens set out preparations like a general preparing for battle, with special schedules, contingency plans, and even a military-style pep talk to the staff. Thus, he hopes it will be understood that his father's fall allowed little room for "beating around the bush." And his father did find a way to accomplish as much as he could, pushing around a trolley laden with everything he needed.

In comparing himself and his own preparations to that of a general before battle, Stevens positions himself as a vital cog in the diplomatic machine. He also seeks to justify what may, he now acknowledges, seem like undue coolness toward his father. Indeed, Stevens implies that he's learned such a sense of professionalism from his father, who can't bear to stop working, and instead finds any way he can to continue.

The tension was also noticeable with Miss Kenton. Once, during the preparations, Stevens came upon her in the dark backroom corridor, and reminded her of the bed linen that needed preparation. She told him it was perfectly under control. He was about to continue, when she added angrily that she has barely a moment to spare, and if she had as much spare time as he evidently did, she'd wander around reminding him of tasks he was already on top of. Stevens protested, but she asked him not to follow and pester her: in fact, she added, stomping away, she'd prefer he not speak directly to her at all, communicating via written note or through a staff member.

The way Stevens tells this story, he remains calm and unperturbed, while she is senselessly angry and moody. These are, indeed, elements to Miss Kenton's character, though she seems particularly irritable here. Nonetheless, an anecdote like this one makes clear the limitations of the first-person narration, as Stevens fails to identify why Miss Kenton reacts the way she does, leaving her motivations a mystery to the reader as well.

Stevens was irritated but had little time to devote to thinking about it. As the first guests began to arrive, he gained a sense of the mood: he overheard someone saying that the fate of Europe could hang on the ability to bring M. Dupont around on a certain point.

Stevens is easily distracted from Miss Kenton's mood by his sense that he is in the midst of important events upstairs, events that require his service.

During these preliminaries, Stevens recalls, Darlington entrusted him with a particularly unusual task. Calling him over, engrossed in a *Who's Who* volume, he apologized for interrupting Stevens, but mentioned that he was godfather to Sir David's son, Reginald, who was engaged to be married. Sir David had asked Darlington to communicate the "facts of life" to his son. He was far too busy to do so, Darlington said, staring at his book. Stevens asked if his employer wished *him* to convey these facts; this being the case, he said he'd do his best.

In the midst of the anticipation around the "fate of Europe," there is also a lighter side to Stevens's duties during this conference. The formality between Lord Darlington and Stevens is such that Lord Darlington can barely bring himself to articulate what he'd like to ask. The request underlines just how far service was expected to extend in these aristocratic households.

Though taken aback, Stevens resolved to settle the matter as early as possible. An hour later he noticed young Mr. Cardinal alone in the library, so he approached him and announced he had a message. He began by saying that ladies and gentlemen differ in a few key respects. Mr. Cardinal sighed and said he was only too aware of that; he'd been doing reading and background on that very topic for a month. He wished Stevens would reassure his father of this. Unless, he added, his father had come up with an entirely new factor—something on the Dupont fellow, for instance. Suddenly Stevens realized that he'd made no progress, but before he could re-broach the topic, Mr. Cardinal announced he needed some air, and left.

Mr. Cardinal seems entirely oblivious to the reason that Stevens has approached him—understandably so, as Stevens approaches the matter from the most oblique side possible. At first, Stevens interprets Mr. Cardinal's response as suggesting that Mr. Cardinal has approached his upcoming marriage with the same kind of dutiful responsibility with which Stevens has approached banter, but it soon becomes clear that they are speaking at cross-purposes.

Stevens was delayed in his task by the arrival of an American senator, Mr. Lewis. As he arrived Stevens happened to encounter Miss Kenton in the back corridor; asking her who had just arrived, she hurried past, telling him to send a message if it was urgent. Though annoyed, Stevens had to hurry upstairs. He remembers Mr. Lewis as congenial and informal. His announcement at dinner that the US would always stand on the side of justice, and wouldn't mind admitting mistakes were made at Versailles, seemed to cheer the group.

Once again, Stevens encounters Miss Kenton only to find her irritated and angry at him, and he finds it easier to turn back to his "upstairs" requirements. Stevens recalls Mr. Lewis in terms of cultural difference, characterizing him as more informal than the Europeans he's used to serving.

At one point, though, Mr. Lewis told the group that Dupont hates Germans with a depth they'd find it hard to understand. While Darlington said that the English also fought the Germans long and hard, Lewis added that the French see the Germans as having destroyed civilization in Europe, and he wondered why the English didn't see it that way. Stevens thinks now that he began then to see something perhaps duplicitous in the Mr. Lewis's smile. But Darlington didn't see it, only responding that the English found the French attitude increasingly despicable; Lewis seemed satisfied by this answer.

Lewis seems to consider himself, as an outsider, as having a privileged viewpoint on the internal conflicts of European states. Looking back onto the events that he's now narrating, with the benefit of hindsight, Stevens suggests that he did in fact see something coming, even if Darlington—who believes strongly in good manners and gentlemanly sportsmanship—cannot.

More people began to arrive, including an Italian gentleman with two bodyguards. As the house filled, a tense atmosphere began to pervade it. At one relatively calm moment Stevens spotted the young Mr. Cardinal strolling outside and resolved to try again with his task: if he concealed himself behind a large bush beside the path, he'd seem to come across Mr. Cardinal naturally. Unfortunately, he failed to properly judge his timing, and sprang out too quickly, frightening the young man. Still, Stevens barged ahead, asking Mr. Cardinal to notice the geese nearby, as well as the flowers and shrubs, which undergo a special change in springtime.

Throughout his recollections of the high-stakes conference, Stevens also intersperses details from this subplot, which injects a bit of humor into the drama (even if Stevens doesn't seem to mean this part of the story to be funny). Stevens's difficulty in getting across the proper message to Mr. Cardinal reflects a disconnect between the reserved, fastidious nature of his professional attitude and the intimate topic he's expected to broach.

Mr. Cardinal responded that he hadn't had much time to appreciate the surroundings, and now M. Dupont had arrived in a horrible mood. Surprised, Stevens said he must hurry off, though he had more to say on the "glories of nature" to Mr. Cardinal later.

Once again Steven has failed to fulfill the "duty" that Lord Darlington has assigned him, giving it up with apparent relief at the sign of a more important responsibility.

M. Dupont was tall and elegant, with a monocle, wearing the kind of costume reserved for gentlemen on holiday; indeed, he'd maintain the appearance of having come to Darlington Hall for pleasure. He was in a foul mood, but cheered up upon seeing Mr. Lewis. Their constant close proximity proved inconvenient to Lord Darlington, who was unable to speak to the Frenchman privately.

Immediately upon M. Dupont's arrival, it comes to be more understandable why Mr. Lewis had presumed to speak so confidently of the French attitude to Germans, given his friendship with M. Dupont—a friendship that proves inconvenient amid the studious casualness of the conference.

The conference began in the drawing room, suitable to the "off the record" nature, such that everyone could feign that the visit was a mere social event. Stevens had to enter and exit frequently, but he recalls Lord Darlington's opening speech emphasizing the great suffering undergone by Germany, and calling for a freezing of reparation payments and withdrawal of French troops from the Ruhr region.

Hosting an unofficial conference has both benefits—a greater intimacy, not to mention comfort of an aristocratic country house—and drawbacks, given the mismatch between the serious diplomatic affairs being discussed and the private social setting.

M. Dupont remained sullen and silent. At one point he stood and followed Stevens, asking him to change the bandages on his feet, which had developed sores from walking around London. Stevens left Dupont in the billiard room awaiting a nurse when a footman hurried over to inform Stevens that his father had taken ill upstairs. Stevens hurried upstairs to find his father on one knee, attempting with all his strength to push the trolley, which remained immobile. Stevens went to his father, whose eyes were closed and face ashen, and eased him to the carpet.

With his father falling ill, the true challenge of this evening will begin, as Stevens will have to juggle his personal and professional responsibilities, and maintain his cool all the while. His father's struggle to keep pushing the trolley—to keep working—despite his great pain only highlights how inextricable his identity is from his profession, a connection that Stevens has adopted too.

After Stevens's father was transported to his room, Stevens wasn't sure what to do: there wasn't a moment to spare. Miss Kenton appeared, then, and said she could attend to his father and show Dr. Meredith up. Stevens thanked her and left, busying himself with serving the guests. As he left the drawing room with an empty teapot, Miss Kenton told him that Dr. Meredith was just leaving: Stevens found the doctor, who said he should be called immediately if Stevens senior deteriorated.

Although Stevens recognizes his duty as a son, he is torn between that duty and his responsibility to his employer. Although Miss Kenton was, earlier, eager to point out Stevens senior's shortcomings in his tasks, she now shows obvious compassion in stepping in to watch over Stevens senior.

That evening, Stevens overheard a conversation between Mr. Lewis and M. Dupont; he'd gone to the latter's room and waited a second at the door before knocking—an action in which, he insists, no subterfuge is implied, since it merely avoids knocking at an inopportune moment. Stevens could barely hear what was said, but recognized a covert tone to Lewis's voice. He heard Lewis tell Dupont that the latter was being manipulated by his lordship, that he'd been deliberately invited late to enable the others to discuss important topics in his absence. Lewis also reported that at the first dinner, the Britons had actually called Frenchmen "despicable," remarking that this was undue behavior for an ally.

Stevens is eager to make clear that he overheard this conversation not because he was spying at the keyhole, but because a central part of his profession involves discretion, which requires always staying one step ahead of the people Stevens is serving. In this case, though, what Stevens overhears allows him to feel even more of a close connection to the great events going on around him at Darlington Hall, even if that includes backstabbing and duplicity.

The next day, the discussions seemed to become increasingly heated, though M. Dupont continued to say little. Meanwhile, Stevens's father had grown no better or worse. On the second evening, Stevens senior was asleep when his son visited, but the chambermaid left by Miss Kenton began to shake him awake. Stevens told her to stop, but she said she'd had to promise she'd do so. Awake, Stevens's father asked how everything was going downstairs. Volatile, Stevens answered, but everything was in hand. Stevens repeated several times that he was happy his father was feeling much better, then said he'd have to get back. His father said he hoped he'd been a good father, to which Stevens laughed and repeated what he'd said before. Stevens senior said he was proud of his son, but Stevens said he was very busy and they could talk again in the morning.

Stevens's thoughts, based on the narrative as he's recounting it, are divided here between the important diplomatic affairs and the status of his father. When he does have a conversation with his father, however, it is as stilted and awkward as all their interactions have been. Stevens has evidently been concerned about his father, but he cannot find any way of expressing it other than in stock expressions. This is the first time that his father seems to be yearning toward more honest, forthright discussion, but Stevens senior cannot break through the veneer of formality.

Downstairs, the kitchen was in chaos, but Stevens managed to restore calm by the time dinner was set. He notes that the banquet hall always looked magnificent when set for a full dinner, especially with the glass chandeliers, which were far subtler than the electric ones they've been replaced with.

Once again Stevens speaks of the Darlington Hall of several decades ago with a sense of nostalgia that he can barely contain.

At the end of dinner Darlington rose to speak, expressing his gratitude for the spirit of friendship and unity he'd seen. Having drunk a good deal of wine, he began to reminisce about his good friend Herr Bremann, and began to go off track: Stevens noticed a certain restlessness among the audience, even ill-mannered, by the time Darlington finished his toast.

Unlike the speeches at official, publicized political conferences, this set of speeches shifts from official to social and informal in tone. Stevens may be awkward at times, but he also has a sharp social sense and the ability to read an audience deftly.

As conversation was resuming, M. Dupont rose to his feet, and gave a toast to their host, Darlington. He went on to say that there had been much criticism of his country's foreign policy. He was impressed, though, by certain of the arguments that had been raised, and was convinced by their justice: he assured the audience that he would bring some of his influence to bear on changes to French policy.

M. Dupont's initial statements seem not to acknowledge the conversation that Stevens overheard between him and Mr. Lewis behind closed doors. Here it seems that Lord Darlington's hopes, that polite conversation and gentlemanly attitudes might enact real political change, haven't been in vain.

Then, M. Dupont said he believes in frankness, and that one must openly condemn anyone who has come to abuse the host's hospitality. He accused Mr. Lewis of doing so, and condemned Mr. Lewis's duplicity, even while reassuring the audience that the American administration is generally far more reasonable and that Lewis no longer has much clout.

M. Dupont had appeared to be under the sway of the American senator, but it turns out that he, too, thinks of himself as a gentleman of the old order, one for whom schemes and duplicity have no place in decent conduct.

After this toast, Mr. Lewis stood and, his voice thick with alcohol, said he won't waste time on Dupont's words. He said that he, too, wants to be frank and he called the gentlemen here "naïve dreamers" who would be charming if they didn't insist on meddling in world affairs. Lord Darlington is only an amateur, he said, and politics today is no place for amateurs. They're well-meaning, but useless; now Europe needs professionals to run their affairs, not amateurs.

Mr. Lewis, like Stevens, puts a great deal of emphasis on the notion of professionalism, but for the American senator that definition relates not to the moral and behavioral requirements of a position, but to expertise and specialist knowledge rather than gentlemanly discussion, which he dismisses as a relic of an earlier time.

After a stunned silence, Lord Darlington responded by saying that what the American calls amateurism, he thinks of as honor. He doesn't care for "professionalism" if it means cheating, manipulating, and greed. There was warm applause, although Mr. Lewis smiled and shook his head. At that moment the first footman whispered to Stevens that Miss Kenton needed a word with him. He slipped out to find her looking upset, saying his father had become very ill. Stevens objected that he was too busy, but she told him he must come now or may regret it later.

Lord Darlington doesn't respond precisely to Mr. Lewis's challenge; while Mr. Lewis had argued that today, there's no longer a place for amateurs, Darlington says he'll refuse to play by those rules, no matter what the contemporary situation requires. Next comes a more urgent instance of another character warning Stevens of something he might regret.

Stevens came to his father's room to see Mrs. Mortimer, the cook, standing over the bed: Stevens senior's face was a dull reddish color. Mrs. Mortimer said he probably had a stroke; she began to cry. Stevens turned away and told Miss Kenton that while this was very distressing, he had to return downstairs: he did so, and the footmen looked relieved to see him. The atmosphere was now celebratory; Mr. Lewis had retired. Mr. Cardinal began to engage Stevens in conversation, though he had to ask Stevens several times if he was alright. Darlington, then, said it seemed like Stevens had been crying. Stevens laughed and wiped his face with a handkerchief, saying it was just the strain of a hard day.

Although Stevens doesn't describe or reflect on his own feelings at all—one might assume from his own description of his reaction that he is completely normal after seeing his father this way—his emotional state can be glimpsed by how he recollects the responses of other people in the drawing room who notice a lack of composure.

Stevens saw Miss Kenton signaling him and he began toward the door when M. Dupont asked him to find fresh bandages. Dupont followed Stevens out the door, and Stevens said he'd come find him soon. Miss Kenton walked toward the staircase, where she told Stevens that his father passed away a few minutes before. Her head bowed, she almost started to sob, but then resumed her composure. She asked if he'd come up and see his father; Stevens said he was very busy, but he gave her permission to do so. Then, he told her his father would have wished him to carry on; to do otherwise would have been to let him down. Miss Kenton responded, "Of course." Stevens returned to the drawing room and told Dupont that a doctor was on his way. One of the German women complimented Stevens, saying she could have sworn he was at least three people all evening.

M. Dupont's continual pestering comes to seem silly, even grotesque, when compared to what is happening upstairs. Stevens hasn't been able to be present for his father's death, and even now, when Miss Kenton tells him he's died, he can't bring himself to see his father—although he masks what now seems obvious (that he is, in fact, shaken) by his habitual formality and composure in giving orders to Miss Kenton. He has so embraced the requirements of his position that he is able to take pride in actually being more productive and inconspicuous than usual.

Mr. Cardinal started up a drunken conversation with Stevens, before a footman told Stevens that Miss Kenton wanted to talk to him. She told him Dr. Meredith had arrived, and Dupont, who'd followed Stevens out, exclaimed in relief. Stevens led Dupont to the billiard room, then met Dr. Meredith in his father's room, which smelled of roasting from Mrs. Mortimer. After thanking the doctor, Stevens asked if he might see a distinguished gentleman downstairs.

The small aside about the smell of roasting coming from Mrs. Mortimer's apron is one of the only ways Stevens's account betrays the strange, surreal nature of what this night must have been like—especially since he doesn't reflect on the disjuncture between his father's death and the conference in any personal, intimate way.

Stevens claims it is not for him to suggest that he is among the "great" butlers of his generation. Even so, he proposes that his actions on that March night may have constituted dignity worthy of a great butler: he recollects the night today, despite its sadness, with a sense of triumph.

It's difficult to tell, here as elsewhere, to what extent Stevens is putting on a brave face, or whether he truly has internalized his profession so much that he sees his father's death as the ultimate test of it.

DAY TWO: AFTERNOON

Stevens has been thinking about the Hayes Society requirement for membership, that a butler be attached to a "distinguished household." While he still thinks of this as snobbery, it occurs to him that it's true if one adopts a deeper understanding of "distinguished." The difference turns on what distinguished his generation from the previous: his, he thinks, was more idealistic, more concerned with an employer's moral status. Butlers of his age had ambitions to serve gentlemen who wanted to further human progress.

Although Stevens makes an effort to distinguish his own opinions from those of a society that he thinks of as overly superficial, he does cling to terms like "distinguished" and "dignity" for what he calls their moral status. Importantly, his goal as a butler is to "further human progress" less by acting than by serving others who might act.

Stevens adopts a metaphor to make his point: butlers of his father's generation tended to see the world like a ladder—with the houses of royalty and oldest families at the top and "new money" lower down—that they should climb as high as possible. These are also the Hayes Society's values, and if they were making such statements as late as 1929, Stevens thinks, it shows that their way of life was doomed. His generation viewed the world instead as a wheel.

Stevens's metaphor helps to reveal how he wants to see his own ambition: he claims that his goal is not to become ever more important with ever greater responsibilities, but rather to approach closer and closer to the men who have great ambitions and responsibilities themselves.

Stevens had noticed that the country's great debates and decisions are made not in public but in the privacy and calm of great houses. He thinks, then, of the world as revolving around the hub of these houses, their decisions emanating out to all. To serve great gentlemen would, for butlers, mean furthering this progress. Stevens himself moved quickly between employers at first, before being rewarded by being able to serve Lord Darlington.

Again, rather than attempting to climb a professional ladder, Stevens seems to have worked to identify the aristocratic gentlemen who seemed most politically influential and to have approached them obliquely. He takes great pride in his ability to finally associate with Lord Darlington, which he thinks of as a "reward."

Stevens is increasingly convinced, now that he thinks about it, that to be "great" one must associate only with a truly distinguished household. He imagines it is the nature of absenting himself on such a trip that is allowing him to develop this new perspective. But it's also perhaps what occurred an hour earlier, which Stevens now describes.

Stevens returns to the Hayes Society's definition of greatness that he seemed to have dismissed just before. This passage shuttles between events from thirty years ago, events from an hour earlier, and the present, as Stevens rapidly relives many parts of his past.

While driving into Dorset, Stevens noticed an odd smell from the car, and after pulling over he resolved to look for a gentleman's house where there might be a chauffeur. After a while he glimpsed a tall Victorian house and drove up to it. The chauffeur was outside, and after opening the Ford the chauffeur said, amused, that Stevens simply needed water in the radiator. As Stevens gazed at the mansion, the man said it was a shame, but the Colonel was trying to sell it: there was only himself and a cook who came in each evening. He and the colonel had been in the war together. Then the chauffeur exclaimed that Stevens must be from one of the "big posh houses"—he was talking almost like a gentleman, and had a beautiful car. When Stevens said he worked at Darlington Hall, the man became curious, asking what Lord Darlington was like. But Stevens brushed him off, saying only that he was employed by Mr. John Farraday.

This Victorian house seems at first like it could be one of the great country houses to which Stevens had referred earlier, houses that are at the center of the great debates of the country. But it soon becomes clear that, like at Darlington Hall and many other old houses throughout the countryside, there is no longer a place for a huge household staff and "unofficial" conferences and parties like the ones Lord Darlington used to hold. The identification of the house as "Victorian," thus built in the nineteenth century, is a subtle means of distinguishing it from truly old "posh" houses like Darlington Hall, which are even older.

The chauffeur suggested that Stevens visit a nearby pond on his way: thus Stevens now finds himself at the charming Mortimer's Pond, sitting and contemplating the fishermen. In his tranquility, he has the opportunity to reflect on why he gave the impression that he'd never been employed by Lord Darlington. The incident, he admits, has some affinity with one from a few years earlier, when an American couple now settled in England, the Wakefields, came to visit. Like Mr. Farraday, they were impressed by the magnificence, and Mr. Farraday was eager to explain all the details of English aristocratic history that he'd picked up.

Although in other parts of his narration, Stevens has reported on events without stopping to linger over their meaning, he now seems more willing to face the question of why he responded as if embarrassed about the connection the man drew between Stevens and Lord Darlington. But, as is typical, Stevens sidesteps this question by turning to yet another recollection, in a process of memory and deferral that is continuous through the book.

At one point, Mrs. Wakefield was examining a stone arch and she asked Stevens if it only looked 17th century, but if it was actually from Lord Darlington's time. He wasn't sure. She then asked him what Lord Darlington was like. Stevens said he didn't work for Darlington. Following the couple's departure, Mr. Farraday mentioned to Stevens that Mrs. Wakefield wasn't as impressed as she could have been—she seemed to think everything was "mock," even Stevens. She told Farraday with great confidence that Stevens had never worked at Darlington Hall before Farraday's time. Farraday asked Stevens to confirm that he was a "genuine old-fashioned English butler," and Stevens did so, but said he may have slightly misled Mrs. Wakefield. It was English custom not to discuss past employers, Stevens said—it was customary for butlers to even give the impression that they'd never worked for anyone else.

Like Mr. Farraday, the Wakefields are wealthy Americans who have taken advantage of the newly-available aristocratic English country houses to move to England; like Mr. Farraday, they are curious about what seem to them to be relics of an earlier time. Indeed, it seems important to Mr. Farraday that what he's purchased is "authentic," such that he is annoyed that Stevens has allowed Mrs. Wakefield to pronounce that Darlington Hall isn't the "real" old country house he thought it was. Stevens slips out of the misunderstanding by reaffirming his specifically English butler habits.

Though he'd put the episode behind him, Stevens now recalls it and admits that this episode and the one from this afternoon are related. He insists that he is far from ashamed of his association with his lordship; indeed, his reticence can better be explained from a reluctance not to hear any more "nonsense" about Lord Darlington, a man of great moral stature to whom Stevens could not be more grateful.

Little by little, it is becoming clear that, despite Stevens's reassurances and claims of loyalty, there does seem to be something he's unsure about regarding Lord Darlington's character, leading him to feel that he needs to protest and defend his association with Darlington.

DAY THREE: MORNING

Stevens is now staying in a cottage inn, where, last night, five or six other customers remained around the bar until late. One of them tried to **banter** with Stevens, who did his best to respond wittily, and was pleased when the group laughed, though belatedly and bemusedly. He has been trying to add bantering to his professional skills, so as to fulfill Mr. Farraday's expectations; for instance, he's been listening to a comic radio show, and whenever an odd moment arises, he tries to test himself by formulating three witticisms in response. So he was a bit disappointed that his attempt at the inn didn't go over even better; he thinks he'll just need to practice further.

The humor of this passage stems from the way that Stevens treats even something like witty banter as another skill to add to his professional repertoire—something he has to study as if it were a new method of dinner service or a different staff rotation. While immersed in memories from the past, Stevens is also eager to look toward his future responsibilities with a new employer who has different expectations from Lord Darlington.

Stevens now finds himself in a pleasant tearoom in Taunton, though only a few other diners are present. He can see out into the street, where there is a signpost for the village of Mursden: he recognizes this as where the firm Giffen and Co. was located. It used to make the finest silver polish available, before the development of new chemical products just before the war led to the firm's demise.

Although Stevens has never ventured this far from Darlington Hall during his employment there, he is well acquainted with some aspects of the region through his responsibilities as butler. The disappearance of Giffen and Co. also signals the demise of an earlier aristocratic lifestyle.

During the '20s, when Giffen and Co. was thriving, Stevens recalls a change in mood among butlers of his generation. One great butler popularized silver as a public index of a house's standards; after people began to marvel at his household's dazzlingly polished silverware, other butlers throughout the country began to copy him. Some, like Mr. Jack Neighbours, made a show out of developing secret methods, but Stevens is certain those had no discernible effect.

Turning back once again to three decades earlier, Stevens recalls how the world of aristocracy and service work was already changing. Like the trends of butler service to which Stevens has already referred, dazzlingly polished silverware is described as if it were a modern-day clothing trend, both a mark of being in the know and a sign of both wealth and distinction in a "great" household.

Stevens is pleased to recall guests at Darlington Hall marveling at the silver. He recalls in particular Lord Halifax, who began to come to the house to meet with the German ambassador of the time, Herr Ribbentrop, exclaiming at the silver of Darlington Hall. A few days later, Lord Darlington told Stevens that while Halifax was at first in a bad mood that night, his delight at the silver put him into an entirely different mood, and thus possibly, Stevens thinks, may have eased his discussion with Ribbentrop.

Stevens is careful to position himself as above the petty gossip and competition of people like Mr. Neighbours, but he is hardly exempt from this realm of social jockeying. Stevens imagines there being a direct continuum between the service he provides and the important decisions and events going on around him at Darlington Hall.

Stevens is aware now, of course, of the extent of Herr Ribbentrop's trickery, as he was part of Hitler's plan to deceive England for as long as possible. But Stevens finds it frustrating that people talk today as if they were never taken in by Ribbentrop, as if Lord Darlington had been alone. The hypocrisy of these people would be clear if one saw their own guest lists from the 30s, often placing Ribbentrop in a place of honor.

After expressing evident pride in facilitating discussions between Lord Halifax and Ribbentrop, Stevens returns to the present and seems to remember how differently Ribbentrop is viewed now. This difference, he insists, is a hypocritical revision of history at the expense of Lord Darlington.

Stevens also finds it hypocritical that people talk as if Lord Darlington were unusual in receiving hospitality from the Nazis in those years; the most respectable ladies and gentlemen in England were doing the same. Stevens insists that the claims of Lord Darlington's anti-Semitism, or his association with the British Union of Fascists, are entirely unfounded. Darlington came to "abhor" anti-Semitism, Stevens says, and the accusation that he barred Jewish staff from employment was entirely unfounded, except for one minor incident in the thirties, which was blown out of proportion. Sir Oswald Mosley, the leader of the "blackshirts" group of British fascists, only visited a few times before the true nature of the organization was made clear. Darlington was never involved with fringe figures, only inviting to his home those who had real influence in British life—including some who were Jewish.

Stevens turns to Lord Darlington's associations with the Nazis in a tone that tries to seem nonchalant, but inevitably comes off as defensive. He mounts a defense of his former employer by seeking to depict the decades of the 1920s and the 1930s as they truly were, not as they came to be seen after the war, when the atrocities of Nazi Germany were made clear. This requires Stevens insisting on Darlington's innocence and ignorance of what the Nazis were really after; historians, indeed, continue to disagree as to who knew—and to what extent they knew—of the Nazis' goals. Already, Stevens's defense of Darlington seems to be on shaky ground.

Stevens knows that some in his profession think it matters little what kind of employer one serves, but these, he thinks, are the most mediocre of butlers. He, on the other hand, takes pride in having practiced his profession at the center of great affairs.

Stevens's insistence on Darlington's greatness seems self-serving in this light; he can't take pride in his profession without having served a great employer, and his former employer's greatness has been called into question by his role in WWII. Thus, to preserve his own dignity, Stevens must exonerate Darlington in his mind.

Still, Stevens is aware that he must keep focused on the present—on serving his American employer— especially given the "small errors" that have arisen in the last few months. One occurred at breakfast last April, when Mr. Farraday simply sat down, picked up his fork, examined it, and turned back to his newspaper. Immediately, Stevens replaced the fork, so swiftly that Mr. Farraday was startled and softly said, "Ah, Stevens." Stevens was deeply embarrassed, though he knows this and other incidents are signs only of a staff shortage: Miss Kenton's return to Darlington Hall would allow such occurrences to stop immediately. Stevens spent last night unable to sleep, going over in his mind those passages in her letter to him.

Stevens has mentioned these small errors before, although each time he has skated over them, balancing a certain frankness with an attempt to make light of the mistakes. Although Stevens doesn't make this connection, it's difficult not to see in the anecdote about the silver a parallel with his father, who took such pride in polishing silver and yet who began making mistakes toward the end of his life, too. In that sense, there seems to be a certain desperation in Stevens's belief that Miss Kenton's return will solve everything.

DAY THREE: EVENING

Stevens wishes to return to the question of anti-Semitism, which has become so sensitive today, especially regarding Lord Darlington's purported ban of Jewish staff—something that Stevens can refute entirely. There were many Jewish people on staff during his years there, and he can't imagine how such a rumor started—unless, "ludicrously," he thinks, from the brief weeks in the '30s when Mrs. Carolyn Barnet held some influence over Darlington.

As with other affairs that Stevens has skated over, he now makes a concerted effort to be more honest, to face the past and justify to his imagined reader (whom he sometimes addresses as "you") why Lord Darlington's later reputation is unwarranted. Already, though, his goals of honesty and justification seem at odds.

Mrs. Barnet had a reputation for formidable intelligence; in the summer of 1932 she and Lord Darlington often spent hours in political conversation, and she would lead him through guided tours of the poorest areas of London's East End. But she was also a member of the "blackshirts" organization: it was during this summer that Sir Oswald Mosey was also invited to Darlington Hall.

Although Stevens has dismissed Darlington's association with the blackshirts by arguing that many people were friendly toward this fascist organization at first, here he uses a different argument about Mrs. Barnet's undue influence over Darlington.

It was then that, Stevens recalls, he once overheard Lord Darlington refer to a certain newspaper as a "Jewish propaganda sheet," and instruct Stevens to stop giving donations to a charity that came to the door, since the management was all Jewish. Stevens recalls being surprised at these requests, given that he'd never heard anything like it from Lord Darlington. Then, one day he was called into the study to hear Lord Darlington say that they cannot have Jewish staff in the household: he's looked into it, and it's for the best. Stevens would have to let the two housemaids go, Lord Darlington instructed.

In recounting what he remembers of this time, Stevens reports what comes across clearly as damning evidence of Lord Darlington's anti-Semitism, even as Stevens strives to defend Darlington by portraying these remarks as an aberration. He finally admits that Darlington did seek to bar Jewish staff, an accusation to which he's objected, all the while trying to contextualize it so as to pardon Darlington.

Stevens knew he'd have to talk to Miss Kenton about the dismissal, and he resolved to do so during their evening meeting in the parlor for cocoa—a meeting that was always professional, though at times they would discuss informal topics. Their work kept them so busy that this was the best remedy against jeopardizing the smooth running of the household, Stevens notes. He did not look forward to sharing this information with Miss Kenton; the housemaids were perfectly satisfactory, and he loathed the idea of dismissing them. But he knew it was his duty to do so.

Although Stevens has described his initial relationship with Miss Kenton as unpleasant, from their evening parlor meetings it seems like they have grown fonder of each other (even if Stevens prefers to explain their meetings in professional terms). For Stevens, there is no question of following his personal ideas rather than his duty to his employer, and the basis of his objection to firing the maids is also unclear—is it because the firing is racially motivated, or because the maids keep the house running smoothly?

Stevens resolved to announce the matter concisely, and he informed Miss Kenton at the end of their meeting. Since she remained silent, he said he would go to bed. But then she said she couldn't believe what he was saying: Ruth and Sarah had worked for them for six years, and she trusted them absolutely. She was outraged at Stevens's calm: to dismiss them would be wrong, she said. Stevens responded that she needed to conduct herself like a woman of her position should and obey his lordship entirely.

Unlike Stevens, who immediately resolves to follow his employer's command, Miss Kenton is far more distraught and uncertain at learning that she'll be expected to dismiss Ruth and Sarah simply because they're Jewish. She and Stevens use different kinds of language here; Miss Kenton relies on moral questions of right and wrong while Stevens refers to loyalty and duty. At this point, the question of Stevens's cooperation with anti-Semitism is unavoidable.

Miss Kenton, though, said that if the girls were dismissed then she'd leave too because it would be a sin to dismiss them. Stevens responded that it was not their place to make such judgments: the world is a complicated place, he said, and he and she could not understand it like Lord Darlington could. The next morning, he met with Ruth and Sarah briefly before they left; they sobbed throughout the meeting.

Stevens not only objects to Miss Kenton's arguments as out of place given her position and duties, but he also refrains from confessing that he too is troubled by the orders. Stevens seems entirely convinced that Lord Darlington does know best.

Miss Kenton remained cold toward Stevens for several weeks. Stevens eventually grew impatient, finally telling her, with a slight laugh, that he'd been expecting her resignation. Miss Kenton wasn't amused: she looked at him and said she'd been busy, but would do so shortly. He was worried, but as time went by, he doubted that she would follow through, and he came to tease her about it now and then.

The unpleasant dismissals over with, Stevens prefers to move on to other responsibilities, while Miss Kenton continues to linger over the events, and to begrudge Stevens for what she believes is his utter indifference to the plight of Ruth and Sarah.

About a year later, Stevens was serving tea one afternoon, long after Mrs. Barnet ceased to visit the house and Darlington cut ties with the "blackshirts," when Lord Darlington asked Stevens whatever happened to the Jewish maids. He asked Stevens to try to track them down, saying it was wrong what occurred. Immediately, Stevens went to see Miss Kenton, who was outside in the summerhouse: it was pleasant outside and he started to help her work, enjoying the view around the lawn.

It does seem that Lord Darlington's anti-Semitism began to give way once it became clear what fascism really meant and once prejudices against Jews yielded to more active discrimination. For Stevens, Lord Darlington's change of heart is perfectly in keeping with his identity as a gentleman.

Stevens began by saying, while laughing, that he'd been thinking of Miss Kenton's earlier insistence that she would resign. But Miss Kenton, after a silence, told him she had been very close to doing so, but had no family other than an aunt, and she realized she had nowhere to go. She was too frightened: she was ashamed, but she couldn't leave. She paused, so Stevens decided to tell her what Lord Darlington had said, concluding that it was a comfort to hear how distressed the man was.

Stevens seems taken aback by Miss Kenton's quiet admission of vulnerability: she clearly remains disappointed in herself for not following her moral compass, and yet recognizes that she has few other people she can rely on. Stevens can only find a way to respond by giving her the message he's been eager to transmit already. His initial laughter casts doubt on how seriously he takes the anti-Semitism at the root of the firings, though his expression of comfort at Darlington's distress indicates the opposite.

In a different voice, Miss Kenton expressed shock, recalling that Stevens had seemed pleased and cheerful about the girls' dismissal. He told her that was quite wrong, but he could not think how to explain why he didn't tell her so. She cried that she had been so upset and that it would have been a comfort to know his feelings, and she asked him why he always had to pretend. Laughing at the ridiculousness of it, Stevens objected, saying, as he prepared to leave, that of course he disapproved of the dismissals. He glanced back as he left, but could only see the profile of Miss Kenton in the darkness staring out at the view.

At this moment, Stevens does seem aware that, at the time of the maids' dismissal, he had not even thought to confide uncertainty to Miss Kenton, something that would have comforted her at the time. Now, though realizing what had happened, he cannot figure out a way to apologize or express himself more honesty than before, as the tragedy of their miscommunication continues.

Stevens is now reminded of what happened next—the hiring of Lisa as a replacement. Lisa had dubious references, having never stayed anywhere for more than a few weeks, but Miss Kenton insisted that she saw potential in her, and would take her under her own supervision. Finally Stevens agreed, saying it would be Miss Kenton's responsibility. To his surprise, Lisa did seem to improve rapidly, from her attitude to her commitment to her daily tasks.

From Stevens's description, it seems that Miss Kenton has sought to recover from the pain of the dismissal, and the subsequent pain of Stevens's inability to connect emotionally with her, by throwing herself into a new task—setting a challenge for herself and striving to meet it.

Miss Kenton took a certain triumph in Lisa's success, and she teased Stevens about it during their parlor evenings. She suggested that Stevens may have been pessimistic about Lisa because he had an aversion to keeping pretty girls on staff. Stevens protested, but Miss Kenton remarked on his guilty smile—a smile he said was merely one of amusement.

Miss Kenton's mood has improved as a result of her success with Lisa, a success that also helps her reestablish the parameters of her relationship with Stevens, one that once again involves her teasing and his awkwardness.

After eight months, Lisa disappeared with the second footman—something that, Stevens acknowledges, is bound to happen in any large household. Though irritating, this was a relatively more civilized case, since they had stolen nothing and had left letters saying they were going to be married. Lisa's letter, full of misspellings, said that they had no money but only needed love; it contained no word of gratitude to Miss Kenton, who was deeply upset. After reading the letter, she said that Stevens was right after all. He told her that she worked wonders with the girl; she should feel no responsibility. Still dejected, Miss Kenton sighed and said that the girl might have had a real career—she threw away her ability, and for what? Seeming far away, Miss Kenton repeated that Lisa was foolish and was bound to be let down.

Stevens had lingered at an earlier point over how irresponsible and damaging such marriages can be; the fact that he takes a softer tone now reflects, perhaps, his unwillingness to blame Miss Kenton for what happened. Rather than gloat or take pride in the fact that he was right about Lisa, he comforts Miss Kenton and reassures her that she did her best—an attempt that seems to suggest a certain development in Stevens's relationship to Miss Kenton. Of course, part of her failure is in her inability to mold Lisa into someone like herself, who remains unmarried, as she seems to recognize.

Stevens returns to the present, where he finds himself in a small cottage belonging to a couple, the Taylors, where he is lodging. He is in a private residence because of an infuriating mistake: he let the Ford run out of gas. He admits that he is a novice in long-distance driving, but he is distressed all the same, given the professional importance of organization and foresight. He'd arrived late to the town of Tavistock, and since all the rooms were occupied as a result of a local fair, he was directed by one landlady to an inn out in the country. But he began to get lost; the car came to a stop and he realized he was out of petrol.

After Stevens's first mishap with the car, this second one is, he recognizes, potentially a sign of his absent-mindedness—something that he could never afford as the manager of a large household like that of Lord Darlington. Now, of course, he is out of his element, but Stevens also seems to acknowledge, if only implicitly, that he is growing old and more prone to such mistakes.

Stevens climbed to a hill and saw a village in the distance. Discouraged, he began to walk toward it; at first there was a path, but soon he was walking through muddy fields and he had to squeeze through fences. Finally, on a new path, he met Mr. Taylor, who asked how he could help. He told Stevens that the village inn was closed, but he'd be happy to offer Stevens a room for the night. It was thus a taxing evening, Stevens reflects; but what unfolded next with the Taylors' neighbors was even more trying.

Stevens's adventure is, he recognizes, hardly suited to what he often refers to as the dignity of his position. But Mr. Taylor proves to be another of the strangers whom Stevens meets along the way who is kind and generous toward him. All these figures seem to recognize Stevens as a character from an earlier time and place.

Stevens thus finds it a relief to be in his room alone now, indulging in recollections. He has been wondering how and when his relationship with Miss Kenton underwent such a change; by the end they even abandoned their evening cocoa routine. He's never been able to decide why, but he reflects now that it may have had to do with the evening Miss Kenton entered his pantry uninvited: he found it crucial that people not be wandering in and out of the butler's pantry, interrupting his order and privacy.

Stevens has been moving from one anecdote to the next in his recollections: he skipped over, for instance, how his relationship with Miss Kenton deepened and changed from skepticism to respect and fondness. Now, though, his thoughts turn to a subsequent shift in their relationship, one that caused another distance to spring up.

That evening, Stevens was enjoying a rare hour off duty, reading, when Miss Kenton entered with a vase of flowers. He was reticent as she tried to chat, so she asked him what he was reading, and he refused to answer. She continued to ask and she approached him, as he backed away, insisting that he objected to her interruption as a matter of principle. She asked if it was a respectable volume, or something shocking. As they stood there, the atmosphere suddenly changed, becoming still: with a certain seriousness, Miss Kenton asked for the book, and took it from Stevens's hand. Finally, she exclaimed that it was just a sentimental love story. Stevens relates now that it was a tendency of his to develop his command of the English language by reading; this volume was chosen simply because it happened to be well-written, and more useful than a more scholarly tome.

To Stevens's credit, he relates this anecdote as honestly as he can, although he can't help himself from adding a gloss to it, justifying his reading material in terms of his profession rather than anything personal. But that justification only underlines how embarrassed Stevens evidently is at being caught by Miss Kenton reading a "sentimental love story." His embarrassment implies, too, that he is developing feelings for Miss Kenton, even though he is so desperate to avoid acknowledging to her that this is the case. The silence seems to suggest their mutual recognition of his feelings, and also Stevens's inability to make anything of it.

Now, Stevens doesn't feel he should be ashamed of confessing that at times he did enjoy such stories. But he insists that his reaction at the time was entirely warranted, since it was the principle of Miss Kenton interrupting his privacy that was at issue. A butler must never be "off duty" in the presence of others; he must fully inhabit his role, rather than donning and shedding it like a pantomime costume. Only when entirely alone can he unburden himself from his role.

Stevens sees his present-day confession that he enjoyed these stories as a powerfully frank admission, but it's clear that even an admission this trivial was far beyond his capacity at the time of the events he's retelling. Stevens's characterization of a butler's role as a performance so thoroughly inhabited that it almost stops being a performance is definitive for his own identity.

This event is really only noteworthy, Stevens thinks, in that it allowed him to realize how inappropriate Miss Kenton's behavior to him had become. He'd need to reestablish a sense of professionalism.

While this event could have gone another way, tugging Stevens toward greater honesty, he draws another conclusion entirely.

Something else, though, that may have contributed to the change was a shift in Miss Kenton's days off. She was accustomed to taking two days off every six weeks to visit her aunt in Southampton. After the pantry incident, though, she began to take advantage of the time off in her contract, sometimes leaving in the morning and not returning home until late. Stevens became a little worried, especially after Mr. Graham mentioned that he'd been wondering how long it would be before Miss Kenton found a husband. Stevens knew this would be a professional loss for Darlington Hall.

While Stevens understands the event in the pantry as a turning point that prompts him to reestablish a sense of greater "professionalism" with Miss Kenton, she seems to have concluded that it's hopeless to expect greater intimacy with Stevens, so she must give up on him herself. It's clearer now than ever that Stevens is not being entirely honest when he characterizes his concern about Miss Kenton getting married as purely professional.

Stevens started to notice that Miss Kenton was now receiving regular letters from the same address. Her moods began to shift too, swinging from cheerful to sullen. Finally, he ventured to ask one day if she'd be going off again on her day off that week. She seemed almost relieved to respond that she'd been going to visit an acquaintance, a former butler who was now employed by a nearby business. She added that he had had great ambitions as a butler, but that Stevens would have been appalled by some of his methods.

Although Miss Kenton has stopped trying to become more intimate with Stevens, it appears that she also would like him to ask about where she's been going—as if his curiosity might reflect his continued investment in her, despite how he may act. She presents her description of her suitor as a way to flatter Stevens.

Miss Kenton added that Stevens certainly must be content; he had reached the top of his profession, and she couldn't imagine what more he'd want in life. He couldn't think of a response to this, and finally he said that his vocation would never be fulfilled until he could see Lord Darlington through all the tasks Darlington set for him. Miss Kenton's mood seemed to change, and the tone of the conversation returned to the professional.

Miss Kenton gives Stevens an opportunity, here, to reflect on what he might want in life outside of his professional commitments—a family, for instance—but, unsurprisingly, Stevens doesn't take the bait; he seems either to misinterpret the question entirely, or to be incapable of sharing his honest feelings with Miss Kenton.

Not long afterward, the evening parlor meetings did come to an end. Stevens recalls the very night: he'd been discussing a forthcoming event with Miss Kenton, and she'd been nearly silent. Finally, he said he saw little point in continuing if she had nothing to say. To his surprise, she exclaimed that she'd had a very busy week, and he didn't appreciate how tired she was. After a moment, he calmly said that if she felt that way, there was no need for them to continue their evening meetings. She said this was only the case that evening, but he said the meetings were clearly inconvenient for her, and, ignoring her protests, suggested they begin to simply communicate during the working day.

Although Stevens had initially characterized his memory of the end to his parlor meetings with Miss Kenton as fuzzy, now he identifies precisely how the meetings ended—another example of the way in which he performs frankness and honesty, but never absolutely. Miss Kenton's moods contrast, as usual, with Stevens's constant calm, even-tempered demeanor, but this time his stubbornness in insisting that they stop meeting suggests that he may have been more hurt than he admits.

Stevens admits now that he'd wondered if things might have turned out differently if he hadn't made such a decision; he recognizes that he may not have realized the full implications of what he was doing at the time. But he also notes that with the benefit of hindsight, one is apt to see turning points everywhere. That evening in the pantry might be thought of as one, as well as his encounter with Miss Kenton the afternoon she learned of her aunt's death. Stevens had handed her the letter; she remained still after reading it, then asked if she might have the following day off for the funeral. He said of course, but upon leaving he realized that he hadn't offered his condolences. He paused in the hall, but realized that Miss Kenton may actually be crying at that moment. He felt a strange feeling, but after a moment he judged it best to leave.

For the first time, Stevens, rather than justifying or explaining his past actions (along with those of others) as if they could have happened no other way, wonders if things could in fact have been otherwise, although he refrains from saying exactly what that alternate set of circumstances might have looked like. Nonetheless, Stevens's thoughts on turning points are reflected in the larger structure of the novel, which has Stevens return to moments that only retrospectively add up to a certain narrative.

That afternoon Stevens, having spent a few hours wondering how he might lighten her burden, found Miss Kenton in the dining room. He asked how she was doing, and if she was experiencing any problems with the new recruits. Laughing slightly, he said that some professional discussion might be useful. She said she would be fine, and he began to leave, then turned and added something else about the new girls. Since she remained quiet, Stevens added that a few things had fallen in standard recently, and that Miss Kenton might be remiss in a few aspects. She looked confused and turned to him; he listed a few tasks that hadn't been ideally fulfilled, and said it wasn't like her to overlook such things. Looking more tired than upset, Miss Kenton asked him to excuse her, and left.

In this recollection, Stevens once again wants to communicate with Miss Kenton, to help her in some way, and yet he cannot determine how he might do so—especially given the boundaries he's set for himself regarding the professional and the personal. Instead, Stevens chooses what seems to be the worst thing to say to Miss Kenton at a moment of grief and vulnerability. Of course, the very inappropriateness of Stevens's words only underlines how much he struggles to communicate with her.

Stevens reminds himself that it's useless to speculate on what might have been. At the time nothing ever seemed like a turning point; he felt, rather, that he had available a never-ending number of days and years in which to mend any misunderstanding. He chides himself on his introspection, thinking it's most likely the result of his trying evening, as well as the fact that he'll arrive and see Miss Kenton tomorrow.

Stevens acknowledges that even the ability to speculate on what might have been relies on the benefit of hindsight, on knowing how things did in fact turn out. For a person so immersed in introspection, Stevens is also aware of the potential dangers of living in the past.

Stevens returns to the events of earlier this evening, after Mrs. Taylor served him a simple supper. Stevens was looking forward to retiring, but then a farmer knocked on the door, announcing himself as George Andrews. He saluted Stevens and expressed his condolences for the mishap, leading Stevens to wonder how he knew of it. Andrews said that they were all very pleased a man like Stevens had come by, implying that the whole village knew of it. Soon another man arrived, introducing himself as Trevor Morgan and saying it was a pleasure to have a gentleman like Stevens in Moscombe. Then a couple, Mr. and Mrs. Harry Smith, came as well.

Although Stevens is not a gentleman himself—he takes care to distinguish people of his position from the aristocrats they serve—he seems that way to others, especially in the present time of the novel, when butlers like Stevens are considered to be relics of an earlier time. He's so intriguing to the people of Moscombe that villagers begin to file in merely to see him.

Mrs. Taylor and Mrs. Smith told Stevens that Dr. Carlisle should be arriving after seeing his patients, and would love to make Stevens's acquaintance. Meanwhile, the others were talking about a certain Mr. Lindsay, who may have had a fine house but was no gentleman. Mr. Taylor said that, indeed, the cut of one's clothes had nothing to do with being a gentleman; the rest of the group agreed.

The discussion on Mr. Lindsay provides the opportunity for the group to inquire about Stevens's own understanding of what a gentleman is—something they believe he can speak with authority on, given that he seems so gentlemanlike to them.

Mr. Morgan turned to Stevens and asked if he might be able to say what a gentleman was. After a silence, Stevens ventured that the quality they sought might be "dignity." Mr. Andrews and Mrs. Taylor agreed, but Mr. Smith proposed that dignity isn't just something for gentlemen; it's something every person in the country can strive for. While Stevens saw that he and Smith wouldn't exactly see eye to eye on this, he judged it best to concur, dispelling some tension in the room.

Stevens takes advantage of the fact that he's been pondering precisely this question for a long time, perhaps especially over the past few days. But while his notion of dignity is closely connected to social class and great political affairs, Mr. Smith proposes a definition that has more to do with democratic participation.

Encouraged, Smith continued that if Hitler had won, they'd all be slaves: in the war they won the right to be free citizens, express their opinion freely, and vote—the true definition of dignity. Mr. Taylor laughed and said Harry was warming up to one of his political speeches, but Smith just smiled and continued. Mrs. Smith added that this little village may seem out of the way, but that they gave more than their share during the war. Mr. Taylor told Stevens that Smith was a strong organizer. Mr. Andrews asked if Stevens was involved in politics before the war: he'd heard of a Stevens who was in parliament.

The war has strongly affected this village, as it has affected Stevens's own life and employment. Indeed, even though the book never goes into details about the war, the war provides perhaps the central turning point, dividing Stevens's life (as well as many others) into a "before" and an "after." Mr. Smith seems to have learned a particular set of lessons from the war, while Stevens refuses to even remember it.

Stevens still isn't sure what made him say such a thing, but he found himself telling the group that he was involved more in foreign policy than domestic affairs. Struck by their sense of awe, he added that his influence was only ever unofficial. Eventually Mrs. Taylor asked if he ever met Mr. Churchill, and Stevens responded that the man did come to the house, though Mr. Eden and Lord Halifax were more usual visitors, and actually had more influence at the time. It's been his good fortune, he added, to have had the ear of many great leaders over the years.

When Stevens refers to foreign policy, he's thinking, of course, of the unofficial conferences and meetings among important European and American officials that he has been privy to as a butler. He doesn't exactly lie to the group—he has met the men he mentions—but he obviously misleads them, even if much of the pride he takes in his position has to do with the closeness he has felt to important affairs.

Smith said that he himself had never met anyone as grand as Stevens had, but he still believed he was doing his part. That's why he has spent so much time making sure the voices of those in small villages like his own get heard, he said.

For Mr. Smith, living in a democracy means that politics is not a question of meetings between important men, but the participation of everyone—something that Stevens struggles to understand.

Stevens responded that he applauded Smith's sentiment, the idea that one should strive to make the world a better place: he was motivated similarly. Smith responded that his point was slightly different: people like Stevens could easily exert their influence, but people like him had to constantly work to remind their peers of their responsibilities at citizens.

Although Stevens attempts to understand what Smith is saying and fit it into his own worldview, one that he's developed through his professional position over the decades, he struggles to grasp just how different their views are.

Stevens tried to excuse himself to retire, although the group kept asking him questions, then entreated him to wait up for the doctor. Just then Dr. Carlisle arrived, and Mrs. Taylor introduced him to Stevens. Mrs. Smith told Dr. Carlisle that Stevens knew Mr. Churchill, Mr. Eden, and Lord Halifax. The doctor began looking at him closely, and continued examining him as Mr. Andrews mentioned Stevens's close relationship with foreign affairs. Finally Stevens managed to excuse himself: to his embarrassment everyone in the room stood up as he left. The doctor offered to give Stevens a lift to his car the next day.

Dr. Carlisle, as the person most approximating a gentleman in the village and in this gathering, seems to consider Stevens with greater skepticism than the other people present. Although Stevens hasn't, in telling the story, yet commented on what provoked him to mislead the group, he is evidently a bit embarrassed by the reaction that he's spawned, and the awe in which the villagers now hold him.

Stevens now feels quite uncomfortable regarding the misunderstanding, but he fails to see how he could have prevented the situation from developing: it would have caused too much embarrassment to clarify things after he realized what had happened. Still, he will probably never see them again.

Again, as he often does, Stevens ostensibly claims not to have regrets and to be unable to imagine how things could have been different. It's difficult to take him at his word.

Stevens finds himself lingering over Mr. Smith's thoughts on dignity. He's certain that the man's statements were far too idealistic. Of course people in England have a duty to think about great affairs, but Stevens can't imagine how they should be expected to have strong opinions on all kinds of things, as Mr. Smith claims the villagers do; in any case, it's absurd to define dignity in such a way.

Stevens had immediately disagreed with Mr. Smith's thoughts on dignity, but now he finds himself needing to justify why he diverges from Mr. Smith's opinion. The difference turns on the relationship between dignity and democracy, and where common people fit in.

Stevens thinks of an incident that illustrates that point, from an evening in 1935 when Lord Darlington was entertaining three gentlemen. He entered the drawing room and Darlington said that Mr. Spencer would like a word with him. Mr. Spencer asked Stevens what his thoughts were on the debt situation in America and the low levels of trade; a little surprised, Stevens nonetheless soon grasped that he was expected to be baffled by the situation, and apologized, saying he couldn't assist in this matter. He repeated the same response to several more questions of the like. Mr. Spencer turned to the others, who were laughing, and asks how the nation's most important decisions could be expected to rest on millions like Stevens.

Stevens is ostensibly trying to prove a point about the inappropriateness of defining dignity as the rights of the common man. However, there are other ways to interpret this situation other than the one Stevens presents. Stevens immediately understands, for instance, how he's expected *to perform, and he acts accordingly—thus bespeaking a far greater level of intelligence that what Mr. Spencer wants to prove.*

Stevens acknowledges that this was a slightly uncomfortable situation, but far from the most difficult any butler might be expected to encounter. He'd nearly forgotten it by the next morning when Darlington went to apologize to him. He noticed how tired and bedraggled the lordship looked, as he told Stevens that he did in fact assist in Mr. Spencer making an important point, as their companion had been talking nonsense about the will of the people. Democracy is an outmoded system, Darlington went on: the world is far too complicated for things like universal suffrage. Germany and Italy had responded properly to people's suffering, while they in Britain continued to endlessly debate. Stevens responded quite well last night in saying that these questions were not in his realm, Darlington concluded.

Stevens's own savvy and intelligence belie his willingness to acquiesce to the beliefs and opinions of those whom he assumes are more intelligent and wise than he is. Here, Stevens's report on Lord Darlington's words helps to make clear the attraction that fascism and various forms of authoritarianism held for the old aristocratic English class, which found itself less and less central in the decisions being made by a democratic country. Much of the irony of this novel lies in the way Stevens exposes such qualities even while continuing to insist on his employer's moral stature.

Stevens recognizes that today, such statements might seem odd, even unappealing, but he thinks there is an important element of truth to what Lord Darlington said. A butler's duty is to provide good service, not to meddle in the great affairs of the country, which will always be beyond his understanding, he says. Mr. Smith's remarks remind him of a certain dangerous strand of opinion in his profession in the '20s and '30s which held that every butler should be constantly reappraising his employer. Such thinking is misguided, Stevens believes. It's not possible to have a critical attitude toward an employer and provide good service at the same time—such a butler would lack the essential quality of loyalty. Loyalty is vital for someone who isn't in a position to understand the world's great affairs: there is nothing "undignified" in that. One cannot be held to blame because the passing of time has shown Lord Darlington's efforts to be misguided or foolish. Stevens carried out his duties as best he could, and it is hardly his fault, nor cause for regret or shame, if Darlington's life and work now seem like a waste.

Even while acknowledging how assumptions and values have shifted from one generation to the next, Stevens himself never undergoes any kind of revelation that makes him reevaluate his views and those of his former employer. Instead, there is a constant but subtle tension between the values that Stevens truly does espouse—values that are inextricably bound to his position as a traditional English butler—and the political implications of such values, especially as they've been revealed over time. Here Stevens continues to cling to the value of loyalty, in particular, as something that has defined his own actions over the years—a quality that has made him unwilling, and even perhaps unable, to think for himself and hold a different opinion from his employer.

DAY FOUR: AFTERNOON

Stevens is sitting in the dining room of the Rose Garden Hotel, a steady rain falling outside. He imagines that on a nice day it must be very pleasant to eat outside; as it is he has spent the past hour watching the rain falling on the village square. The rain is now lighter than before, but he wants to wait until 3:00 to meet Miss Kenton, rather than surprise her by arriving earlier than their appointment.

After a tumultuous series of recollections, in which Stevens has striven to balance retrospective reevaluation with a defense of his own and Lord Darlington's pasts, Stevens returns to a certain calm and balance: as usual, he is fastidious and well-organized in his plans.

Stevens is quite aware that his request may only be met with disappointment. But the day had begun auspiciously, with a pleasant breakfast at the Taylors' before Dr. Carlisle met him at the door with a can of petrol. As they walked to the car, the doctor abruptly asked if Stevens was a manservant; feeling relieved, Stevens told him he was the butler of Darlington Hall. Carlisle said he conjectured as much, and Stevens replied that he didn't mean to deceive anyone. The doctor said that he could see easily how it happened, and found him an "impressive specimen" anyway.

Although Stevens was himself at fault for misleading the villagers, he can't quite bring himself to explain how or why he did so, and he is happy to have the mistake corrected by someone else. Dr. Carlisle seems to see a friendly face in Stevens, someone who is similarly distinct from the villagers gathered around at Moscombe, and whom he might have something in common with.


Dr. Carlisle asked several times what Stevens thought of the village folk, though with a slightly odd, deliberate edge, as he said he'd happily spent his whole life "out here." Stevens said that they were congenial, and there were some interesting viewpoints expressed. The doctor told Stevens that Harry Smith, to whom he must be referring, is interesting but all in a muddle in his thoughts. Stevens asked if Smith was considered a comic fellow; that's too strong, Carlisle replied, as people in the village do think they ought to have strong feelings. But like people anywhere, they want to be left alone, to have a quiet life, rather than be bothered by issues. Stevens was surprised at the tone of disgust, though the doctor quickly recovered.

Dr. Carlisle expresses a strange mixture of scorn and defensiveness as he seeks to describe the villagers. On the one hand, he has become one of them, having lived for so many years in the "out of the way" village; but as a doctor, he is considered and thinks of himself as part of a higher, more important social class. In that way, he's somewhat like Stevens, who is both firmly excluded from the aristocracy, and intimately connected to it through his employment and service to members of that class.

Dr. Carlisle told Stevens that when he first arrived in the village, he was a committed socialist, because he thought socialism would allow people to live with dignity—that's what he used to believe. Apologizing for rambling, he asked Stevens what he thought about dignity. Though taken aback, Stevens responded that it had something to do with not taking one's clothes off in public. Bemused, the doctor looked at him, but at that moment the Ford came into view. Stevens thanked Dr. Carlisle and they took leave of each other.

Dr. Carlisle's politics and social views seem to have shifted over the course of time—unlike the general trend of British society, though, he seems to have grown more conservative over time. Nonetheless, he still contrasts to Stevens, who, despite all his introspection, never fundamentally changes his views over the course of the book.


All morning, Stevens has been thinking of a fragment of a memory: standing alone in front of the door to Miss Kenton's parlor, convinced that on the other side she was crying. Earlier he'd asserted that this was a few moments after she learned of her aunt's death; now he thinks he may have been confused. It may have taken place a few months later, when the young Mr. Cardinal arrived unexpectedly at the house.

This is another instance in which a memory related earlier in the novel turns out to be, if not misleading, then at least misremembered. The question is, again, to what extent Stevens consciously or subconsciously modified the memory in order to fit the narrative he wanted to believe.


The young Mr. Cardinal had, following his father's death in an accident a few years later, been making a name for himself as a witty columnist—writing columns that were rarely pleasing to Lord Darlington. Still, he continued to treat the man like the godson he was. But this was the first time Mr. Cardinal had ever shown up without warning. Darlington seemed annoyed when Stevens informed him of Cardinal's arrival, but said he'd join him soon.

Mr. Cardinal is a member of a younger generation, one that does not see in fascism the same welcoming, nostalgic glimpse of an earlier time that his father and Lord Darlington had seen. Although Darlington continues to look after his godson, as the years go on the disconnect between these generations widens.

Stevens then went down to Miss Kenton's parlor to inform her of Mr. Cardinal's arrival. She said she was going out that evening, as they had agreed a fortnight earlier. He said it had slipped his mind, and of course she should leave, even if some visitors were expected. As he left, Miss Kenton said she had something to tell him: her acquaintance had asked her to marry him before he started a job in the West Country the next month. He merely responded "Indeed" to her remarks, and asked her to excuse him.

As Stevens reports his conversation with Miss Kenton without, at least for now, commenting on it, it seems nevertheless evident that he is giving Miss Kenton a hard time—even, perhaps, that he's sulking a little about her intended excursion. As usual, Stevens fails to admit any emotional reaction to Miss Kenton, even at the news of her engagement.

Twenty minutes later, Stevens was carrying a tray upstairs when he heard angry footsteps and saw Miss Kenton glaring at him from the foot of the stairs. She asked if he expected her to remain on duty; he said not at all, but she replied that the commotion and stamping in the kitchen and outside his parlor suggested otherwise. She'd made these arrangements weeks ago, she said; he replied simply that he wished her a pleasant evening.

Stevens, again, doesn't convey in his recollections whether or why he was angry, but by reporting what another character said, he allows his reader to understand how upset he was—something that he cannot bring himself to convey to Miss Kenton, whom he continues to treat politely and formally.

Upstairs, Mr. Cardinal was eager to hear about Lord Darlington's guests, but Darlington said it was quite confidential, and that Mr. Cardinal couldn't join them. After dinner, from the drawing room, Stevens suddenly heard angry voices, and Darlington shouting to Mr. Cardinal that it wasn't any of his business. After a while, they seemed to have calmed down, and as Mr. Cardinal left to go to the library, Darlington reminded Mr. Cardinal that he was trusting him.

Stevens remains both a part of and outside the affairs of the "great men" upstairs. He has to balance his duties to and curiosity about powerful people and events against his own personal affairs, though this is a balance he's always excelled at—mostly by expunging the personal in favor of a consistent professional attitude.

Herr Ribbentrop and another gentleman arrived not long thereafter. A little later, Miss Kenton returned. She asked if Stevens was not at all interested in what took place with her acquaintance; Stevens replied that he really needed to get back upstairs, as events of worldwide significance were taking place. If he must rush off, she said, she'd just tell him that she accepted the marriage proposal. Stevens offered her congratulations. She said she'd like to leave as soon as possible, and he added that he'd do his best to find a replacement quickly.

The coexistence of two worlds, upstairs and downstairs, upper-class and servant class, continues, even as Stevens would prefer to to remain fully focused on the upstairs affairs and forget about anything to do with his own personal life. Miss Kenton, for her part, is frustrated at Stevens's lack of emotion, so much so that she seems to act almost solely to try to provoke a response from him.

As Stevens left her, Miss Kenton called out his name, and asked if after all her years of service, he had nothing more to say to such news. He repeated his warmest congratulations, but said again that important events were going on upstairs. She told Stevens that he was actually important to her relationship with her acquaintance, as they often spent time amusing themselves by telling anecdotes about him. Stevens responded with only, "indeed," and excused himself.

Miss Kenton's last attempt at inviting a response from Stevens verges on the desperate, but he doesn't take the bait. As a result, Miss Kenton turns from desperation to cruelty. This maneuver has something in common with Stevens, who has caused pain to Miss Kenton in the past as a result of failed communication.

Upstairs, Mr. Cardinal asked Stevens to get him more brandy; while Stevens suggested that he may want to stop drinking, Cardinal refused. He began telling Stevens that he considered him a friend. Interrupting himself to ask if Stevens was feeling unwell, he asked Stevens to tell him if the Prime Minister was in the other room. Lord Darlington, he told Stevens, was in "deep water." Over in the other room—he wouldn't need Stevens to confirm it, he said—were the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary, and the German Ambassador. Darlington believes he is doing something honorable, Cardinal said, but in fact is being made a fool of: the Nazis are manipulating him like a pawn.

Not unlike what took place at the final speeches of the "unofficial" international conference, this passage involves one of Darlington's guests drinking too much and sharing something he shouldn't have. At first it seems like Mr. Cardinal is trying to get on Stevens's good side so that he can learn about what's going on in the other room; then, however, he claims to know what's happening already, to recognize the evil truth of what Stevens thinks of simply as "events of worldwide significance."

In response to Mr. Cardinal's questions as to whether Stevens had noticed this, Stevens said that it wasn't his place to do so. Cardinal said that was to be expected, as Stevens wasn't curious, never thinking to look at things more closely. Darlington is a true gentleman, Mr. Cardinal said, but the other men have used and manipulated that noble quality into something else. Cardinal recalled the American senator, years before, who had called Darlington an amateur: now he had to admit that the senator was right. Stevens must have seen this, he repeated, but Stevens said he hadn't.

In his drunken state, Mr. Cardinal speaks to to Stevens with frankness but also a certain level of cruelty. His anger, it seems, is tied up with a feeling of frustration in seeing clearly what, he thinks, the older generation cannot. He thus disdains Stevens's lack of attention, even while hoping Stevens might confirm what he sees around him.

Mr. Cardinal asked Stevens if he was content to watch his lordship go off a cliff; Stevens said he didn't understand. Cardinal replied that Darlington has been the single most useful pawn of Hitler, establishing links between Berlin and the most influential British citizens, bypassing the Foreign Office altogether. Now Darlington was trying to convince the Prime Minister to accept an invitation to visit Hitler, and for the king himself to do so, as if it was all a terrible misunderstanding to be cleared up. Stevens couldn't see why this was such a terrible idea: Darlington had always striven to preserve peace in Europe, and Stevens had faith in his judgment.

It's been hinted throughout the book that Lord Darlington allowed himself to get too close to the Nazis, that he seemed to believe they could be managed with old gentlemanly decency. Mr. Cardinal exposes that benign-seeming theory for the naïve, even dangerous delusion that it is. Stevens, though, continues to see things from Lord Darlington's view, confident that all he needs to do is follow his employer's judgment.

Stevens rose to leave as he heard the bell from the drawing room. Upon going downstairs, he met Miss Kenton, who apologized for her foolishness earlier. He said he couldn't even recall what she had said, given the events of importance unfolding upstairs. He continued to the cellar to get a bottle of port for the gentlemen. Upon returning, he saw a light from under Miss Kenton's parlor door. Now he's certain that this is the moment lodged in his memory, as he passed by, increasingly certain that she was within, crying. But he hurried upstairs and took his usual position. At first his mood was, he now admits, downcast; but then a slight feeling of triumph began to come over him. It had been a very trying evening, and he'd managed to preserve a dignity in keeping with his position.

Although Miss Kenton seems to extend an olive branch to Stevens, hoping that they can regain some of their lost trust and friendship, he is not willing to do the same, remaining on the plane of formality and distance. This anecdote was sparked by Stevens's realization that the memory he related earlier of Miss Kenton crying actually took place in a different context. The new memory is now part of a much broader network of recollections—memories that are linked, in Stevens's sense of triumph, to the night of his father's death.

DAY SIX: EVENING

Stevens has thought about coming to this seaside town of Weymouth for many years, and he has been strolling along the pier for several hours, with a beautiful view of the sunset over the sea. It's now two days after his meeting with Miss Kenton, and he will leave tomorrow to arrive back at Darlington Hall.

In keeping with the retrospective, backward-gazing tone of the novel, Stevens's meeting with Miss Kenton will be related after it already happened, as another memory.

Miss Kenton had surprised Stevens by coming to the hotel. He met her in the tea lounge; she smiled and held out her hand as she saw him. They talked there for the next two hours, Stevens noticing how gracefully she had aged. For the first twenty minutes, they exchanged polite remarks, and Stevens began to notice that Miss Kenton seemed slower, weary, even sad, rather than the lively, volatile woman she used to be. Little by little, the initial awkwardness began to ease as they started to reminisce about old times.

As was so often the case in their past, while Stevens is methodical and plans ahead, Miss Kenton is more impetuous, here interrupting Stevens's carefully laid out plans. During their meeting Stevens must learn to reconcile the woman of his memories with the person sitting in front of him, two decades later.

Stevens also learned that, while Miss Kenton had indeed left her home for several days, she'd recently returned, and Mr. Benn was pleased to have her back. Of course, none of this is any of his business, Stevens stresses, and he wouldn't have pried at all, were it not for the professional reasons for wanting Miss Kenton back at Darlington Hall. Miss Kenton gave Stevens the address of her daughter in Dorset, saying she'd heard all about Stevens and would be thrilled to meet him on his way back.

Quite early on in their meeting. Stevens has to recognize that the main reason he thought Miss Kenton might return to Darlington Hall—having left her husband—is no longer the case. Once again he reiterates that his interest in her return is solely professional, an insistence that, by this time, has come to seem entirely disingenuous.

Stevens attempted, in turn, to describe to Miss Kenton how Darlington Hall had changed: she seemed to become visibly more cheerful when turning to old memories of the house. Only once did they touch on Lord Darlington, when Stevens mentioned his sadness at the death of Mr. Cardinal in the war. Miss Kenton brought up the unsuccessful libel suit, which she'd heard about, and, despite himself, Stevens began to tell her that his lordship had been very upset at the terrible things said about him during the war by that newspaper in particular, and thought he'd get justice through the suit. Instead, the newspaper only increased its readership, and Darlington's good name was destroyed. The house became so quiet after that: it was tragic to see, Stevens said.

Like Stevens, Miss Kenton seems happier when she can dwell on events of the past rather than the present. The mention of Lord Darlington allows Stevens give more details about the unfortunate decline of his employer after the war. It is obvious, then, why Stevens prefers to recollect a time far in the past, when Lord Darlington was a sought-after aristocrat whose home was the center of important political affairs, rather than the recluse who had lost his reputation at the end of his life.

Otherwise, though, the two talked of happy memories, and Stevens was surprised that two hours had passed when Miss Kenton said she must return home. As Stevens drove her to the bus stop, she asked why he was smiling; he said he'd been concerned by certain parts of her letter, particularly the bit about the emptiness she felt, but saw now he had no reason to be. Miss Kenton said she didn't feel empty at all, and asked what the future held for him. He said there'd be no emptiness for him, just work and more work.

The meeting between Stevens and Miss Kenton hasn't gone quite like he hoped, but it seems that Stevens has still enjoyed their time together and has been able to be happy for Miss Kenton, even though her happiness means that he will be returning alone to Darlington Hall. Work has always been at the center of Stevens's life, and seems it will continue to be.

As they waited for the bus, Stevens asked permission to ask Miss Kenton a personal question: given the letters he's had from her, he'd like to know if she was unhappy, or being ill-treated in any way. Miss Kenton assured him that her husband treated her quite well. But Stevens tentatively said that the fact she'd left her husband several times made him wonder.

Stevens finds it difficult to reconcile the nostalgic, even desperate tone of some of Miss Kenton's letters, with the cheerful, content-seeming woman that he's been talking to. His insistence on asking such a personal question is quite out of character.

Miss Kenton said she felt she could respond honestly, as she and Stevens may not meet again for many years. When she left Darlington Hall, she didn't believe she was really leaving—she thought about it as another ruse to annoy him. She was very unhappy at first, but they had Catherine, the war ended, and eventually she realized she loved her husband. Of course, at times she thought she'd made a terrible mistake with her life, she said. She wonders what kind of a life, for instance, she may have led with Stevens. That's when she gets angry over something trivial and leaves; but each time, she recognizes that there's no turning back the clock: her place is with her husband.

Miss Kenton admits explicitly for the first time that her various arguments, ploys, and even her courtship were all attempts to get attention from Stevens, to provoke him either to communicate his true feelings, or if he couldn't manage to do that, at least to respond to her in some way. While Stevens has tried to claim that regret is useless, Miss Kenton is more honest about having lived with many regrets about how things could have gone otherwise.

Stevens admits that at that moment, his heart was breaking. After a silent moment, though, he turned to Miss Kenton with a smile and said he agreed that it's too late to turn back the clock. She could expect many more happy years with Mr. Benn in the future, he added. She thanked him, and said it was very nice to see him again; he agreed.

This is the first time that Stevens relates outright what he feels—but the honesty is limited to his narration, as he does not share that feeling with Miss Kenton, instead, as usual, putting on a brave face and remaining polite and slightly distant.

Stevens watches the pier lights being switched on, and thinks back to a curious discussion he had this afternoon with a man on the dock. The man had begun chatting with Stevens, who didn't listen too closely until the man mentioned that until his retirement, he was the butler of a nearby house. He was impressed to hear that Stevens worked at Darlington Hall, and given his enthusiasm, Stevens shared some of his tricks of the trade. After telling the man the new employer was an American, the man said that Stevens must have stayed on as part of the package; laughing, Stevens agreed. After a silence, Stevens said that he gave his very best to Lord Darlington, and finds that he doesn't have much left to give. He's beginning to make more and more trivial errors.

The last anecdote that Stevens relates is also, fittingly, a recollection from the past, although this is only the past of a few hours ago. Although Stevens has met with a number of kind, generous people throughout his trip, it is with this stranger that Stevens is more honest and frank than he's been with anyone else. Throughout the book Stevens has expressed a commitment to looking forward and continuing to work on his profession, but now he describes uncertainty and doubt regarding his future.

The man asked if Stevens wanted a hankie, and gave him one; Stevens apologized, saying the traveling must have tired him. He said that Lord Darlington wasn't a bad man; he chose a path, and though it proved misguided, at least he chose it. Stevens cannot say the same for himself, since he simply trusted in his lordship. He can't even say he made his own mistakes; he asked what dignity there is in that.

Stevens doesn't say explicitly that he is crying, though the man's response makes that obvious. Stevens now gives up on insisting that it's silly to have regrets: instead he admits frankly that his involve living entirely in the service of another, such that even his regrets are not his own.

The man responded that his attitude is all wrong: one must keep looking forward and enjoy it, especially for both of them, now that their day's work is done. Stevens agreed with him, and then the man departed. Stevens thinks there might be something to the idea of ceasing to look back so much. Surely there is little choice, for people like himself, other than to leave fate in the hands of great gentlemen.

After the man's departure, it seems like Stevens's viewpoint may have shifted, that he may have understood something vital about agency and the course of his own life. But his conclusion is almost indistinguishable from the other pronouncements he's made over the course of the novel.

Stevens gazes at the families on the pier, and a group of six or seven people behind him. At first he thought they were friends, but now it seems they are strangers who paused to watch the lights come out and are now **bantering** together. Perhaps his bench companion simply expected the same from him, in which case he proved disappointing. He should, he thinks, look at bantering more positively, particularly if it leads to human warmth. He resolves to approach the task with renewed commitment, practicing for the next week, before Mr. Farraday returns.

Stevens's journey through the English countryside might be thought of as a kind of quest, leading him potentially to an epiphany or change of heart regarding his central beliefs. But the book ends not far from where it begins, with Stevens looking forward to what remains of his life and his work, obsessed as he's always been with service, professionalism, and dignity.

HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

MLA

Baena, Victoria. "*The Remains of the Day*." *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 22 Jun 2017. Web. 21 Apr 2020.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Baena, Victoria. "*The Remains of the Day*." LitCharts LLC, June 22, 2017. Retrieved April 21, 2020. https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-remains-of-the-day.

To cite any of the quotes from *The Remains of the Day* covered in the Quotes section of this LitChart:

MLA

Ishiguro, Kazuo. The Remains of the Day. Vintage. 1990.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Ishiguro, Kazuo. The Remains of the Day. New York: Vintage. 1990.