



Repressed Memories and Broken Identities in Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*

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Abstract

Human mind is a hidden cave where one can spot number of treasures and dangers. Both can be evident in the nuances of one's mind. One can take overwhelming joy and also suppressing sadness. It is in the perspective and decision of individuals what to store and what not to dig out. Kazuo Ishiguro, one of the eminent Japanese born British authors, a renowned Nobel Prize recipient, in his chosen novel *The Remains of the Day* (1989) vividly portrays the life of the dutiful butler and the leading protagonist Stevens, who has done an analysis of his past by recollecting his experiences and memories to rectify his mistakes and seek forgiveness in the present. This paper deals with Steven's fragmented memories and broken identities. Ishiguro expresses the function of suppressed emotions and fragmented memories and studies how it shatters the identity of the individual

Keywords: Human mind, memories, broken identity etc.

In Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* the leading protagonist, Stevens lead a life full of depression and self – delusion. Having a broken identity, Stevens poses as a broken Individual with self delusion and he becomes a secluded personality due to his dedicated service and workaholic nature at Darlington Hall in England. This paper examines how Stevens obsession for dignity drives him crazy in his work and makes him a unromantic man in love. Professional commitment and loyalty leads him to breach his relationship with beloved people and distorts his identity and left him with a sense of regret for his indecisive nature in his past and his loyalty for his employer in his service.

Stevens is considered as a failure in making love or maintaining relationships. In psychology, when one's heart is feeling heavy with mental pain, those feelings will be sprouted like a mist in the mind that blocks the sense of regret in individuals and made them to continue their duties without facing the broken feelings or painful thoughts. Stevens identity is getting broken and fragmented in such a way to lead a dignified yet prestigious life at his work place. Stevens always believes in professional ethics rather than personal life. Dignity often stands as a shield in life but he doesn't aware of the fact that indirectly it becomes a piercing sword in his heart whenever he tries to bring out the balance at his workplace and at his home. He always

adheres to his profession that he thinks as the right thing to do. By placing his trust on his employer Darlington, a treacherous person, who has dedicated his lifetime to Nazis (staunch followers of Hitler) but later he realizes his blunder mistakes based on the misconception about Darlington's true colors and also for misplacing his faith on Darlington. It leads him to create a ruptured sense of regret in his mind.

In Trauma theory, the sense of regret refers to a complex emotional response where traumatic survivors analyse the past events and comes out with a solution to the crisis and would think about the right decisions that they need to make. By their self accusations, the traumatic survivors think that regret could be a way to their subconscious mind to live a balanced life in the outer world. Counterfactual thinking is another way for them to prevent their mind from recalling the most disturbed events and this type of thinking will make them to think like all those terrible events have been finished off at some time in their life.

The Remains of the Day by Kazuo Ishiguro is a thought provoking novel. On the surface, it is a personal record of a sincere butler's motor trip across the English country in the summer season of 1956. It is a nuanced psychological study of repression, self-delusion, self deception, and broken identity. The leading character, Stevens, the victim of his past, who has devoted his lifetime to his employer Lord Darlington at Darlington Hall, narrates his journey as he travels in order to meet his beloved lady, Miss Kenton, a former housekeeper. This is not only a mere recollection of Stevens past events, but a gradual unveiling of a self. Through the leading character Stevens' voice, Kazuo Ishiguro examines how repressed memories mould the identity of an individual, and also how emotional outburst distorts moral responsibility of individuals, and how loyalty to others transforms into a self-erasure.

This article examines how repression functions and shatters the identity of characters in the novel *The Remains of the Day*, and also it studies how memory of an individual acts as protecting shield and also a deadly trap. In doing so, it reveals the unavoidable fact that the destruction of a human being. The novel's basic structure reflects the structure of repression. Steven becomes the sole narrator of his life journey in the present time but most of the times he slips into the secrets about his memories of his past life. Thus, these memories of Stevens are modified, refined, softened recollections of his past. He filters the memories and he reveals only the memories that he wanted to reveal and intentionally hides out irrelevant and unpleasant, gloomy part of his life. It shows his voluntary suppression of his real feelings and emotions regarding his past life.

In psychology, the term 'repression' refers to unconscious process of suppressing or blocking stressful or painful memories, feelings or thoughts. Stevens employs this shield of suppression in his life and he always emphasizes dignity and professional commitment at work. He suppresses his romantic feelings for his colleague, Miss. Kenton. But he doesn't aware that the above are barriers or hurdles that prevents him from having the sense of regret or guilt.

Throughout the novel, Stevens addresses Lord Darlington as a genuine person and Stevens always ignores the political turmoil that crowded the Darlington Hall before the Second World War. He always regarded Darlington's mistakes as something like co -incidental errors. Stevens feels reluctant in confronting the fact about Darlington's dark secrets associated to politics. This self preservation of Stevens makes him to get into the trap where he

unknowingly caught up. After many years, he starts his road trip to dig out his buried memories in the underneath of his mind. He could felt the inner turbulence in seeking forgiveness for the people he caused harm.

Stevens real identity is constructed upon the concept of dignity. For Stevens, dignity associated with emotional restraint and loyalty. He proclaims that a great butler should inhabit his professional role completely and without any further questions. Stevens does not look at himself as a man who happens to be a butler. He sees himself as a butler entirely. He never realized the fact that he has lost his individuality in the way to protect his dignity. Moreover, he has suppressed his personal feelings, emotions and dreams in his service.

One of the most painful and terrible examples of repression occurs after he lost his father. When his father was dying in deathbed, Stevens was serving the guests at an important international conference. Stevens remained calm and cool when he came to know about his father's deteriorating health condition. Later, he frames this behavior as a solid proof for his professional greatness. Actually, he was supposed to perform the role of a dutiful son and this moment requires the presence of Stevens. But Stevens chose to be a dignified butler rather than a dutiful son.

This event emphasizes the fractured identity of Stevens. He had 2 different consciousnesses. They are personal consciousness and professional consciousness. Steven's professional consciousness performs diligently while his personal consciousness is disintegrating. Lord Darlington's is an influential person who used to indulge in political activities and used to conduct meetings with powerful people and he becomes partial in treating his workers. Once he dismissed two Jewish maids due to political reasons. Stevens is a loyal fellow to Darlington and he carries out the tasks whatever is assigned to Stevens in Darlington Hall without any further questions.

When Miss Kenton, one of the colleagues questions this dismissal of the maids, Stevens responds with impolite and rude attitude. He claims that a dedicated butler's role is to perform the assigned duties properly and not to question Lord Darlington's decisions. This strong stand of Stevens reflects his blind addiction to his service and his lack of humanity. Repression functions here in the form of moral evasion. Moral evasion is a long process to ignore or hide personal responsibilities for immoral reasons through self deception and distortion. Stevens deliberately avoids facing the ethical implications of his obedience. his deeds indeed have the impact for what he has done in the past.

In retrospect, Stevens tries to regard the mistakes committed by Darlington as something naïve and co incidental. He used to frame Darlington as a genuine man misled by his situation. While this is partially a fact, Stevens tries to defend him to face the criticism against his passive attitude in Darlington Hall.

His professional identity as a faithful servant cannot coexist with the fact that he may have given his support to the cruelties of Darlington Hall. Therefore, memory is reframed and molded and the past is softened. The entire narrative becomes a defending one. Miss Kenton, Stevens beloved and colleague in Darlington Hall represents his emotional support. Her presence often reveals the depth of his repression. Miss Kenton sometimes tries to get connected to Stevens emotionally. She wants to be in touch with him and occasionally questions his inability to stand for justice in Darlington Hall. She had the intimate relationship

with him and this intimacy could be seen in some situations when she brought flowers for him and when she spoke about her marriage with him.

Every time, Stevens gets into the code of formality. He denies admitting his feelings. He highlights only on professionalism, even when his own mind betrays suppressed feelings. Miss Kenton's memories are not stable in his story because Stevens mind and heart is wandering between crowded doubts and confident statements. He recalls the dialogues and words spoken by the people with clarity yet he is not willing to admit their emotional weight. His repression is a voluntary and conscious avoidance.

When Stevens finally have a chance to meet Miss Kenton many years later, he learn the information that Miss Kenton's marriage is not a harmonious one and that she once decided to leave her husband. but she has changed her mind set and decided to retain her relationship with her family. Stevens should return alone to Darlington Hall. This meeting compelled him to confront the remains of his time. The unacknowledged love has turned out to become only a memory that he cannot change. Ishiguro's prose style highlights the major theme of repression. Stevens used the formal language thorough which he is describing terrible events. He always applies a tone of restraint in his writings.

In the course of the novel *The Remains of the Day*, Stevens certainty begins to deteriorate and many strangers started questioning the reputation of Lord Darlington. He feels embarrassing in those moments and sometimes he admits that he might have made the mistakes. This confession is a significant one. For the first time, Stevens seeks self-awareness. However, even this is a partial recognition. He suddenly reframes regret as a golden opportunity to learn more about his bantering skills for his new employer.

The climax scene in the novel, set on a pier at Weymouth emphasizes the novel's emotional depth. Stevens gradually enjoys the sceneries and the evening lights and contemplates on the remains of the day. At the end only, he realized the value of time and thinks that his life should have been lived under right people. Unfortunately he was misguided by negative forces. So, he resolves to focus only on making the best of what remains in his life. The ambiguity clearly shows the fragility of his identities. Stevens' self-concept has been shattered, but not completely dismantled. The repression has loosened, but it has not washed away by the situation.

The novel is parallel to Britain's identity issues in postwar period. Once Britain attained the status of a global empire, Britain faced the issue associated to social hierarchies and political power in the 1950s. Darlington Hall stands as a symbol of this shift. The grand estate now owned by an American employer, and the place has lost the traditional touch. Stevens's broken identity reflects the entire national decline. As he adhered to traditional ideals of service and hierarchy, Britain struggles to redefine itself in a new world order. His loyalty to a flawed aristocrat reflects a broader nostalgia for imperial authority.

Thus, repression functions on both personal and cultural levels. The reluctance to face the political errors and the longtime wish to preserve one's dignity despite failure or loss all resonate with a society. Ishiguro weaved these layers successfully. The image of a broken butler is parallel to the image of the broken nation. Ultimately, the novel's tragic end is internal. Stevens is not collapsed by dramatic catastrophe. His repression is acting like a shield that safeguarded him from mental pain but deprives him of long-term desires. He sacrifices his

relationship and intimacy by suppressing his feelings and emotions. He sacrifices his moral stand by controlling his doubts.

Stevens broken identity is a reduction of his personal self to some other self. Stevens becomes a different person whom he doesn't want to transform. His world shrinks to secret conferences, illegal agreements and polite exchanges. And yet, Ishiguro gives a decent portrayal for Stevens who is portrayed as someone like a dignified, honest and sincere person. His repression arises from his own instincts and a real belief in his service.

In the novel *The Remains of the Day*, Repressed memories are the basic foundation of Stevens real identity. His narration portrays the importance of memory and how memory can be modified to preserve the self-image. Yet memory also endures certain control. It surfaces in moments of longing and hesitation. Broken identity of a person arises when one's life constructed on denial confronts reality. Stevens's life journey highlights a life of dignity that he lead and it becomes empty without having a firm stand on reality.

In the course of his life, he cannot go back in time to change any events or is not able to reclaim his past love or undo political errors. But he can acknowledge and value the level of repression. Ishiguro's novel leaves a trace of thought provoking insight to the readers that is connected to the message that identity built on suppression is weak and delicate. When memory gives pressure to go back, the self of a person begins to rupture. The remaining time in the end of one's life, is a clear awareness of lost possibilities. Through Stevens's calm voice, Ishiguro weaves the profound harm caused by emotional denial and moral evasion. Repressed memories do not vanish. They mould the personality and they are the reason for who one become and, in Stevens life, whom one fails to become.