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# CONCEALING AND REVEALING: REPRESSION IN *A PALE VIEW OF HILLS* AND *THE REMAINS OF THE DAY*

Abstract: *A recurring theme in many of Kazuo Ishiguro's novels is that of repression. This article examines* A Pale View of Hills *(1982) and* The Remains of the Day *(1989), analysing repression through the lens of psychoanalytic literary theory—particularly Freud's concept of repression as a defence mechanism—as well as trauma theory and the narratological frameworks of narrative identity. In addition, it draws on sociocultural and gender theory to argue that repression functions not only on an individual level but also as a broader societal and national construct. Through close textual analysis, the article contends that Ishiguro's characters repress not only emotions but also aspects of their personal and cultural histories in an effort to preserve a fragile sense of dignity and self-coherence.*

Keywords: *repression, trauma,* A Pale View of Hills*,* The Remains of the Day*, selective memories, defence mechanism, societal and national construct, guilt, pain.*

## 1. Introduction

Kazuo Ishiguro's novels *A Pale View of Hills (1982)* and *The Remains of the Day (1989)* explore the theme of repression, unfolding the complex ways in which the protagonists cope with internal conflicts and societal expectations. Repression has a profound impact on personal identity, on the psychological and

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the emotional aspects of the characters as well as the interpersonal relationships. In *A Pale View of Hills*, Ishiguro portrays Etsuko's poignant psychological journey of memory and mourning as she struggles with suppressed guilt and silent grief over her eldest daughter's suicide. Similarly, in *The Remains of the Day*, Stevens, an English butler bound by self-imposed and societal expectations, exemplifies repression through his obsessive commitment to professional etiquette, sacrificing personal fulfilment and emotional expression. Ishiguro explores the complexities of repression through his protagonists' selective and nuanced memories, depicting it as both a psychological defence mechanism and a societal construct. Employing psychoanalytic theory, trauma theory, narrative identity, and sociocultural and gender theory, this article argues that Ishiguro's characters embody the struggle to maintain dignity and coherence in the face of deeply repressed trauma, guilt, and emotional isolation.

## 2. The Theme of Repression in *A Pale View of Hills*

Sigmund Freud's essay "Repression" (1915) provides a critical framework for understanding the psychological mechanisms operating in *A Pale View of Hills*. In his essay, Freud defines repression as the process by which distressing thoughts, memories, or desires are excluded from conscious awareness in order to reduce psychological discomfort. He makes the distinction between *primal repression*, which prevents certain instinctual impulses from entering consciousness, and *repression proper*, which pushes already conscious thoughts into the unconscious (1925:p.86). Repressed material does not disappear; instead, it continues to influence present behaviour and often resurfaces indirectly through dreams, slips of the tongue, or neurotic symptoms. *Repression proper* is evident in the character of Etsuko in *A Pale View of Hills*. She suffers from recurring nightmares that disrupt her sleep, and she reveals repressed material through slips of the tongue and other neurotic symptoms, as will be discussed in the following analysis.

Currently living somewhere in the countryside in England, Etsuko recalls episodes from her life in Nagasaki, especially the memories she has of a woman called Sachiko she befriended there. Her first recollection reveals that Sachiko has a daughter named Mariko, who is about ten years old, whereas Etsuko is pregnant with her first daughter, Keiko. It is interesting to note that from the very beginning Etsuko appears to be Sachiko disguised. Wai-chew Sim calls this a "doppelganger configuration" in which 'Sachiko is Etsuko's alter ego' (2010:p.29). In the very first instance in the novel, Etsuko recalls that when Sachiko moved to the new

neighbourhood, women started gossiping about her and her "American friend". One of them said that the stranger had been very unfriendly to her that morning. Suddenly, the stranger (Sachiko) becomes Etsuko:

> 'It was never *my* intention to appear unfriendly, but it was probably true that *I* made no special effort to seem otherwise, for at that point in my life, *I* was still wishing to be left alone.' (Ishiguro, 1982:p.13, emphasis added)

Etsuko's shift from narrating Sachiko's story to using first-person singular pronouns reveals her repression through slips of the tongue. She appears to have assumed Sachiko's identity, narrating her own experiences through another character because she is unable to speak about herself directly. Sim further notes that "[s]he seems to exemplify our propensity to act in these ways, to see the self in the other" (2010:p.30). Whether Sachiko or Mariko are real people or not, we cannot ascertain, but Etsuko clearly appropriates their life story to evade the guilt and pain she feels. In essence, she employs displacement as a psychological defence mechanism by constructing a narrative that distances herself from emotional trauma. Etsuko has misgivings about motherhood because, as Sachiko puts it, "[c]hildren [...] mean responsibility" (Ishiguro, 1982:p.86) and she is a young mother. She projects all her doubts onto Sachiko. She suppresses her own feelings and never outright states that Sachiko is a bad mother, but her selection of memories leads down that path. Cynthia F. Wong opines:

> 'Etsuko's memory of her friendship with Sachiko may be a reminder that she eventually adopted attitudes similar to Sachiko's; if she intended to criticise her friend for her choices, she does so as an indirect way of reviewing and perhaps criticizing her own actions. In effect, she is a reader of her own life who is interpreting its significance from the distance of time and space.' (2019:p.35)

In fact, Etsuko relates events suggesting that Mariko was often emotionally neglected. Sachiko would be away at work or spending time with her American paramour, leaving Mariko unattended for long hours, except when Etsuko supervised her. Etsuko hints at significant similarities between Sachiko's life story and her own. Could she be expressing, through Sachiko, her doubts and fears about not being a good mother to Keiko? Like Sachiko, Etsuko makes choices that do not end well. Sachiko's paramour proves unreliable; he cheats on her and frequently drinks excessively, yet she decides to leave with him for America. Furthermore, she disregards Mariko's feelings on the matter, despite Mariko's protests against the decision. In the subsequent passage, Etsuko takes it upon herself to pacify Mariko:

"I don't want to go away. I don't want to go away tomorrow."

> I gave a sigh. "But you'll like it. Everyone's a little frightened of new things. You'll like it over there."
> "I don't want to go away. And I don't like him. He's like a pig."
> "You're not to speak like that," I said, angrily. We stared at each other for a moment, then she looked back down at her hands.
> "You mustn't speak like that," I said, more calmly, "He's very fond of you, and he'll be just like a new father. Everything will turn out well, I promise."
> [. . . ] "In any case," I went on, "if you don't like it over there, *we* can always come back."
> [. . . ] "Yes I promise," I said. "If you don't like it over there, *we*'ll come straight back. But *we* have to try it and see if *we* like it there. I'm sure *we* will." (Ishiguro, 1982:p.173, emphasis added)

Etsuko reasons with Mariko that life in America might actually be good. Initially, talking about Sachiko and Mariko, she suggests they should try it first and then decide. However, at some point in the conversation, Etsuko shifts from using the pronoun "you" (i.e. Mariko and her mother) to "we" (i.e. Etsuko and Keiko, her daughter). Thus, she adopts the identity of Sachiko and Mariko becomes Keiko. This shift is yet another instance in which repression manifests itself through a slip of the tongue. According to Yugin Teo, Etsuko attempts to confront her own history by utilising Sachiko's past to reflect on her previous decisions. (2014:p.64). Like Sachiko, she leaves Japan and takes her daughter with her, possibly without her consent, though the exact story is not provided, only hinted at (which is another instance of repression). Etsuko leaves her Japanese husband, Jiro, and marries an Englishman, Mr Sheringham, yet to this day she has misgivings about her decision, which her repressed self can only manifest through Sachiko's story. Ljubica Matek states in her essay that 'the process of migration [. . .] never seems to be complete, leaving her torn between who she was and who she is now' (2018:p.130). A sense of guilt can be inferred when reading between the lines, though she seeks to justify herself. Below are given two examples to illustrate:

> 'But such things are long in the past now and I have no wish to ponder them yet again. My motives for leaving Japan were justifiable, and I know I always kept Keiko's interests very much at heart. There is nothing to be gained in going over such matters again.' (Ishiguro, 1982:p.91)
> '[. . . ] it became his view that Keiko was a difficult person by nature and there was little we could do for her. In fact, although he never claimed it outright, he would imply that Keiko had inherited her personality from her father. I did little

to contradict this, for it was the easy explanation that Jiro was to blame, not us. [. . .] I do not find it as easy as my husband did to put the blame on Nature, or else on Jiro. However, such things are in the past now, and there is little to be gained in going over them here.' (Ishiguro, 1982:p.94)

In the last sentence of both extracts, the reader senses Etsuko's unwillingness to dwell on the past, as it is too painful for her. Rebecca Suter comments that what must have played a part in Keiko's suicide are a series of factors, such as 'the trauma of migrating to a foreign country at a young age, her mother's divorce and her second marriage to an Englishman, and the birth of her half-English half-sister' (2020:p.25). It is inferred that deep down Etsuko knows the truth behind Keiko's death, but she suppresses it because she does not want to be overcome by guilt and remorse.

On another occasion, in Chapter Seven of the novel, Etsuko recalls accompanying Sachiko and her daughter Mariko to Inasa, a hilly area in Nagasaki. She mentions that this was one of the best memories she had of those times (Ishiguro, 1982:p.103). Later, in Chapter Eleven, a conversation unfolds between her and Niki, her second daughter:

"What was so special about it?" said Niki.

"Special?"

"About the day you spent at the harbour."

"Oh, there was nothing special about it. I was just remembering it, that's all. *Keiko* was happy that day. We rode on the cable-cars." I gave a laugh and turned to Niki.

"No, there was nothing special about it. It's just a happy memory, that's all." (Ishiguro, 1982:p.182, emphasis added)

Once again, while recalling her outing with Sachiko and Mariko, Etsuko quite suddenly mentions Keiko, thus substituting Mariko with Keiko and simultaneously blending Sachiko and herself into one person—herself. This narrative slippage raises questions about whether the confusion is deliberate or unconscious. What is clear, however, is that Etsuko struggles with repressed emotions. The past hovers over the present, and Etsuko feels the need to narrate it to heal her wounds. According to trauma theory, individuals who suffer from unresolved trauma must revisit their painful memories—however distressing—in order to process them and integrate them into their life narrative. Full recovery, as Caruth notes, is achieved when the person can recall and articulate the traumatic experience without psychological collapse (1995:p.176). Etsuko's indirect storytelling—using Sachiko's story—

demonstrates both her repression and her attempt to gain distance from the trauma, while also suggesting a gradual effort to come to terms with the past.

Thus far, repression has been discussed in terms of its emotional and personal dimensions. However, personal history does not exist independently of public history. To explore another facet of the emotional and personal dimensions of repression, it is worth considering Etsuko in the context of her nation's historical past. She experienced the horrors of the bombing in Nagasaki, which affected both her and people close to her. Mrs Fujiwara, her mother's friend, lost all her family, except her eldest son (Ishiguro, 1982:p.111). Sachiko lost her husband, and Etsuko herself remained bereft of family and likely a fiancé, as inferred by the fact that she moved in with Ogata-San's family before marrying his son, Jiro. These traumas manifest themselves in the form of ghosts, haunting Etsuko repeatedly. An eerie atmosphere prevails the world of the novel, but ironically so, Etsuko narrates in a calm contemplative voice, even when she mentions Keiko's suicide. For example, instead of talking about her feelings when she received the tragic news, she shifts the focus onto Niki, who, according to her, came to reassure her that she was not responsible for Keiko's death, and onto the newspapers, which reported that Keiko was Japanese and had killed herself in her room. Then, she ends it all abruptly by saying: "I have no great wish to dwell on Keiko now, it brings me little comfort" (Ishiguro, 1982:p.11). It appears that repression takes the form of diversion; Etsuko does not dwell long on painful events to prevent herself from being overcome by grief and sadness. Thus, Etsuko's personal history can be better understood in the context of public history.

The bombing of Nagasaki also comes across as a repressed distant memory. Etsuko unemotionally recalls sheltering in tunnels and derelict buildings (Ishiguro, 1982:p.73), and she remembers seeing rubble and hearing reports of children dying in horrific ways (Ishiguro, 1982:p.100). She also recalls visiting a memorial for those killed by the atomic bomb, finding the statue more comical than reminiscent of war (Ishiguro, 1982:pp.137–138). Etsuko and other characters rarely discuss the war; its consequences are mentioned sporadically and fleetingly, as if pushed aside to be forgotten. They keep the memory of war repressed and focus instead on the parts of Nagasaki being rebuilt in Western style. Applying Michel Foucault's theory of discourse and power in *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction* (1978), Etsuko's silence about the bombing of Nagasaki can be interpreted not merely as a personal act of repression, but as a consequence of broader discursive constraints (p.27). In post-war Japan, survivor narratives were often shaped—and at times silenced—by political and cultural forces that discouraged open testimony. In

*Hiroshima Traces: Time, Space, and the Dialectics of Memory* (1999), Lisa Yoneyama argues that, decades after the atomic bombings, survivors struggled to testify about the disaster because their accounts were frequently met with "suspicion and ambivalence" (p.87). As a result, many remained silent, and silence itself came to be seen as a legitimate and even expected expression of trauma.

Repression in *A Pale View of Hills* can also be viewed as a social construct. Sachiko and Etsuko live most of their lives in a patriarchal Japanese society where men are encouraged to climb the social ladder, while women are confined to domestic roles. These roles are so deeply ingrained in the Japanese psyche that even women see themselves as dependent on a male figure in their lives. Sachiko tells Etsuko that if her husband were still alive, Mariko would have had the kind of upbringing appropriate to their family position (Ishiguro, 1982:p.45). Sachiko's relative, Yasuko Kawada, tells Etsuko, "it isn't good that a woman should be without a man to guide her" (Ishiguro, 1982:p.161). Furthermore, only men are seen as highly respected or important in society (Ishiguro, 1982:pp.109, 111), women are considered their inferiors. This is why Sachiko (rather Etsuko disguised as her) takes the decision to emigrate. As she relates to Etsuko:

> 'Mariko will be fine in America, why won't you believe that? It's a better place for a child to grow up. And she'll have far more opportunities there, life's much better for a woman in America.' (Ishiguro, 1982:p.46)

Women feel they are not given equal chances with men, or worse they live under men's dictates. One instance is the story Ogata-San relates about one of his son's colleagues at work. Although he brings it up in the context of changing times in Japan, one can sense the strong patriarchal mentality behind it and the resistance to change:

> 'Apparently at the last elections, his wife wouldn't agree with him about which party to vote for. He had to beat her, but she still didn't give way. So in the end, they voted for separate parties. Can you imagine such a thing happening in the old days? Extraordinary.' (Ishiguro, 1982:p.152)

Moreover, Sachiko was forbidden by her husband (who was then alive) to learn English and her books were taken away from her (Ishiguro, 1982:p.72). Etsuko feels awkward when Ogata-San asks her to play the violin; she has suppressed her desire due to her responsibilities as a married woman. Even father-son relationship manifests repression. Ogata-San refrains from openly discussing issues with Jiro, such as the encounter with Shigeo Matsuda, while Jiro displays little interest in his father's affairs (Ishiguro, 1982:pp.154–155). Consequently, their relationship is

characterised by coldness, distance, and formality. Having lived within a repressive societal context for most of her life, it is not surprising that Etsuko experiences difficulty in expressing her emotions explicitly. She has internalised the prevailing belief that emotions, particularly those that could cast one in a negative light, should be kept private. Judith Butler argues that gender is a performance—not an innate essence, but a socially regulated identity 'instituted through a stylised repetition of acts' (1988, p.519). Etsuko's repression in *A Pale View of Hills* can be interpreted as a socially compelled performance of identity. She enacts the role of the reserved, obedient wife and dutiful Japanese mother because such behaviour is culturally expected of women in her context. Her silence and emotional restraint reflect not only personal repression but also the internalisation of post-war Japanese norms regarding femininity, propriety, and self-sacrifice.

As mentioned earlier, repression is further evident in her narrative style. Etsuko controls her narrative by seeking to conceal rather than reveal, thus leaving gaps and ambiguities. Wojciech Drąg observes that 'Etsuko's narration is riddled with conspicuous omissions, which makes it impossible for the reader to piece together her past and comprehend the reasons for some of her crucial decisions' (2014:p.89). For instance, when talking about her Japanese husband, Jiro, she does not provide reasons for leaving him. She explains that Niki had little idea of what actually occurred during those last days in Nagasaki, and then adds that, although she does not claim to recall Jiro with affection, he worked hard to do his part for the family and he expected her to do hers:

> '[I]n his own terms, he was a dutiful husband. And indeed, for the seven years he knew his daughter, he was a good father to her. Whatever else I convinced myself of during those final days, I never pretended Keiko would not miss him.' (Ishiguro, 1982:p.90)

What transpired during those last days in Nagasaki? What does she imply by "in his own terms"? Does she agree or does she think he was imposing his will upon her? Etsuko just leaves these aspects vague. In another scene, she tells Niki that her father (Mr Sheringham) was sometimes rather idealistic because he believed they could give Keiko a happy life in England. Then, she adds she knew from the very beginning that Keiko was not going to be happy there, nevertheless she decided to take Keiko with her. Niki assures her that leaving Japan was the right decision, as she couldn't bear to watch her life waste away (Ishiguro, 1982:p.176). Etsuko represses her narrative by hinting at feelings of guilt, but then moves on to Niki's words to soothe her conscience. Secondly, she introduces gaps and ambiguities,

saying more with what she does not reveal than with what she does. Once again, her life is shrouded in mysteries: Why did she leave Japan exactly, and why did she believe her life would waste away if she stayed? Recalling an episode with Keiko, she mentions two elements in her narrative: first, her vehement opposition to Keiko's decision to leave the house and move to Manchester, and her display of certain attitudes that ultimately led Keiko to sever all ties with her—a decision she now regrets. Secondly, she notes that her daughter was unhappy at home. She does not clarify what those attitudes were, nor does she explain why Keiko was unhappy at home. By suppressing details, she leaves these questions open to conjecture.

In addition, repression is mirrored in Etsuko's choice of memories that the critic Peter Sloane calls "moving, yet often cryptic reflections" (2021:p.27). This repression of memories serves her to avoid unpleasant or hurtful truths, or even hint at her feelings by telling a story that seemingly bears no connection with her. In an interview with Gregory Mason, Ishiguro notes that "she does need to arrange her memories in a way that allows her to salvage some dignity" (1998:p.338). In one scene, for instance, she recalls an unpleasant image that entered her thoughts one particular afternoon. It was the image of a little girl found hanging from a tree, which, according to her, shocked the neighbourhood more than the earlier child murders. She adds that she could not have been alone in being disturbed by such images (Ishiguro, 1982:p.156). The image becomes "much more intense and vivid" (Ishiguro, 1982:p.156) because it holds significance for her; years later, Keiko would commit suicide by hanging herself in her room. Instead of delving into memories with Keiko to reveal more about her character and their relationship, and to explore her feelings about the suicide, she indirectly offers scattered glimpses, leaving it at that. Etsuko consistently deflects attention away from herself. For example, on the fifth day of Niki's visit, she awakes during the early hours and reflects on Keiko's landlady finally opening the door of her room in Manchester (Ishiguro, 1982:p.88), as if she was curious to know about the shock Keiko's landlady received, rather than talk about her own shock at the news of Keiko's death. This diversion reflects her difficulty in facing such painful emotions and her battle with feelings of guilt. However, memories, though controlled, are so nuanced that at times they reveal more than conceal. Such is the case when she continually brings to mind the image of her daughter 'hanging in her room for days on end' (Ishiguro, 1982:p.54). Then, she adds:

> 'The horror of that image has never diminished, but it has long ceased to be a morbid matter; as with a wound on one's own body, it is possible to develop an intimacy with the most disturbing of things on one's own body.' (Ishiguro, 1982:p.54)

The memory of Keiko committing suicide will continue to be "a wound on her body", but the act of narration, however repressed as it may be, has a cathartic effect on her. Perhaps, with time, this bad dream, will remain a distant memory.

In light of Paul Ricoeur's concept of narrative identity, as developed in *Oneself as Another* (1992), it can be argued that Etsuko uses storytelling as a form of psychological defence. She constructs a sense of selfhood (ipse) by narrating the version of her life that she chooses to disclose, thereby suppressing painful truths about her past. According to Ricoeur, individuals come to understand themselves through the narratives they construct about their lives; however, in doing so, they also assume moral responsibility for their actions (1992:pp.121–122). When past experiences or emotions are too distressing to confront directly, the narrative may become selective, evasive, or distorted—as is the case with Etsuko.

## 3. The Theme of Repression in *The Remains of the Day*

Similar to *A Pale View of Hills*, repression in *The Remains of the Day* takes on both a personal and a public dimension. Furthermore, it manifests in the selection of memories and the narrative style. In an interview with Ishiguro, John Freeman introduces the novel as 'the story of a repressed butler who realises he has given his life to an antiquated idea of service' (2008:p.194). In fact, repression forms the undercurrent behind Stevens's attitudes and actions. The novel opens with Stevens anticipating an expedition to the West Country, but he is unsure about the attire for the trip. From this moment on 'clothing' becomes a recurrent metaphor in the novel, symbolising the split between Stevens's private and public self. His ideal of a great butler involves, as he mulls over, fully inhabiting the professional role in public without being shaken by unexpected or distressing events. This professionalism is likened to a gentleman's suit, worn with pride and dignity, embodying a profound commitment that nothing and no one can strip it away in public. A great butler relinquishes his professional role only by choice and always when alone. For Stevens, this is a matter of dignity (Ishiguro, 1993:pp.42–43). Adam Parkes observes that Stevens 'is obsessed with [dignity] because he believes it holds the key to his whole life' (2001:p.43). Parkes further notes that Stevens's problem is that he associates his entire identity so closely with his professional role that without it, he would consider himself as having no identity at all (2001:p.43). In the same vein, Barry Lewis comments that Stevens's 'commitment to being a butler has almost an existential fervour' (2000:p.85). Stevens's unswerving commitment to his profession aligns with Michel Foucault's concept of disciplinary power, particularly the way

individuals become "docile bodies"—efficient, self-regulating agents of institutional norms (Foucault, 1977:pp. 135–169). As a butler, Stevens has internalised the hierarchical values of the English class system, not through external coercion, but through self-discipline—illustrating how power operates most effectively when it is internalised. This also resonates with Judith Butler's concept of the performativity of identity: the continuous enactment of social norms in order to sustain a socially accepted self (Butler, 1990:pp. 25–33).

Since the profession of the butler is so important to Stevens, he represses the emotions he has concerning Miss Kenton. Similar to Etsuko, who conceals herself behind Sachiko's story, Stevens hides behind the mask of professionalism. In more than one instance, Stevens speaks of Miss Kenton in professional terms, stressing her dedication to her profession and how she 'never allowed her professional priorities to be distracted' (Ishiguro, 1993:p.51). However, very rarely does he voice his personal feelings about her, and only understatedly. He insists that Miss Kenton is indispensable to Darlington Hall due to 'her great affection for this house' and 'her exemplary professionalism' (Ishiguro, 1993:p.9). When Mr Farraday, his current American employer, jests about Miss Kenton as his 'lady-friend' and, what is more, 'at [his] age', Stevens comments that it was 'a most embarrassing situation' (Ishiguro, 1993:p.14). A little later in the novel, Stevens recollects that Miss Kenton and his father had started working at Darlington Hall around the same time, in the spring of 1922. This happened because two members of the staff decided to marry and consequently left their positions. Stevens then asserts that he 'has always found such liaisons a serious threat to the order in a house', especially 'marrying amongst more senior employees can have an extremely disruptive effect at work' (Ishiguro, 1993:p.51). He particularly blames those housekeepers 'who have no genuine commitment to their profession' and who go 'from post to post looking for romance' (Ishiguro, 1993:p.51). Is he, in a way, spelling out his fears through these comments—that, after all, he is just flesh and blood and may give in to his feelings? Does he see falling in love as a threat to his profession? Furthermore, he lives in a repressive society that deems it wrong to have romantic feelings at an old age. Is he ashamed to admit his feelings for Miss Kenton? We cannot answer these question definitely, because, as Kathleen Wall notes, 'Stevens has attempted to avoid, in his life as well as in his narrative, the voices and needs of the feeling self' (1994:p.26). We can only catch glimpses of his emotional self when Stevens seems to betray himself. His overemphasis, for instance, that his desire to see Miss Kenton has a purely 'professional motive behind' (Ishiguro, 1993:p.13) backfires on him. In trying to convince his audience, he is actually trying to convince

himself that his excitement about the trip is purely work-related, which obviously is not the case. It is evident from his recollections that Miss Kenton, aside from her professional role, holds another important place in his life, but his repressed self never acknowledges it. Reminiscent of Etsuko, Stevens attempts to keep his emotional self under control. Drawing again on Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, Stevens perceives Miss Kenton as a threat to the stability of his masculine and professional performance. As a result, he suppresses any affective expression toward her in order to maintain his identity as the ideal butler.

Stevens recalls once that when Miss Kenton brought a large vase of flowers in his pantry for the first time to brighten his parlour a little, he told her that, that was not a room for entertainment and that he wanted to keep distractions to a minimum (Ishiguro, 1993:p.52). Miss Kenton retorted that there was no need to keep his room "so stark and bereft of colour", to which Stevens answered curtly that "it [had] served [him] perfectly well thus far as it [was]" (Ishiguro, 1993:p.52). Similar to his room, Stevens deprives himself of any emotions other than loyalty to his profession and his lord. In Wall's words, he will not allow anything or anyone to 'tear the fabric that he has erected between his private and his professional selves' (1994:p.28), if we continue with the clothing metaphor. This is evident in his exchange with Miss Kenton, where he insists she should address his father by his last name rather than his first, considering it 'talking down' to him (Ishiguro, 1993:p.53), rather than a sign of intimacy. Stevens is so emotionally repressed that he mistakes intimacy for a lack of respect. It appears he compels Miss Kenton to maintain the same emotional distance he has established for himself. Brian W. Shaffer observes that 'Stevens never addresses Kenton other than by her family name, despite their "close working relationship" for nearly fifteen years' (1998:p.71).

In another passage, Miss Kenton displays curiosity about the book Stevens is reading, but he refuses to disclose what it is. Feeling uneasy, he stands up and clutches the book to himself when Miss Kenton approaches him, trying to find out. He perceives her curiosity as an invasion of privacy and a disruption of some quiet lonely time. Finally, Miss Kenton discovers it was a romance novel, and naturally reacts: "Good gracious, Mr Stevens, it isn't anything so scandalous at all. Simply a sentimental love story" (Ishiguro, 1993:p.167). However, Stevens feels so awkward and agitated that he abruptly shows her out of the pantry. Soon afterward, he sees the need to explain to his audience that his sole motive for reading it, is to improve his command of English, which is desirable in his profession (Ishiguro, 1993:pp.167–168). Stevens appears contradictory here because, while he described his father as the embodiment of a great butler despite lacking a good command of language (Ishiguro,

1993:p.34), which he considers inessential to the art of butlering, he justifies his reading of the book in similar terms: to master his command of English and thus enhance his butlering skills. Additionally, in reference to the book episode, he states:

> 'I did at times gain a sort of incidental enjoyment from these stories. I did not perhaps acknowledge this to myself at the time, but as I say, what shame is there in it? Why should one not enjoy in a light-hearted sort of way stories of ladies and gentlemen who fall in love and express their feelings for each other, often in the most elegant phrases?' (Ishiguro, 1993:p.168)

This ambivalence mirrors the struggle to keep his emotional self repressed. In another instance, Stevens has the chance to console Miss Kenton after the death of her aunt, who was 'like a mother to her' (Ishiguro, 1993:p.176), just as she comforted him when his father passed away. However, he gives the feeble excuse that he does not want to 'intrude upon her private grief' (Ishiguro, 1993:p.176). He senses that she might be crying in her room, and a strange feeling overtakes him. Yet, his repressed self prevents him from doing more than deciding: "I judged it best to await another opportunity to express my sympathy and went on my way" (Ishiguro, 1993:p.177) Some time later, Stevens comes across Miss Kenton, but instead of easing 'her burden a little' (Ishiguro, 1993:p.177), as he had intended to do, he ends up criticising her for being complacent with the new employees under her charge (Ishiguro, 1993:p.178). Even in this grieving situation, Stevens ends up talking business. He is robot-like, incapable of expressing human emotion. He becomes so irritating because of his self-restraint that, at one point, Miss Kenton bursts out: "Why do you always have to *pretend*?" (Ishiguro, 1993:p.154, emphasis in original) With the benefit of hindsight, Stevens considers these episodes—the death of her aunt, the bringing of the vase of flowers into his pantry, and the ending of their cocoa evenings together—as "turning points" (Ishiguro, 1993:p.175), which he, unfortunately, failed to recognise at the time. Now, he is overcome by regret. While emotional repression serves as a defence mechanism for both, Etsuko to cope with a painful past, and Stevens to maintain a professional demeanour, in Stevens, repercussions outweigh the benefits. Stevens may consider himself a great butler; however, his obsession with his profession leads him to stifle his emotions to the extent that he sacrifices the relationships with the most important people in his life. Miss Kenton attempts to build bridges, but Stevens tears them down. Parkes asserts that 'Stevens closes off the possibility of a love story that Miss Kenton has tried so hard to keep open' (2001:p.47). This emotional repression can be read through Freud's structural model of the psyche: the id, which holds Stevens's

repressed desires and affections, is in constant conflict with the superego, which represents the internalised ideals of duty, decorum, and social propriety (Freud, 1960:pp. 30–40). Stevens's ego mediates this conflict by employing repression, pushing his desires out of conscious awareness and rationalising his detachment as "professionalism" (Freud, 1957:pp. 147–149). In this light, his restraint is not mere self-discipline, but a psychological defence rooted in an inner struggle between unconscious desire and rigid moral obligation.

Stevens's repression is also made manifest in his relationship with his father. He refers to his father predominantly in the third person singular, even when speaking directly to him. In the few instances that he refers to his father as "you", he switches back to the third person because he does not know how to be intimate with him. The father-son relationship is characterised by formality and aloofness, as if Stevens and his father are perpetually playing their professional roles. Both feel the need to control their emotions, even within their relationship, as a way to maintain dignity. Lewis states that '[d]ignity, for Stevens, is largely a matter of reserve and aplomb in the pursuit of butlering excellence' (2000:p.82). Stevens's professional role has become so consuming that it dictates every aspect of his life. This was true of his father, too, when he was in the prime of his career. Stevens looks up to his father careerwise and strives to emulate his restraint, which, according to Stevens, is a hallmark of great butlering. A great butler remains unruffled by unexpected events, exemplified by the story of the British butler in India his father likes to tell. When confronted with a tiger in the dining room, he calmly assured his master that dinner would be served on time and that there would be no evidence of the incident afterward (Ishiguro, 1993:p.36). Another example of repressed emotion is when Stevens's father volunteered to tend to the needs of an ex-general, who arrived at Loughborough Hall in his new guise as businessman. Despite harbouring a deep loathing towards this person, responsible for his elder son's death in the Boer War, Stevens's father swallowed his feelings because he recognised the general's importance to his master's business prospects (Ishiguro, 1993:p.41). However, this constant exertion of restraint has led both Stevens and his father to adopt repression as a way of life. As mentioned, these repressed emotions extend beyond their professional realm. Stevens perceives that his last conversations with his father had been reduced to strictly professional matters (if there were ever any intimate ones in the first place), and that they 'took place in an atmosphere of mutual embarrassment' (Ishiguro, 1993:p. 64). Parkes opines that if Stevens had not revealed that the under-butler at Darlington Hall was his father, we might have mistaken him for just another staff member under Stevens's care (2001:p.48).

Stevens also demonstrates repression by never mentioning a mother figure in his life. Additionally, he mentions his brother—his only sibling—only in passing, solely to highlight his father's exceptional abilities as a great butler, rather than acknowledging his brother as an individual in his own right. His family history reaches its peak of repression during the first major conference at Darlington Hall. Stevens senior, sensing his impending death, seeks assurance when he says: "I hope I've been a good father to you", to which Stevens replies, "I'm glad Father is feeling so much better" and "I'm afraid we're extremely busy now, but we can talk again in the morning" (Ishiguro, 1993:p.97). This is what Stevens is capable of expressing. Work always takes precedence. He never tells his father that he adores him or considers him an example worth imitating. When Miss Kenton brings the news that his father has passed away in the room upstairs, Stevens insists on continuing with his professional duties, stating that "my father would have wished me to carry on just now" (Ishiguro, 1993:p.106). Parkes asserts that 'the call of professional duty inevitably drowns the sounds of a personal emotional crisis' (2001:p.50). Reginald Cardinal perceives that something is amiss with Stevens and asks him three times if he is alright. Even Lord Darlington notices such a thing, commenting that it appears Stevens is crying, but Stevens suppresses his emotions and denies it (Ishiguro, 1993:p.105). Sloane remarks that Stevens is multiple immanent subjects oscillating between states (he frequently cries while denying that fact) (2021:p.116). Stevens remains dedicated to serving the guests, engaging in conversations and laughing with them, pretending nothing has happened. In retrospect, he concludes that '[f]or all its sad associations, whenever I recall that evening today, I find I do so with a large sense of triumph' (Ishiguro, 1993:p.110). Lewis notes that '[B]y normal yardsticks, the butler's priorities seem perversely awry, but he manages to recast his behaviour as a professional victory' (2000:p.83). Stevens compels himself to maintain composure and meet his professional demands. This philosophy aligns with his belief in what constitutes a great butler:

> '[. . .] any butler who aspires at all to a 'dignity in keeping with his position' [. . .] should never allow himself to be 'off duty' in the presence of others. [. . .] A butler of any quality must be seen to *inhabit* his role, utterly and fully; he cannot be casting it aside one moment simply to don it again the next as though it were nothing more than a pantomime costume.' (Ishiguro, 1993:p.169, emphasis in original)

Evidently, Stevens puts on a mask or dons a costume, never allowing others to detect his emotional turmoil because he views this as failure.

Stevens also represses himself to focus on fulfilling his master's wishes. He holds this other philosophy in life that he can make a small contribution to the world by serving a great lord. In this context, repression acts as a societal construct. Stevens, as an ordinary person and the son of a servant, believes he cannot rise above his social class:

> '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.' (Ishiguro, 1993:p.244)

Stevens pledges his obedience to his lord at all times, although he senses that some of his decisions are wrong. When Lord Darlington adopts an anti-Semitic stance under the influence of his German allies and orders Stevens to dismiss the two Jewish maids from his staff, despite their professional competence, Stevens promptly complies. Miss Kenton opposes this decision, but Stevens remarks: "His lordship has made his decision and there is nothing for you and I to debate over" (Ishiguro, 1993:p.148). Their duty is just to fulfil the wishes of their employer because, according to Stevens, he is in a better position to understand big issues like Jewry and 'better placed to judge what is for the best' (Ishiguro, 1993:p.149). Stevens's political repression is driven by his belief that it is morally wrong to contradict his master, coupled with the recognition that individuals like himself lack the knowledge to judge political matters. Rebecca L. Walkowitz asserts that 'Stevens fails to notice that his professional restraint contributes not only to international alliances but also to anti-Semitism, political appeasement, and emotional isolation' (2007:p.223). Dominic Head also notes that 'the condition [of subjection] has been thoroughly internalised, making [Stevens] the ideal conduit for a ruling-class agenda' (2002:p.158). At one point, Reginald Cardinal tries to explain to him that his lord has become a pawn of the Nazis, yet Stevens fails to heed his words and continues to give his lord unswerving loyalty, thereby ending up being "the pawn of a pawn" (Shaffer, 1998:p.73). He willingly chooses to be politically blind. In one episode, he allows himself to be humiliated by Mr Spencer, one of his master's guests at Darlington Hall, by answering his political questions in a manner that confirms his theory that ordinary people are ignorant of politics. Then Stevens asserts:

> 'Let us establish this quite clearly: a butler's duty is to provide good service. It is not to meddle in the great affairs of the nation. The fact is, such great affairs will always be beyond the understanding of those such as you and I, and those of us who wish to make our mark must realise that we best do so by concentrating on what is within our realm; that is to say, by devoting our attention to providing the best possible service to those great gentlemen in whose hands the destiny of civilisation truly lies.' (Ishiguro, 1993:p.199)

Stevens is constrained by the social class he belongs to, yet for once, he feels flattered when villagers in the West Country mistake him for a gentleman. After all, he has always aspired to be important (to contribute to a great cause), but he is aware that, in his case, this is only possible by serving a great man. Thus, as in the case of Etsuko, repression in Stevens is also a societal construct. To further substantiate the point that Stevens lives in a repressive society, consider an incident in the novel when David Cardinal must explain sexual matters to his 25-year-old son in preparation for his upcoming marriage. He had attempted to have this conversation with his son for the past five years without success. Eventually, he passes the responsibility to Lord Darlington, his son's godfather, who, in turn, assigns Stevens to handle this delicate task. Stevens behaves awkwardly and is all too eager to avoid it when his professional obligations demand his attention (Ishiguro, 1993:p.85, 90).

Moreover, a sense of superiority for his nation paradoxically leads Stevens to repression. He believes that true great butlers exist solely in England because they alone possess the capability for emotional restraint (Ishiguro, 1993:p.43). This restraint is also reflected in the landscape, which Stevens describes as characterised by a lack of dramatic or spectacular elements, and a sense of quietness and restraint. The landscape recognises its beauty but feels no need to boast about it, unlike some sights in Africa or America which 'strike the objective viewer as inferior on account of their unseemly demonstrativeness' (Ishiguro, 1993:p.29). Consequently, Stevens is influenced by the ideology that undemonstrativeness or repression is a strength, not a weakness.

Stevens's literal journey to the West Country symbolises his metaphorical journey into his past, during which he reflects on select memories involving his father, his lord, and Miss Kenton—three key figures in his life. In an interview with Graham Swift, Ishiguro stated that "[a]t some level [the protagonists] have to know what they have to avoid and that determines the routes they take through memory, and through the past. There's no coincidence that they're usually worrying over the past. They're worrying because they sense there isn't something quite right there" (2008/1989:p.39). Recollecting the conference of 1923, Stevens recounts meticulously the preparations for that significant event because history "could well be made under this roof" (Ishiguro, 1993:p.77). He also devotes considerable attention to narrating the details of serving the guests, but only a small portion of his recollection is dedicated to his dying father. More is revealed through what is reported to him by Miss Kenton and the doctor, rather than what he experienced himself. This overemphasis-underemphasis effect serves to highlight the aspects Stevens feels proud of or comfortable talking about while obscuring those he feels ashamed of or guilty about. In the same event, Stevens recalls how M. Dupont extols

Lord Darlington as a well-intentioned and honest person, echoing Stevens's previous praise of his master. It appears that M. Dupont's speech about Lord Darlington is Stevens's own reconstruction of the actual speech, reassuring him that his loyalty to his master was justified. Similar to Etsuko, Stevens appropriates others to justify his actions and beliefs. The other pivotal event Stevens recollects is the year 1936, a decisive year in the career of Lord Darlington, as well as in Stevens's professional and personal life. Lord Darlington is deceived by Hitler and ends up supporting his policies, which ultimately led to his downfall. Consequently, Stevens's sacrifices are rendered futile. In the same event, Miss Kenton informs him that Mr Benn has proposed to her and indicates that Stevens had the right to know, implying she would decline the proposal if Stevens expressed his feelings for her. However, instead of seizing the opportunity to confess his emotions, Stevens behaves coldly, distant, and disinterested, ultimately pushing her towards accepting the proposal. When she informs him of her acceptance, Stevens merely says, "Miss Kenton, you have my warmest congratulations. But I repeat, there are matters of global significance taking place upstairs and I must return to my post" (Ishiguro, 1993:p.219). In recollection, however, he betrays himself by recalling a fragment of memory associated with that event: Miss Kenton was crying in her room, and he contemplated knocking on her door but was paralysed by indecision. He confesses that this moment remained vivid in his memory over the years (Ishiguro, 1993:p.212). Another instance is when he meets Miss Kenton (now Mrs Benn) in Little Compton and he describes her, by and large, as the same person "who had inhabited [his] memory over these years" (Ishiguro, 1993:p.232). From these instances, it is clear that Stevens had feelings for Miss Kenton (he still does) but repression and indecision got the better of him. These select memories serve mostly to justify his choices, though he knows deep down they were not the right ones. This becomes evident when he breaks down crying in front of a stranger at the Weymouth pier. Ironically, he continues to repress himself by attributing his emotional state to travel tiredness (Ishiguro, 1993:p.243).

One last aspect of repression, similar to Etsuko, is manifested in Stevens's narrative style. In some instances, Stevens impersonalises a personal incident by using "one" (Ishiguro, 1993:pp.139,243–245). Margaret Scanlan argues that Stevens avoids painful confrontations with his past by substituting the first person "I" with the third person impersonal pronoun:

> 'Stevens indeed frequently avoids the first person, substituting an evasive *one* when his emotions are in danger of breaking through. The great heartbreak of his life, his estrangement from Miss Kenton, hides behind this locution, as when he describes how, meaning to condole with her for the loss of her aunt, he

ended up rebuking her for failing to supervise the new maids.' (qtd. in Beedham, 2010:p.47, emphasis in original)

Whenever Stevens uses the pronoun "one" instead of "I", his speech takes on an abstract, theoretical tone. In doing so, he shifts the focus from himself to people in general and distances himself from feelings of guilt, much like Etsuko. In addition, his narrative is marked by 'gaps and silences [which] act as defensive tools for hiding, deflecting and distorting stories recounted' (Szederkényi, 2014:p.9). Day Five of his journey, for example, the day he met Miss Kenton is entirely missing. He only narrates the encounter retrospectively during Day Six-Afternoon, likely omitting many details and narrating only what he deems fit to narrate. Stevens uses a polished, formal language that he has emulated (as is the case mentioned above with the romance book Miss Kenton caught him reading). This language seems "mock", using Mr Farraday's term, as though he inhabits it like a costume frequently mentioned in the book, aiming to give the impression that he is a true gentleman. In other words, he represses his true self in favour of his professional self. Repression also emerges in the form of the detached tone Stevens employs, giving the impression that he is impervious to what is transpiring and thereby concealing his true feelings. Stevens's repressed narrative style can be more deeply understood through Paul Ricoeur's concept of narrative identity, as an effort to impose coherence on a fragmented and emotionally dissonant past. His self-narration is governed by the standards of professional dignity, constructing a stable idem-identity at the expense of acknowledging the vulnerable, shifting dimensions of his ipse-self.

## 4. Conclusion

Etsuko and Stevens have gone a long way and their 'lives have not turned out quite as [they] might have wished' (Ishiguro, 1993:p.244). Various factors have affected their choices: some personal and emotional, others societal and national. Both protagonists knead narratives that serve to conceal rather than reveal, attempting to preserve a sense of dignity and coherence in the face of painful pasts. By applying psychoanalytic, narrative, sociocultural and gender theories, we see how repression in these novels functions on multiple levels: as a defence against personal guilt and as a learned response to societal expectations. Etsuko displaces memory and accountability through fragmented storytelling, while Stevens clings to a professional ideal that demands emotional erasure. These characters illustrate how identity and memory are shaped not just by internal drives but also by historical, cultural, and institutional forces.

In this way, Ishiguro's novels serve as profound meditations on the burden of memory and the cost of repression. They invite us to consider how we, too, may conceal uncomfortable truths—not only from others but also from ourselves—shaping narratives that comfort rather than confront.

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## СКРИВАЊЕ И ОТКРИВАЊЕ: РЕПРЕСИЈА У РОМАНИМА *БЛИЈЕДИ ПОГЛЕД НА БРДА* И *ОСТАЦИ ДАНА*

*Резиме*

Једна од тема које се понављају у романима Казуа Ишигура јесте потискивање. У овом раду бавимо се *Блиједим погледом на брда* (1982) и *Остацима дана* (1989), анализирајући потискивање кроз леђу психоаналитичке књижевне теорије – нарочито Фројдовог концепта потискивања као одбрамбеног механизма – те кроз теорију трауме и кроз наратолошке оквире наративног идентитета. Поред тога, аутори се ослањају на социокултурну и родну теорију да би показали како потискивање не функционише само на нивоу појединца већ као шири друштвени конструкт, на нивоу државе. Кроз пажљиву текстуалну анализу, чланак потврђује да Ишигурови ликови не потискују само емоције већ и аспекте сопствене и културне историје у покушају да сачувају крхки осјећај достојанства и усклађености са самим собом.
▸ ***Кључне ријечи*:** потискивање, траума, *Блиједи поглед на брда*, *Остаци дана*, селективна сјећања, одбрамбени механизам, друштвени и државни конструкт, кривица, бол.

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