



# Repression, Defense Mechanisms and the Unreliability of Stevens' Narration in *The Remains of the Day*

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Repression, Defense Mechanisms and the Unreliability of Stevens' Narration in *The Remains of the Day*

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**Abstract**

This essay argues that repression and defense mechanisms contribute to the unreliability of Stevens' narration through three aspects: Stevens' uncertainty of certain memories, his failure to report certain scenes correctly and his defensive, self-contradictory discourse. There is no single best way to define what is considered reliable and what is unreliable in narratology because the complexity of fictional characters will render different kinds of unreliability. This essay detects three kinds of unreliability of Stevens corresponding to the three aspects mentioned above: the first kind results from the untrustworthiness of our memory, the second kind is the contradiction between the voice of the narrator and the other characters and the third kind lies within the narrative discourse. The unreliability of Stevens' narration attributes to repression and defense mechanisms. The five kinds of defense mechanisms analyzed in the essay are selective memory, denial, projection, reaction formation and rationalization. In order to defend his self-image as a great butler, Stevens lies to or hides from himself and tries to avoid acknowledging certain undesirable thoughts or emotions. Even though Stevens becomes more reliable as he gains more self-realization during the road trip, his defenses are still on.

**Key words**

repression, defense mechanisms, (un)reliable narrator, discourse, the (un)conscious, butler, Kazuo Ishiguro, *The Remains of the Day*

*The Remains of the Day* is written by Kazuo Ishiguro, the winner of the 2017 Nobel Prize in Literature. It is the 1989 Booker Prize winner and the basis for the successful 1993 film starring Anthony Hopkins and Emma Thompson. Since its first publication in 1989, *The Remains of the Day* has encouraged discussions of many fields. Some critics are interested in the diasporic background of the author (Belau and Cameron, 2007); some have compared his works with those of other post-colonial writers (Parkes, 2001); and others investigate the class issue in the story (Fluet, 2007). This essay, however, discusses the first-person narrator in *The Remains of the Day* and argues that the unreliability of Stevens lies in his psychological ambivalence. The essay analyzes three aspects where repression and defense mechanisms contribute to the unreliability of the narrator. The first aspect is Stevens' uncertainty of certain memories; the second aspect is his failure to report certain scenes correctly; and the third aspect is his defensive and self-contradictory discourse.

The first-person narrator in *The Remains of the Day* has been a common discussion topic among critics and it is necessary to present some of their ideas. An early discussion about the unreliable narrator in *The Remains of the Day* is Kathleen Wall's article which was published in *The Journal of Narrative Technique* in 1994. In "The Remains of the Day' and its Challenges to Theories of Unreliable Narration," Wall suggests that Ishiguro creates a first-person narrator who challenges the traditional definition of an unreliable narrator, which focuses on the in-accordance between the "norms and values" of the implied author and the words or actions of the narrator (Wall 18). This sort of unreliability can be understood as the contradiction between the meaning conveyed by the overall structure of the story and the meaning promoted by the narrator's words and actions. Instead, Wall argues that Stevens belongs to a sort of unreliable narrator "whose weakness is psychological, who lies to or hides from himself" (Wall 22) because he/she is constantly in a mental struggle to defend his/her identity against his/her own doubts. This kind of unreliable narrator, according to Wall, is "less likely to distort events," but more inclined to make comments which contradict scenic presentations (Wall 22).

Similarly, in the article published in 1999 called "The Lessons of 'Weymouth': Homodiegesis, Unreliability, Ethics, and *The Remains of the Day*," James Phelan and Mary Patricia Martin argue that the unreliability of Stevens' narration is linked to his "knowledge and perception," in other words, he becomes more reliable when he gains more knowledge about himself (92). James Phelan and Mary Patricia Martin focus mainly on the last chapter of the book, when Stevens spends his last night in Weymouth and visits a pier before driving back to Darlington Hall the next day. Looking at Stevens' character as one who struggles to gain more accurate information, they maintain that Ste-

vens' "inability to articulate fully his motives underlines the magnitude of his later self-recognition" (93). The last chapter is the culmination of Stevens' struggle for self-recognition, and it is also the moment when Stevens is the most honest throughout the whole journey. The reason why he fails to report honestly his motives earlier on is because of his lack of self-awareness caused by his strong repression.

In the article by Lilian R. Furst called "Memory's Fragile Power in Kazuo Ishiguro's 'Remains of the Day' and W. G. Sebald's 'Max Ferber'" which was published in 2007, Furst looks specifically at the untrustworthy role which memory plays in *The Remains of the Day*. Furst argues that it is difficult to trust the first-person narrator's memory when he recounts events in the past (532). Furst further argues that what makes it difficult to trust what he says is the first-person perspective, which means that the events and values will be filtered through Stevens' point of view (534). Just as Furst points out, Stevens' recollection of past events becomes "a biased self-justification aimed to emphasize how right and admirable he has been all along" (549). It is understandable that Stevens tries so hard to defend his behavior and the values he upholds, because just like anyone, his identity is built around them.

It is equally important to note in the beginning that there is not one single best way to define what is considered reliable and what is unreliable. Since Booth first brought up these two binary terms in 1961, critics have debated about its clear-cut classification and tried to refine it. While Booth suggests that there is an implied author constructed by the overall text who is judging the unreliable narrator's morals and values behind his back, critics have introduced different insights since then. Both Wall and Hansen note the same kind of inconsistency existing within the narration. Hansen refers to this inconsistency as "intranarrational unreliability" (2007) and Wall calls the signals of such inconsistency "verbal patterns or tics" (1994). Critics often take into consideration the character type of the narrator when they determine the reliability of the narrator (Wall 1994; Furst 2007). Hansen also mentions Nünning's reader-oriented method. By examining the case of Humbert in Nabokov's *Lolita*, Nünning argues that the reliability of the narrator is linked directly to the values of the real reader. That is to say, the reader will consider the narrator to be more reliable if the narrator's worldview agrees with his or her own (Hansen 227-228).

It seems that there is always some kind of contradiction, discrepancy or inconsistency when the unreliability occurs. Like Hansen says, the reader tends to resort to the concept of "unreliable narrator" when they detect "textual inconsistencies" (235), whether they are between the implied author and the narrator, the narrator and the implied reader, or within the narrator himself/herself.

The contradiction between the implied author and the narrator happens when the narration contradicts the narrative reality (Hansen 234). The contradiction between the narrator and the implied reader happens when there are two sets of stories told: one promoted by the narrator but not accepted by the implied reader and the other accepted by the implied reader but "unacknowledged and/or suppressed (consciously and unconsciously)" by the narrator (Hansen 237). The contradiction within the narrator himself/herself exists within the narrator's discourse (Hansen 234).

Just as Tamar Yacobi puts it: "there are no package deals in narrative" (223) as the complexity of fictional narrators will render various types of unreliability, but critics can offer "different strategies" (Hansen 244), for example Hansen's "four-category taxonomy" (227) and Phelan and Martin's "six types of unreliability" (93). Hansen comes up with four kinds of unreliability, which are intranarrational unreliability, internarrational unreliability, intertextual unreliability and extratextual unreliability (241). Intranarrational unreliability refers to the recurring verbal patterns which signify uncertainty or internal contradictions (241-242). Internarrational unreliability occurs when the narrator's version of the story contradicts other narrators' version (241). Intertextual unreliability considers the character type of the narrator as a determining factor of the narrator's reliability (242). Extratextual unreliability requires the reader to use his/her own values and knowledge from real life to relate to the narrator in the fictional world (242-243). Phelan and Martin's "six types of unreliability" are misreporting, misreading, misregarding, underreporting, underreading and underregarding (95). These six types of unreliability are more nuanced divisions of unreliability along three parameters: the axes of event/fact (89), ethics/values (89) and knowledge/perception (92). This essay does not use Phelan and Martin's "six types of unreliability" because their focus is mainly on the last chapter of the book and they merely investigate certain extracts from the last chapter in a detailed or even nuanced sense.

As we can see, there are different standards when it comes to what is considered reliable and what is unreliable. Therefore this essay's definition of unreliability cannot conform to only one standard or another, but really depends on the specific situation analyzed here: Stevens in *The Remains of the Day*. The essay detects three kinds of unreliability corresponding to the three aspects which will be analyzed to support the thesis statement. This essay argues that repression and defense mechanisms contribute to the unreliability of Stevens' narration. In other words, the essay proves how repression and defense mechanisms lead to the following three kinds of unreliability. The first kind is the intrinsic unreliability due to the nature of the first-person narrator in relation to the function of memory. The second kind of unreliability is between the narration and the narrative reality,

the latter represented by the voice of other characters. The third kind of unreliability lies within the narrative discourse and is what Hansen calls intranarrational unreliability.

This essay uses Hansen's notion of internarrational unreliability and intranarrational unreliability because they support the second and third kind of unreliability detected in *The Remains of the Day*. As for Hansen's other two kinds of unreliability—intertextual unreliability and intratextual unreliability—this essay does not use them for the following reason. The essay does consider the character type of Stevens—an aging butler with limited knowledge and an ingrained worldview. However, this factor alone is not suitable for systematic close-reading analysis, since *The Remains of the Day* is basically Stevens' diary or monologue. This essay also uses real life knowledge to make inference about Stevens' behavior and narration, but extratextual unreliability is reader-oriented too and takes the focus away from the work itself.

Now that we have detected the indicators of Stevens' unreliability, in order to look into the cause of Stevens' unreliability, a definition of repression and defense mechanisms has to be presented here. The father of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, first brings up the concept of the conscious, the unconscious, and repression in his four lectures on the origin and development of psychoanalysis. Sigmund Freud notices that there may exist two independent mental states in one individual and he calls them the conscious state and the unconscious state (189). According to Sigmund Freud, the unconscious is where the memories of and painful emotions associated with pathogenic situations are "imprisoned" and "forgotten" by the conscious mind (188). Lois Tyson compares the unconscious to a "storehouse" in which our thoughts and emotions associated with painful experiences as well as our "fears, guilty desires, and unresolved conflicts" are kept (12).

Repression is thus the process through which those undesirable memories, thoughts, and emotions are kept in the unconscious. However, they never disappear but are always ready to emerge into the conscious (Freud 192). The result of this dynamic power struggle is that we unconsciously act in ways which are the "surrogate" (Freud 196) for those repressed objects. Repression seems to be inefficient and actually this is where defense mechanisms are called into being. In a study conducted in 1998 by three psychologists called Roy F. Baumeister, Karen Dale and Kristin L. Sommer, new revisions of Freudian defense mechanisms are made. They first clarify the relation between repression and defense mechanisms. For them, repression is neither one of the defense mechanisms, although its function is similar to denial (one of the defense mechanisms), nor an equal to the totality of all the defense mechanisms, even though they have the same purpose and complement each other. They argue further that "repression is simply the blotting of threatening material

out of the conscious mind, and if that could succeed, then there would be no need for defense mechanisms" (1084-1085). Metaphorically speaking, if repression is like a net with holes through which the painful experiences and emotions can escape out into the conscious mind, then the defense mechanisms are like forceful stand-by hands ready to push them back into the unconscious.

Whether repression or defense mechanisms, they serve the same purpose and complement each other to protect our self-esteem, or as Baumeister, Dale and Sommer put it, the "favorable views of ourselves" (1082). A similar notion raised by Sigmund Freud is "the ethical, esthetic and personal pretensions of [our] personality" (193). If one desire is in opposition to the other desires of the individual and does not fit into the identity of the preferred self, then the desire will be repressed and not recognized by the conscious mind (Freud 193). Just like Sigmund Freud, Baumeister, Dale, and Sommer, Tyson also thinks that defense mechanisms work unconsciously and aim to keep us thinking and doing things in the way which we believe shapes our identity (15).

This essay argues that repression and defense mechanisms contribute to the unreliability of Stevens' narration and an important point to note here concerning the thesis statement is the use of the collective noun "defense mechanisms". In his review of Anna Freud's book *The Ego and the Mechanisms of defense*, Ron Spielman lists 21 defense mechanisms which Anna Freud has mentioned in her book and 8 others which she has not mentioned. There are around 30 different kinds of defense mechanisms and psychologists have tried to put them into different groups according to different measurements. The collective term "defense mechanisms" in the thesis statement does not mean that all kinds of defense mechanisms contribute to Stevens' unreliability. There are maybe other defense mechanisms which Stevens uses and which this essay does not mention, but the ones mentioned and analyzed in the essay (selective memory, denial, projection, reaction formation, and rationalization) are proven to contribute to Stevens' unreliability.

The classification of defense mechanisms has played a big part in the development of psychoanalysis and psychologists have come up with different solutions. Spielman argues further that compared to other psychoanalytical concepts, defense mechanisms are most subjected to empirical research (433) and this calls for a need to classify all different kinds of defense mechanisms. Similarly, in the article called "An Objective Instrument for Measuring Defense Mechanisms," Goldine C. Gleser and David Ihilevich maintain that it is important to classify defense mechanisms, not only for the purpose of measurement and research, but also for the convenience in clinical situations (51).

Now that we have already had a brief background about narrative (un)reliability and a theoretical background of repression and defense mechanisms, it is proper to give a short introduction of the book here. Stevens, the first-person narrator in *The Remains of the Day*, has been the butler of Darlington Hall for almost 40 years. He is now on a road trip to the West Country to meet his former coworker—Miss Kenton, whom he wants to recruit again after her 20 years of marriage. During his trip, Stevens also reminisces about his past, recollecting past events and important people in his life, namely his father, his employer Lord Darlington and his coworker Miss Kenton.

Stevens is a very complicated case in the study of narrative reliability because he challenges the binary distinction of either reliable or unreliable. If he is unreliable because he is a person with a strong bias towards most topics due to his limited knowledge and his subjective values; then he seems to be “more ’reliable’” in the way that he is “aware of [his] biases” and he “struggle[s] for such awareness” (Wall 22). Stevens seems to be aware of opposing opinions when he is stating his own, as it is shown by sentences starting with such as “you may retort” (Ishiguro 44) and “there will always be . . . those who would claim that” (Ishiguro 45). He also reflects on and criticizes his own words or behavior, for example when his new employer Mr Farraday asks him why he does not admit to Mr Farraday’s friends that he has worked for Lord Darlington, he later finds his answer “woefully inadequate” (Ishiguro 132). Then he starts to reconsider why he does not tell the truth after he lies to a stranger about the same thing, but only comes to another inadequate conclusion—because he does not want to hear people talking “utter nonsense” (Ishiguro 132) about Lord Darlington.

Examples of Stevens’ reliability abound, but as Phelan and Martin point out, Stevens’ narration is “reliable as far as it goes; the problem is that it does not go far enough” (91). While Stevens does possess some degree of wisdom and knowledge and his flow of thoughts is logical to some extent, his narration always gets suspicious when he tries so hard to defend his image as a great butler who seems to be so successful and perfect. It seems like any thoughts or emotions which are contrary to the image of a great butler would instantly be repressed by him or expressed in the form of their “surrogate” (Freud 196). Indeed, the abundance of defensive remarks together with his verbal patterns almost always signify his ambivalent mental state. As Wall puts it, Stevens is the kind of unreliable narrator whose “weakness is psychological”. Because they undergo severe mental conflict or believe strongly in certain ideas, they have to “[lie] to or [hide] from [themselves]” so that the mental pieces that construct their world would not tumble down (Wall 22).

The most evident indicator of this unreliability is Stevens’ uncertain recollection of past events. It is understandable that an old man like him would not remember every event from almost

30 years ago so clearly, as it is shown by frequent confessions such as "I am not sure . . ." (Ishiguro 63), "I cannot recall now . . ." (Ishiguro 94), "I can't recall precisely what I said . . ." (Ishiguro 176) and so on. However, judging "the role of the unconscious in our everyday experience of remembering and forgetting" (Furst 530), his recollection of past events is certainly affected by his repression. Furst argues that the events Stevens can or cannot remember, that he can remember clearly or not so clearly, depend largely on the "significance" Stevens attributes to them (539). What is significant for Stevens is no doubt his pursuit of being a great butler and therefore events which ensure him of that identity stay alive in his memory; conversely, events which undermine his preferred self-image would be gone, fade away or appear blurry in his mind. Even though Stevens' recollections of past events are like jumpy episodes without any order (which manifests his conflicting mental state), the lengthy discussion about the qualities of a great butler in the second chapter of the book still bespeaks his preoccupation.

According to Tyson, one way for us to keep the unwanted thoughts and emotions in the unconscious is through selective memory, which is the act of "modifying our memories so that we do not feel overwhelmed by them or forgetting painful events entirely" (15). Selective memory comes into function when Stevens has a lapse in his recollection because he totally forgets the painful events or when he cannot be sure of certain facts because he tries to change the painful events into something he can handle. Three instances can illustrate that Stevens' unreliability arises from the working of repression and selective memory.

The first instance is when Stevens recounts the important 1923 conference held in Darlington Hall and he recalls being very busy serving the guests of Lord Darlington. He remembers that he has tried several times to inform the young Mr Cardinal about "the facts of life" (Ishiguro 86); he remembers paying extra attention to the suspicious American gentleman—Mr Lewis—and tending to the most crucial figure for the conference—M. Dupont. However, there is no recollection of how his father is doing on Stevens' part until his father is "taken ill upstairs" (Ishiguro 97). Before Stevens is informed of his father's breaking down, he has already left his position once, but is now unable to recollect the reason why: "The German countess then began to speak, but I was at this point, for some reason I do not recollect, obliged to leave the drawing room for an extended period" (Ishiguro 96). It is very likely that he leaves the drawing room to check on his father's condition on the warning from other workers, but he does not want to admit to himself that his father's working ability is declining because of old age.

Just like the Chinaman incident where Stevens refuses to get out of the billiard room to check if the Chinaman is in the right position so that he can “[hide] from himself” (Wall 22) the fact that his father is making mistakes because he is too old to carry out his work, this lapse of remembrance is also a blocking of information which is too disturbing for him to handle. In Stevens’ mind, his father possesses the “dignity in keeping with his positions” (Ishiguro 36)—the ability to perform one’s job with emotional constraint in any kind of difficult situation, which he wants for himself too. He identifies with his father, looks up to him and sees his own future in him. Therefore, to face the fact that his father can age and die is to remind himself that one day he will also age, or worse, be useless. The thought is terrible enough to be repressed by Stevens who is now moving towards the remains of his day—the latter part of his life.

The second instance also takes place during the 1923 conference when Stevens suspects Mr Lewis for the first time:

It is possible this is a case of hindsight coloring my memory, but I have a distinct feeling that it was at that moment I first sensed something odd, something duplicitous perhaps, about this apparently charming American gentleman. But if my own suspicions were aroused at that moment, Lord Darlington evidently did not share them. (Ishiguro 90-91)

Here Stevens is in a very ambivalent frame of mind. On the one hand, he is very sure about feeling something suspicious regarding Mr Lewis—the unpopular American gentleman during the 1923 conference at that specific moment, as it is suggested by the word “distinct” which means clear and unmistakable. On the other hand, he doubts that he has detected the trickiness of Mr Lewis at that early stage even when Lord Darlington is unaware of that. He thinks that he just realized that because he is looking back at the event now. Later on Stevens finds out that Mr Lewis is speaking ill of Lord Darlington behind his lordship’s back and Mr Lewis reveals himself as a contemptuous and disrespectful person among the guests. However, even in retrospect, Stevens dares not to have his own opinion because his master does not share it.

Stevens believes firmly that a butler’s right position is to find a master whom he thinks “wise and honourable” (Ishiguro 211) and devote his best service to him. He chooses Lord Darlington as the one who possesses the right judgment and the one whom he decides to devote his best service to. Stevens is wholeheartedly dedicated to Lord Darlington, whom he serves loyally and trusts blindly. For Stevens, gentlemen like Lord Darlington are people who can influence “the destiny of

civilization," while butlers can never understand the "great affairs" they are up to (Ishiguro 209). Even when Lord Darlington dismisses the two Jewish maids, Stevens still believes that his master has his own reasons which are too complicated for him to understand. Therefore it is not strange that even when Stevens is alone with himself, he dares not question Lord Darlington's judgment. Furst notices that Stevens "has shut his mind," blocking all the uncomfortable thoughts which might betray his "creed of loyalty" towards Lord Darlington (546). Seen in this light, Stevens' uncertainty of this memory is another case of the working of repression and selective memory, since he does not want to admit to himself that he has a different opinion than Lord Darlington.

The third instance occurs when Stevens tries to remember the reason why Miss Kenton comes to his pantry one evening when he is alone reading romantic novels and he confuses it with the times when she brings flowers to his pantry. For Stevens, his pantry is both "a crucial office" (Ishiguro 173) where he makes the most important decisions concerning his work and a private place where he can take off his professional clothing. If Stevens wants to relax after work and engage in some private activities, he will also do it in his pantry. In fact, Furst suggests that Stevens' reading romantic novels is one way for him to vent his repressed and suppressed desires and feelings (548). Stevens is dedicated to his work almost all the time, but as a young man he still needs to let out his sexual desire, even if by means of reading romantic novels. However, judging from their close working relation which is now at its peak because of their intimate cocoa meetings (Stevens meets up with Miss Kenton at her parlour for their daily meeting over cocoa), it is possible that Miss Kenton is entering and leaving his pantry for no particular reason, a sign of their rather personal relationship.

The defensive phrase "I had never allowed" (Ishiguro 173) is his denial of the fact that he has forged a rather personal relationship with Miss Kenton, which, if allowed to develop into a romantic one, would become a threat to his career. Earlier in the book, Stevens already states that butlers or housekeepers who get married and leave their positions are "a blight on good professionalism" (Ishiguro 53) and he shows his disapproval of butlers who engage in romantic relationships with housekeepers. Stevens dedicates his life to striving to be a great butler and he has always been repressing his romantic feelings towards Miss Kenton. He does not want to acknowledge to himself that he has failed to constrain his romantic feelings towards Miss Kenton or that he has allowed her to enter his pantry freely. Therefore, he represses these thoughts which threaten his identity as a good butler by modifying that memory.

Another useful indicator of Stevens' unreliability is his failure to report certain scenes correctly. Whiteley summarizes that Stevens often fails to report the "full picture" of the scenes he recounts (29) and he tends to leave out certain information which other characters manage to convey. It is especially evident when Stevens' rendering of the scene contradicts the version rendered by other character(s) involved in the same scene. One kind of unreliability included in Hansen's "four-category taxonomy" (227), internarrational unreliability, occurs here when Stevens' version of the story contradicts other narrators' version. There are "other voices" from other characters in the story, notes Hansen, and their renderings of the story raise question concerning the authority of the narrator's version because they are also participants in the situation and they can offer different perspectives (241).

However, it is important to note the fact that convention in narratology agrees that the scenes presented by the unreliable narrator are actually reliable (Wall 20). The scenic presentations, maintains Whiteley, though accompanied by the uncertainty of memory, can "foreground" the narrator's limited perspective (29) by showing the contrast between his voice and the voices of other characters. The voices of other characters appear only in scenic presentations in *The Remains of the Day*, which means that they are independent from the subjective narration of Stevens, even though the scenic presentations are still rendered by him. As a first-person narrator, Stevens often comments on the scenes he presents earlier to "clarify" certain points, or rather, to justify his own behavior. As a result, Stevens' commentaries on the scenes usually contradict scenic presentations, a fact which makes him even more unreliable (25). Hansen also suggests that in order to gain a more accurate evaluation of the reliability of a narrator, the reader should pay more attention to the actual event, rather than focus too much on the narrator's comment (237).

One major defense mechanism adopted by Stevens when he fails to report certain scenes fully and correctly is denial. As mentioned earlier in the essay, denial's function is similar to repression, and can be understood, according to Baumeister, Dale and Sommer, as "the simple refusal to face certain facts" which are threatening to the protection of self-esteem (1107). Tyson also notes that denial is to deny the existence of unpleasant situations in a self-deceptive fashion (15). Stevens believes a butler's dignity lies in emotional restraint, but he can also act emotionally or even childishly on certain occasions. The fact that he can also be emotional undermines his self-image as a great butler and is threatening to his identity, therefore he automatically denies it in his conscious mind. Two instances are discussed here to illustrate how psychological denial leads to his failure to report certain scenes correctly.

The first instance once again takes place during the 1923 conference when his father dies. Stevens focuses mainly on his achievement when he recounts that conference and never explicitly acknowledges his sorrow over his father's death. The message that Stevens is actually very sad over his father's death is conveyed through other characters instead. Wall points out that Stevens "fails to report emotions or reactions that other characters notice" (25). Indeed, it is Lord Darlington who notices that Stevens is crying and inquires if he is all right. Stevens replies that he feels "perfectly" all right and it is just "the strains of a hard day" (Ishiguro 110). Here Lord Darlington is more reliable because no matter what excuse Stevens uses, he is wiping off his tears with a handkerchief. Moreover, a hard day of work would probably make him very tired, but not make him cry. Another telling detail is that there are three times when Stevens mentions that other people have cried for his father. Mrs Mortimer, the cook, "began to cry" (Ishiguro 108) when she thinks his father has had a stroke and was "weeping bitterly" (Ishiguro 114) when his father dies. Even when Miss Kenton informs Stevens of his father's death, "a sob escaped her" (Ishiguro 110). If other people even cry for his father's death, it is suspicious to say that Stevens himself does not feel anything.

For Stevens, "dignity" means never abandoning a butler's clothes in public, that is to say, to carry on one's work with emotional constraint no matter how difficult the situation is (Ishiguro 43-44). He believes that he has demonstrated "that crucial quality of 'dignity'" and has become mature as a butler (Ishiguro 73) during the 1923 conference. However, in order to obtain that dignity, Stevens acts very cold towards the death of his father by neglecting the suffering of his father and repressing his own sorrow. Burguno notices that one psychological reason of his behavior is that Stevens "denies so much of the human condition" (100) which, in this case, is the pain arising from his father's death. Even in retrospect, when the ambiguous idea of the "sad occasions" (Ishiguro 110) sticks out of his mind, he quickly transfers this potential feeling of grief and regret into "a large sense of triumph" (Ishiguro 110). Only through focusing on his professional achievement and denying the unhappy episode of his father's death can Stevens reach momentary mental peace.

The second instance occurs on the evening when Miss Kenton goes out to meet her acquaintance and she accepts his marriage proposal. Again Stevens "fails to report emotions or reactions that other characters notice" (Wall 25). It is through the information provided by other characters who participate in the same event, in this case Miss Kenton and Mr Cardinal, that the reader gets to see the full picture of the scene. Stevens appears to be strangely calm and even happy when Miss Kenton informs him about the purpose of her going out. However, during their argument shortly after that, Miss Kenton reveals the truth that Stevens is actually very displeased and even angry

about her going out and that he shows his anger by making noises both in the kitchen and outside of her room (Ishiguro 226). It is Mr Cardinal this time who notices that Stevens is feeling unwell and asks if he is all right and to whom Stevens replies "perfectly all right" (Ishiguro 231). The small laugh he lets out when he replies to Mr Cardinal's question gives way to his pretentious demeanor, indicating that he is actually lying nervously. The fact is that he is very sad because Miss Kenton has accepted the marriage proposal of her acquaintance. Wall claims that unreliability occurs when the meanings conferred by the narrator contradict the truth rendered by the whole story (21). It is precisely through the sharp contrast between Stevens' rendering of the story and the truth revealed by Miss Kenton and Mr Cardinal that Stevens' narration turns out to be unreliable.

Wall argues that an unreliable narrator tends to lie to himself/herself, without acknowledging to himself/herself facts that undermine his/her identity (21). Stevens tries very hard to defend the values he upholds and, in this way, his identity as a good butler who possesses certain qualities such as dignity and loyalty. He has always been repressing his romantic feelings towards Miss Kenton because he knows that engaging in a romantic relationship is a threatening factor in a butler's career. By denying the fact that he is romantically attached to and emotionally affected by Miss Kenton, he gets rid of that threatening factor to his career. In the prior situation, Stevens denies the fact that he is emotionally affected by Miss Kenton, so he automatically leaves out that information when he recounts the scene. In retrospect, Stevens admits that he actually feels "somewhat downcast" (Ishiguro 238) at the end of that evening, but soon denial takes over. Baumeister, Dale and Sommer maintain that after denial one starts to rebuild "positive conceptions of self and world" when coping with a traumatic situation (1110). Stevens' experience here is not traumatic but painful enough for him to engage in a weaker version of denial. After denial he begins to focus on his professional achievement and feels a deep sense of triumph, very similar to the case during the 1923 conference.

As mentioned previously in the essay, Wall argues that the kind of unreliable narrator whose weakness is psychological is "less likely to distort events" but more inclined to have comments which contradict scenic presentations (22). Indeed, Stevens becomes unreliable when he does not comment on certain scenes or when his comment proves to be a biased justification of what has really happened. However, as this essay proves, the fact that he fails to provide a complete picture of the event, if not distorts the event, is in itself potent evidence of his unreliability.

Last but not least, Stevens' defensive and self-contradictory discourse indicates his unreliability. Wall suggests that through discourse we can discover the pattern of the narrator's thinking process (19) which reveals the narrator's preoccupations. Stevens' sometimes defensive and sometimes

self-contradictory discourse usually contains two ways of interpreting it: one interpretation is literal and apparent and the other hides behind Stevens' psychological motives. Wall has not investigated if those motives are unconscious or conscious (22), but posits that sometimes verbal tics are in themselves independent indicators of unreliability, revealing the narrator's mental conflicts (19). Similarly, Hansen categorizes this kind of unreliability existing within discourse as intranarrational unreliability, namely, repeating verbal patterns which signify uncertainty or internal contradictions (241-242).

This kind of unreliability is easy to detect: it does not require any contradictory relation with a second party, since the discourse itself is revealing. For example, the proliferation of defensive phrases almost always sound a bit alarming and make the reader feel uneasy. As Wall contends, the defensive tone in Stevens' narration is evident in the frequent use of phrases like "let me make it immediately clear," "I should point out," "I feel I should explain" etc (24). Indeed, these phrases usually signify that Stevens is going to justify something, as if he knows someone is questioning his remarks. Wall concludes that these phrases foreground his defense of his identity as a great butler and the values upon which he constructs his life (24).

Apart from these aforementioned phrases which indicate that Stevens feels the need to justify things, there are other patterns of defensive expressions such as "why should I hide it?" (Ishiguro 5), "why should I deny it?" (Ishiguro 115) and "why should I not admit this?" (Ishiguro 184). These sentences reflect the working of repression and Stevens' mental struggle. Sigmund Freud notices that sometimes when one wants to say something "straight out," he/she is also possessed by "strong opposite motives" (198). Sigmund Freud explains how the force of repression succeeds in refraining one from revealing his/her deepest concerns. However, as the above phrases suggest, there has always been a kind of resisting force against repression which prompts the repressed thoughts to escape from the unconscious and emerge into the conscious.

These defensive phrases and sentences cluster in Stevens' commentary on the scenes he just recounts. Combined with the use of certain kinds of defense mechanisms, they manifest Stevens' conflicting mental status. Two extracts of commentary will be analyzed here and three new defense mechanisms involved are projection, reaction formation, and rationalization.

According to Tyson, projection involves shifting our undesirable thoughts and emotions to someone else; by accusing others of having them, we deceive ourselves that we are innocent (15). By perceiving others to have certain threatening traits, we can avoid recognizing them in ourselves and therefore we can defend our preferred view of self (Baumeister, Dale and Sommer 1090).

In addition, Baumeister, Dale and Sommer contend that reaction formation is to act in a way which is in opposition to one's real intentions or feelings, usually in an exaggerating or extreme manner (1089). That is to say, when one realizes that one possesses certain undesirable traits which are threatening to one's self-esteem, one tries to deny them by showing that one has the opposite traits (1085).

Rationalization as a defense mechanism allows an individual to devise "reassuring or self-serving but incorrect explanations for his or her own or others' thoughts, actions, or feelings, which cover up other motives" (Knoll, Starrs and Perry 43). To put it another way, rationalization permits the individual to use self-deceptive excuses to justify his/her behavior, so that the individual does not have to accept the true cause of or reason for his/her behavior.

It is helpful to consult different classifications of defense mechanisms in order to choose the most relevant defense mechanisms used by Stevens. For instance, Gleser and Ihilevich have put intellectualization, isolation, and rationalization in the same group because these three defense mechanisms all engage in a principle which splits the emotions from the actual content (52). In this situation, it is extremely important to distinguish these three defense mechanisms by their own defining characteristics so that the choice of defense mechanisms is carefully considered. As stated previously, rationalization involves substituting the real motives behind an unpleasant situation with self-serving but incorrect excuses. Intellectualization, as the name suggests, involves taking an objective view of the unpleasant situation and analyzing it with facts and logic (Cariola 24). Isolation, according to Baumeister, Dale and Sommer, is to separate the threatening cognition related to the unpleasant situation from other thoughts or emotions (1099). Therefore, it would be proper to use rationalization to analyze Stevens' mental state, since he makes excuses to avoid admitting his real motives behind his behavior.

The first extract of commentary takes place after Stevens lies to the former batman that he has never worked for Lord Darlington. This leads him to remember that he once lied to Mr Farraday's American friend about the same issue and he wonders why he denies his association with Lord Darlington in both occasions:

. . . [It] may be that you are under the impression [It I am somewhat embarrassed or ashamed of my association with his lordship, and it is this that lies behind such conduct . . . Indeed, it seems to me that my odd conduct can be very plausible explained in terms of my wish to avoid any possibility of hea-

ring any further such nonsense concerning his lordship; that is to say, I have chosen to tell white lies in both instances as the simplest means of avoiding unpleasantness. This does seem a very plausible explanation the more I think about it . . . and I am today nothing but proud and grateful to have been given such a privilege [to serve Lord Darlington]. (Ishiguro 132-133)

Stevens deploys a cluster of defense mechanisms in this short extract to avoid admitting to himself that he is ashamed of his connection with Lord Darlington. The first sentence reveals the working of projection, when Stevens employs a second person pronoun "you" to project his unwanted thought onto his imaginary narratee. Wall claims that since the pronoun "you" encompasses Stevens' unexpressed and even repressed thoughts, it almost always triggers his own defenses immediately afterwards (24). The second and the third sentences reveal the working of rationalization, as Stevens comes up with other incorrect explanations and reassures himself that they are plausible so that he does not have to face the real reason. The last sentence in this extract can be understood as an example of reaction formation, as Stevens turns his undesirable feelings of shame and embarrassment into positive emotions such as gratitude and pride, thus conforming to his loyalty to Lord Darlington.

In Stevens' mind, a butler's right position is to serve his master and engage in his master's struggle so that he can also make "a contribution to the course of history" (Ishiguro 147). Even though it turns out that Lord Darlington is not the wise gentleman Stevens assumes him to be, Stevens does not dare to defy Lord Darlington because his devotion for Lord Darlington is embedded in his construction of his identity and his worldview. Criticizing and querying Lord Darlington's decisions would be questioning and downgrading his own decision and even his overarching belief that a great butler should bestow his trust and loyalty upon his honorable master. Therefore, even though Stevens does feel embarrassed and ashamed of his connection with Lord Darlington, he would repress that thought and would not want to admit it to himself. It is unpleasant and threatening for Stevens to acknowledge the fact that he has made a big mistake in following the wrong master all along, so he tries very (or a bit too) hard to defend Lord Darlington and, in doing so, he defends his own preferred self too.

The second extract of commentary takes place after Stevens recounts the episode where Miss Kenton catches him reading sentimental romantic novels. Stevens claims that he does not really enjoy reading those romantic stories and that he only reads them for professional reasons:

There was a simple reason for my having taken to perusing such works; it was an extremely efficient way to maintain and develop one's command of the English language . . . their plots were invariably absurd—indeed, sentimental—and I would not have wasted one moment on them were it not for these aforementioned benefits. Having said that, however, I do not mind confessing today—and I see nothing to be ashamed of in this—that 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?

(Ishiguro 176-177)

The fact is that Stevens not only likes reading those romantic love stories but also feels ashamed of reading them—it is almost like a guilty pleasure for Stevens. Stevens' identity is built around being a great butler, who wears his professional suit and who is reasonable all the time. To accept the part of himself which desires sentimental pleasure would pose a threat which might tarnish his preferred self-image as a great butler. According to Baumeister, Dale and Sommer, "the nature of threat is . . . the undesirable image of self . . . The nature of defense is therefore to refute or otherwise reject an undesirable view of self" (1115). Stevens uses three defense mechanisms in this extract to avoid facing that undesirable part of himself and thus to protect his preferred view of self.

The first defense mechanism is rationalization, as Stevens goes to great length to make up excuses in order to cover up the real reason why he reads those romantic stories. The excuse he comes up with is that he wants to expand his vocabulary in order to converse better with the ladies and gentlemen he encounters at work. As Wall notices, his profession becomes "either a disguise for other more emotional motives or a defense for his strangely unemotional behavior" (24). Indeed, the overuse of his profession as excuses to justify his somewhat odd behavior in certain situations does reduce the reliability of Stevens' narration.

The second defense mechanism is reaction formation, when Stevens displays a derogatory opinion about those sentimental love stories, accusing that their plots are absurd and claiming that they are useless to him if not for professional purposes. These all sound convincing enough until the sudden irruption of the repressed thought into his conscious mind which reveals the truth: he confesses that he does occasionally get enjoyment from reading those romantic novels of people falling in love. However, this confession is surrounded by his denial at the same time, as it is suggested by the defensive sentences "I see nothing to be ashamed of in this" and "what shame is there in it". These defensive sentences, as discussed earlier in this essay manifest Stevens' ambivalent mental state

as the force of repression and defense mechanisms are struggling with the repressed thoughts and emotions which are ready to emerge into the conscious mind at any possible moment.

This essay has discussed so far that repression and defense mechanisms contribute to the unreliability of Stevens' narration in *The Remains of the Day* through three aspects: Stevens' uncertainty of certain memories, his failure to report certain scenes correctly, and his defensive and self-contradictory discourse. Though much focus is on Stevens' unreliability, it is important to note that Stevens as a narrator does not belong to the binary standard as either reliable or unreliable (few narrators actually do). As Phelan and Martin point out, recognizing the existence of different kinds of unreliability helps us to understand that reliability and unreliability are not a binary pair (96). There are different layers of unreliability, which means narrators can be reliable according to one standard but unreliable according to the other and vice versa.

In addition, Phelan and Martin consider it equally wrong to assume that if one part of the narration is unreliable, then all the narration is unreliable (96). In fact, Stevens' narration is progressive: it becomes more reliable as Stevens gets more self-realization. Critics like Linda Belau and Ed Cameron, Ryan Trimm and Lisa Vikjord lay great emphasis on Stevens' physical journey and they maintain that the road trip is like a pilgrimage for Stevens on which he gradually discovers "his own private, repressed person" (Vikjord 12). By moving away from his comfortable zone in Darlington Hall and by recollecting and reflecting on events in the past, Stevens starts to see more clearly the undesirable part of himself which has previously been repressed. This does not mean that Stevens has stopped repressing or let down his defenses completely, but the fact that Stevens gains more self-awareness and can therefore recall past events in a more accurate manner does improve his reliability.

One example is Stevens' interpretation of Miss Kenton's letter. At the beginning, he seems very sure that Miss Kenton has "an unmistakable nostalgia for Darlington Hall" (Ishiguro 10) and that she holds a distinct wish to return. Later, however, he finds that she does not "state explicitly her desire to return" (Ishiguro 50) in her letter. Finally he admits that he might have exaggerated the evidence of her wishing to return and he cannot find any passage in her letter that supports his assumption.

As discussed previously, Stevens has always been repressing his romantic feelings towards Miss Kenton, so he could never explicitly express his desire for Miss Kenton to come back to Darlington Hall and work again with him. However, his desire is apparent when he psychologically projects his own wish onto Miss Kenton by over-positively misinterpreting her letter. Stevens ad-

mits that his thought is “wishful thinking” but “of a professional kind”. The word “professional” appears here in an uncalled-for place, indicating that Stevens is repressing his romantic feelings towards Miss Kenton by hiding his private intentions or feelings behind professional excuses. Even though Stevens has never stopped repressing or let down his defenses completely, he still struggles to face some of the undesirable facts he used to repress. Furst also notices that after reading Miss Kenton’s letter again and again during the trip, Stevens begins to realize that he might exaggerate her nostalgia for Darlington Hall and imagine her wishing to come back (547). Such a realization proves that Stevens is willing and able to gain more accurate information, which increases his reliability.

Due to the limitations of time and space, this essay cannot discuss in detail other interesting topics related to psychoanalysis and *The Remains of the Day* and here are some suggestions for further research. For example, how much is Stevens aware of the existence of these undesirable thoughts and emotions that he tries to repress? To put it another way, do Stevens’ repression and defense mechanisms proceed in the conscious or the unconscious? Anna Freud argues that defense mechanisms are carried out without the awareness of the conscious mind and the only way we can catch a glimpse of what has happened is by retracting them in retrospect (Spielman 430). However, she also questions her own conclusion because if the ego is totally unaware of a repressed thought or desire’s invasion into the conscious mind, then how can it manage to deploy any kind of defense mechanism? It requires a mental agency to make decisions in these circumstances (Spielman 431).

Sigmund Freud points out that there is no correlation between the repressed and the unconscious. Even though what is repressed is always unconscious, what is unconscious is not necessarily repressed (*The Ego* 9). Anna Freud also doubts the notion that the ego is identical with the conscious mind (Spielman 431). Both Sigmund Freud and Anna Freud agree that there are certain institutions in the ego which work in the unconscious. They can have powerful effects on our thoughts and action, but require analysis afterwards to become conscious (*The Ego* 8-9; Spielman 431). This discussion brings about the concept of unconscious awareness and further questions pertaining to the nature of the conscious and the unconscious, which other researchers may take an interest in.

Stevens is a complicated case to study in narratology. As proven in this essay, he is reliable as he is aware of his biases and struggles to gain more self-awareness, but mostly he is unreliable because he hides from or lies to himself when certain thoughts and emotions are too hard for him to handle. We find that repression and defense mechanisms are two contributing factors which lie behind his unreliability; Stevens’ defensive tone is enacted to protect his identity as a great butler and

his preferred image of self. It is his trying so hard to build that image of a perfect butler with no fault that the reader starts to suspect him. Stevens' career pursuit plays such a big role in his life that he misses out on chances to develop a deeper relationship with the four most important people in his life—his father, Lord Darlington, Miss Kenton, and himself. It is through the road trip that Stevens gets to reminisce about his past and gradually realize certain unpleasant facts about himself that he has been repressing. As he gains more self-recognition during his trip, he also becomes more reliable. Despite the superficial quietness in the plot and style, *The Remains of the Day* touches upon universal themes which concern the entire human race: broken relationships/dreams, regret, and self-redemption. This is perhaps why *The Remains of the Day* keeps being one of the most popular books even to this day and begets great honor to its author.

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