

The Weight of Unspoken Pain: A Comparative Analysis of Trauma in *The Remains of The Day* and *When We Were Orphans*

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Abstract—In Kazuo Ishiguro’s masterful works, *The Remains of the Day* and *When We Were Orphans*, the theme of unspoken pain reverberates through the lives of their protagonists. This paper undertakes a rigorous comparative exploration of trauma, focusing on Stevens and Christopher Banks. Both characters grapple with suppressed memories, identity crises, and the haunting weight of their past experiences. Stevens, the devoted butler in *The Remains of the Day*, conceals his emotional turmoil behind a facade of professional duty. His unexpressed grief over lost opportunities and personal sacrifices underscores the silent suffering inherent in trauma. Meanwhile, Christopher Banks, the detective protagonist of *When We Were Orphans*, embarks on a relentless quest to uncover the truth about his parents’ disappearance during his childhood in Shanghai. His identity hinges on solving this mystery, revealing the intricate interplay between memory, loss, and selfhood. Through a comparative lens, readers analyse narrative techniques employed by Ishiguro. The first-person narration in both novels allows readers intimate access to the characters’ inner worlds, while unreliable memories and gaps in storytelling mirror the fractured nature of trauma. Within Ishiguro’s novels, subtle threads weave through the narrative, subtle yet potent. These threads, whether in the form of recurring objects, evocative landscapes, or elusive motifs, serve as silent witnesses to the characters’ inner struggles. Rather than overt symbols, they become conduits for unspoken pain, inviting readers to explore the depths of human experience.

Keywords: Resonant suffering. Submerged recollections, Selfhood enquiry, Textual scrutiny, Narrative strategies

Kazuo Ishiguro, the masterful architect of literary landscapes, beckons readers into realms where emotions echo across time and borders. His narratives transcend geographical boundaries, resonating with a global audience. Within the pages of *The Remains of the Day* and *When We Were Orphans*, Ishiguro crafts a delicate tapestry, a world where unspoken pain, like a shadow, clings to characters’ souls. In this realm, trauma is not a mere plot device; it is the heartbeat of existence. Ishiguro’s prose, akin to a quiet confidante, invites us to witness the silent suffering of Stevens and Christopher Banks. Their pain is not loud; it is the hushed ache of memories suppressed, identities fractured, and dreams deferred. The readers become voyeurs, peering into their souls as they navigate the labyrinth of their pasts.

Trauma theory, a cornerstone in literary studies, illuminates the intricate interplay between psychological distress and narrative representation. Within this framework, we encounter key concepts that resonate across cultures and epochs. Post-traumatic stress, repression, and dissociation emerge as critical lenses through which we examine the impact of trauma on individuals and societies. These concepts transcend mere clinical definitions; they become literary tools, allowing authors like Ishiguro to delve into the depths of human suffering. By weaving trauma theory into their narratives, writers evoke empathy, challenge norms, and invite readers to confront the unspoken pain that reverberates through their characters’ lives.

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) disrupts the fabric of memory, haunting survivors with vivid recollections of traumatic events. Repression, a defence mechanism, buries distressing memories deep within the subconscious, rendering them inaccessible yet potent. Dissociation, characterized by detachment from reality, fractures the self, creating fragmented narratives. Ishiguro deftly employs these concepts, allowing his characters to grapple with their pasts. Whether it’s Stevens suppressing memories of lost love in *The Remains of the Day* or Christopher Banks unravelling the mystery of his parent’s disappearance in *When We Were Orphans*, trauma’s impact is palpable. Through their unreliable perspectives, Ishiguro invites readers to question the veracity of memory and the boundaries of selfhood.

Literature transcends mere entertainment; it becomes a vessel for collective memory and shared experiences. Authors wield language to evoke emotions, challenge assumptions, and illuminate hidden corners of the human psyche. Ishiguro’s prose, like a surgeon’s scalpel, dissects trauma’s complexities. His novels serve as mirrors reflecting our unspoken pain. Through vivid imagery, sensory details, and unreliable narrators, he navigates the treacherous terrain of memory distortion. The act of reading becomes an act of empathy, a bridge connecting individual suffering to universal truths. In this literary alchemy, trauma transforms from a clinical term into a visceral, shared reality.

Ishiguro's novels form a rich treasure house of trauma-related themes. From the haunting corridors of Darlington Hall in *The Remains of the Day* to the mist-shrouded landscapes of *The Buried Giant*, trauma permeates his fictional worlds. Scholars have dissected these narratives, unearthing layers of meaning. The fallibility of memory, the fragility of identity, and the blurred boundaries between past and present, all find resonance in Ishiguro's work. His exploration of collective amnesia, buried histories, and the weight of unspoken pain invites critical inquiry. By surveying existing scholarship, we recognize that Ishiguro's trauma landscape extends beyond individual characters; it mirrors societal wounds and cultural reckonings.

Ishiguro's mastery lies in his use of unreliable narrators. These fractured voices, Stevens, Kathy and Ryder reveals the gaps in memory, the distortions that shape their narratives. Their unreliability becomes a deliberate choice, a reflection of trauma's impact. Memory, like a faded photograph, blurs at the edges, and Ishiguro captures this ambiguity. Readers grapple with the enigmatic mist in *The Buried Giant*, questioning what is remembered, and what is forgotten. Identity, too, fractures, whether it is the butler who serves with unwavering loyalty or the detective haunted by vanished parents. Ishiguro's novels become palimpsests, layers of memory and forgetting etched upon the collective consciousness.

Stevens, the unyielding butler at Darlington Hall, epitomises the stoicism of a bygone era. His life revolves around the meticulous management of the estate, an emblem of British aristocracy in decline. Within the hallowed halls, Stevens's emotional detachment is palpable. His loyalty to Lord Darlington borders on reverence, blinding him to the political undercurrents that shape the world outside. Hidden beneath the crisp uniform and gleaming silverware lies a well of suppressed memories, an unexpressed love, a momentous opportunity lost. Stevens's professional duty, executed with unwavering precision, becomes both armour and prison. His commitment to decorum conceals the personal trauma of unfulfilled desires, lost connections, and the haunting spectre of regret. As he serves, he wrestles with the echoes of what might have been, navigating the fine line between duty and self-denial.

Christopher Banks, the intrepid detective, straddles continents and epochs. His journey begins in the vibrant streets of Shanghai's International Settlement during his childhood, a time of upheaval and uncertainty. The sudden disappearance of his parents leaves an indelible mark, a void that shapes his very existence. Driven by an insatiable need for answers, Christopher's obsession with solving the mystery becomes his *raison d'être*. Like the fractured city he inhabits, his identity remains elusive, a puzzle with missing pieces. As he matures, the trauma of parental loss seeps into every facet of his life. Friendships are tinged with the ache of absence; romantic entanglements carry the weight of unanswered questions. Christopher's quest for resolution becomes a mirror reflecting not only the enigma of his parents' vanishing act but also the fragility of selfhood. In his relentless pursuit, he grapples with memory's distortions, the blurred boundaries between past and present, and the disorientation of a world torn apart by war. His detective work extends beyond solving crimes; it becomes a desperate search for wholeness, a way to reclaim the fragments of a fractured soul.

Narrative techniques serve as our compass through the labyrinth of trauma within Kazuo Ishiguro's novels, *The Remains of the Day* and *When We Were Orphans*. These techniques, when examined closely, reveal the intricate threads that bind character experiences and reader engagement. In both novels, first-person narration becomes an intimate conduit. Stevens, the unyielding butler, and Christopher Banks, the relentless detective, step forward as our storytellers. Their memories, emotions, and vulnerabilities unfold before us. We inhabit their consciousness, sharing their joys, regrets, and uncertainties. Stevens's meticulous reflections on lost love and missed opportunities become our own. Christopher's relentless quest to solve the mystery of his parents' disappearance resonates with us. Through their eyes, we are not mere observers; we become participants in their emotional landscapes.

Memory, like a fractured mirror, reflects trauma's impact. Stevens suppresses painful recollections, shielding himself from emotional turmoil. His unreliability mirrors the weight of unspoken pain, the love forsaken, the chances missed. Christopher, too, grapples with fragmented memories. His obsession with solving the parental mystery drives him to piece together a fractured past. The gaps in their recollections echo the void left by trauma, a silence that reverberates through their lives.

Flashbacks transport people across time. Stevens revisits missed chances, glimpsing the echoes of Darlington Hall's grandeur. Christopher retraces his childhood in Shanghai, haunted by parental absence. Retrospection, like a surgeon's scalpel, unveils suppressed emotions. These glimpses into the past reveal the weight of unspoken pain, the ache of what was and what might have been. The juxtaposition of past and present illuminates their struggles, allowing readers to witness the impact of trauma on their identities. In the comparative exploration, Ishiguro's narrative choices become our guide, unravelling the delicate threads that bind trauma, memory, and selfhood.

In *The Remains of the Day*, the silver tray transcends its utilitarian purpose. As Stevens, the unyielding butler, glides through the grand halls of Darlington Hall, the tray bears witness to whispered conversations, decisions made, and the weight of duty. Its

polished surface reflects not only the opulence of the estate but also Stevens's unwavering commitment to decorum. Yet beneath its gleaming exterior lies a reservoir of suppressed memories, a love unspoken, a pivotal moment missed. The tray becomes both armour and prison, concealing emotions beneath its stoic facade. It mirrors Stevens's silent suffering, the ache of unfulfilled desires, and the haunting spectre of regret.

In *When We Were Orphans*, the streets of Shanghai emerge as a haunting backdrop. Christopher Banks, the relentless detective, retraces his childhood steps, the laughter, and the sudden disappearance of his parents during tumultuous years. These mist-shrouded alleys symbolize more than physical space; they mirror Christopher's fractured identity. The vibrant city of his youth becomes a palimpsest, a place where memories blur at the edges. The streets echo with absence, a void left by trauma. They hold unanswered questions, longing, and the ache of what was lost.

Both novels feature unopened letters, an eloquent silence resonating with trauma. Stevens carries Miss Kenton's unsent letter, a confession of love, like a talisman. Its sealed envelope embodies missed opportunities, unspoken feelings, and the weight of duty unfulfilled. For Christopher, the letters from his absent parents become elusive clues. Their silence mirrors the trauma of loss and the ache of separation, the yearning for connection. The unopened envelopes hold memories frozen in time, fragments of a past tantalisingly out of reach. In these recurring symbols, Ishiguro weaves a language beyond words, a silent dialogue between characters and readers, revealing the delicate threads of unspoken pain.

Within the quiet corridors of Kazuo Ishiguro's novels, silence becomes a potent force, a burden carried by characters as they grapple with their pasts. Stevens, the unyielding butler in *The Remains of the Day*, epitomises stoicism. His silence is deliberate, an armour against emotional turmoil. As he serves Lord Darlington, the weight of unspoken memories presses upon him. Miss Kenton's unsent letter, a confession of love remains sealed, a testament to missed opportunities. Stevens's refusal to confront the past mirrors the trauma he carries. His professional façade, meticulous and unwavering masks the inner turmoil. The polished silverware reflects not only Darlington Hall's grandeur but also Stevens's silent suffering.

In *When We Were Orphans*, Christopher Banks's relentless pursuit of truth becomes his *raison d'être*. His identity hinges on unravelling the past, his parents' sudden disappearance during Shanghai's tumultuous years. His detective work extends beyond solving crimes; it becomes a desperate search for answers, a way to reclaim fragments of selfhood. The unopened letters from his absent parents symbolise longing and loss. Christopher's relentless quest mirrors the collective disorientation of a world torn by war. Like Shanghai's mist-shrouded streets, his identity remains elusive, a puzzle waiting to be solved. In these silent spaces, Ishiguro invites us to explore the delicate balance between remembering and forgetting, truth and distortion.

Within the delicate fabric of trauma narratives, universality emerges, a shared language that transcends cultural boundaries. These narratives are more than stories; they are mirrors reflecting our collective humanity. Here, we explore the profound implications of trauma narratives, with a spotlight on Kazuo Ishiguro's unique contribution. Trauma narratives resonate universally because they tap into our collective consciousness. Whether it's a soldier haunted by war, a survivor of abuse, or an individual grappling with loss, trauma transcends individual lives. Readers, regardless of their backgrounds, find solace and recognition in these stories. Ishiguro's characters, Stevens and Christopher Banks become our companions, their silent pain echoing our own. Their struggles bridge cultural divides, reminding us that beneath our diverse identities, vulnerability unites the readers. The universal resonance of trauma narratives serves as a quiet reminder that our shared emotions bind us, a raw, unfiltered connection that transcends time and space.

Ishiguro's exploration of trauma extends beyond literary craftsmanship. His novels, subtle, and nuanced, invite readers to confront the complexities of suffering. Through Stevens's silence and Christopher's relentless quest, we witness the fragility of memory, the ache of longing, and the blurred boundaries between past and present. These characters become our guides, navigating the labyrinth of human experience. By weaving trauma into his narratives, Ishiguro contributes to our collective empathy. He reminds us that suffering is not confined to specific events or individuals; it permeates our existence. His stories become conduits for understanding, their silent pain echoing through generations. In this dance between words and silence, trauma narratives transcend fiction, becoming our shared heritage, a testament to resilience, healing, and the enduring human spirit. May these narratives continue to echo within the readers, bridging gaps and fostering compassion.

Embedded within trauma narratives lies a universal thread, a language that bridges cultural divides. These narratives serve as reflective mirrors, illuminating our shared human experience. The paper delves into the significant implications of trauma narratives, focusing specifically on Kazuo Ishiguro's distinctive contributions.

While Ishiguro's novels provide a poignant lens through which to examine trauma, extending our analysis to other literary works could yield fascinating insights. Comparative studies across different authors, genres, and cultural contexts allow us to discern patterns, variations, and unique approaches to portraying trauma. For instance, exploring trauma in postcolonial literature, contemporary dystopian fiction, or historical narratives could reveal how diverse voices grapple with shared themes. By juxtaposing Ishiguro's characters with those from other novels, we can unravel the universal threads that bind human experiences. Additionally, investigating trauma in non-Western literature, such as African, Asian, or Indigenous narratives, offers fresh perspectives. Cultural nuances significantly influence trauma representation. Unique healing mechanisms emerge within cultural contexts. These questions beckon further exploration.

Trauma narratives transcend disciplinary boundaries. Interdisciplinary collaboration enriches our perspectives and methodologies. The following concepts show how different fields contribute:

Psychology: Delving into trauma's psychological impact reveals intricate layers. Research on trauma resilience and post-traumatic growth informs both literature and clinical practice. Resilience, the ability to bounce back after adversity becomes a beacon of hope. Survivors draw strength from within during times of trauma. Such an exploration is guided by the inquiry into emerging coping mechanisms. Additionally, understanding how trauma shapes memory, its fragmentation, vividness, or repression and unlocks new dimensions. Literature becomes a mirror reflecting the human psyche's intricate dance with trauma.

Tracing Trauma Across Authors and Genres. Beyond Ishiguro, examining how trauma is portrayed by other authors, Virginia Woolf, Toni Morrison, or Tim O'Brien, reveals evolving literary conventions. Each author weaves trauma into their narratives uniquely. Symbolism, narrative techniques, and character development become tools to convey the inexpressible. Literary studies bridge the personal and the universal. By analysing trauma representation across genres, poetry, novels, drama, readers uncover shared themes. Literature becomes a collective witness to human suffering.

Trauma narratives are embedded in historical contexts. Investigating how trauma manifests during wars, social upheavals, or cultural shifts provides a temporal dimension. Historical trauma, the Holocaust, colonial violence, and displacement, leave indelible marks on collective memory. These echoes resonate through generations, as readers bridge literature and history to uncover narratives that have been silenced by time, oppression, or cultural erasure. Trauma becomes a living archive, reminding us of resilience, loss, and the human spirit's enduring quest for healing. In this interdisciplinary exploration, readers honour the resilience of survivors, amplify voices often overlooked, and contribute to a more understanding and enlightened collective.

Beyond the confines of individual disciplines, trauma narratives beckon us toward interdisciplinary dialogues. Readers can explore how fields like anthropology, sociology, and neuroscience intersect profoundly with these narratives like,

In the context of cultural rituals and trauma, anthropology unveils the profound interplay between these rituals and survivors' journeys. Ceremonies, rites, and communal practices significantly shape survivors' experiences, weaving a rich fabric of understanding within this intricate dance. Rituals become bridges, connecting past trauma to present healing. They offer solace, validation, and a shared language for the unspeakable. By studying these rituals, readers honour cultural diversity and recognize that healing isn't a solitary endeavour. It is a collective rhythm, a heartbeat echoing across generations.

Sociology reveals how societal structures, family, community, and institutions either support or exacerbate trauma. Social norms, power dynamics, and access to resources influence survivors' paths. For marginalised communities, systemic inequalities compound trauma. Analysing these structures compels us to consider strategies for dismantling oppressive systems. Creating spaces that nurture resilience is essential. Societal change becomes an essential part of trauma recovery.

Neuroscience delves into neural pathways, the intricate highways where trauma leaves its mark. Traumatic memories shape behaviour through stress responses. Neuroplasticity, the brain's ability to adapt, becomes a beacon of hope. Understanding neural mechanisms informs therapeutic interventions. From cognitive-behavioural therapy to mindfulness practices, we navigate the brain's terrain, rewiring trauma's impact. In the ongoing exploration, we honour survivors, amplify silenced voices, and contribute to a more empathetic and well-informed global community.

In the intricate fabric of Ishiguro's novels, universality emerges, a shared language that transcends cultural boundaries. These narratives are more than stories; they are mirrors reflecting our collective humanity. Stevens and Christopher Banks, though separated by time and circumstance, grapple with suppressed memories, identity crises, and the haunting weight of their past experiences. Stevens, the devoted butler in *The Remains of the Day*, conceals emotional turmoil behind his professional facade, bearing the weight of lost opportunities and personal sacrifices. Meanwhile, Christopher Banks, the relentless detective in *When We Were Orphans*, seeks answers to his parents' disappearance in Shanghai, unravelling the delicate interplay between memory, loss, and selfhood.

As readers, witness the delicate interplay between memory and loss. Ishiguro's first-person narration grants them, intimate access to the characters' inner worlds, while gaps in storytelling mirror the fractured nature of trauma itself. These subtle threads, whether in the form of recurring objects, evocative landscapes, or elusive motifs, serve as silent witnesses to the characters' struggles. Through this comparative study, we explore the depths of human experience, acknowledging the echoes of pain that reverberate across generations.

The exploration of the study extends beyond literary analysis. By shedding light on suppressed narratives, the paper empowers readers to confront their unspoken pain. Readers recognise that storytelling is not merely an academic exercise; it is a vital tool for healing and connection. As readers explore the intricacies of identity and memory, they encourage society to participate in thoughtful conversations. Within the quiet anguish of Stevens and Christopher Banks lies a bridge a connection that spans beyond temporal and geographical boundaries. In this reverberation of pain, readers can discover hope, woven by resilience, empathy, and compassion, binding them into a more enlightened and compassionate collective.

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