

УНИВЕРЗИТЕТ У БАЊОЈ ЛУЦИ
ФИЛОЛОШКИ ФАКУЛТЕТ

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“TRACE” IN NARRATION

Abstract: *The Derridean concept of “trace” or supplement is set at the core of his studies of the unconscious meaning of a text. Further, the textual unconscious is crucial to the deferral of meaning along the axis of difference /différance. In view of Derrida’s ideas, Kazuo Ishiguro’s novels, *The Pale View of Hills* and *When We Were Orphans* are analyzed as a narrative attempt to deconstruct the construction of reality that is grounded in conventional discourse. The article is based on the assumption that in Ishiguro’s novels the narrative process offers an insight into how the mind deals with experience. In this vein, the complex narration in Ishiguro’s novels is viewed as a parallel to the processes in the human mind. The analysis of Ishiguro’s narration is based on Beckett’s and Proust’s ideas about the issue of memory. Proust sees the dynamics of memory as a game of voluntary and involuntary memory, in which the former is a product of the conscious and the latter of the unconscious memory. On the other hand, Proust’s meditations on the nature of memory may be linked with Freud’s studies of repressed emotions and Samuel Beckett’s conception of the process of forgetting as essential to recollection.*

Key words: *Derrida, deconstruction, trace, supplement, memory, dynamics of memory, Proust.*

What we usually call memory refers to what Proust called voluntary memory. Proust believed that remembering past events is like leafing through the pages of an old family album. Beckett revisits the issue of memory in his essay on Proust, further developing Proust’s ideas on the nature of remembering. In Beckett’s view “the material that [the photographs] furnish contains nothing of the past, merely a blurred and uniform projection once removed of our anxiety and opportunism - that is to say, nothing (Beckett 1931: 32).”

To remember the past for Proust means to recapture past sensations through the recreation of the abandoned and long forgotten self. For this reason, in *Remembrance of Things Past* Proust shows that the quest for the past is actually a quest for our past impressions. Consciousness tends to transform the past. Beckett further writes:

There is no escape from yesterday because yesterday has deformed us, or been deformed by us...

Yesterday is [...] a daystone on the beaten track of the years, and irremediably a part of us, within us, heavy and dangerous. We are ... other, no longer what we were before the calamity of yesterday (Beckett 1931: 3).

What consciousness stores in the memory is its voluntary image of the past. Proust has it that the essence of the past, the core of our past selves is contained in the involuntary memory, which is invoked at random. These chance occurrences are capable of endorsing past and long forgotten sensations and call to mind our past selves.

In Ishiguro’s novels *A Pale View of the Hills* and *When We Were Orphans*, the voluntary memory fuels the main narration. It presents the past as a series of images. The representation is much like “turning the leaves of a photographic album” as Proust would have it, where “grief, anxiety and opportunism” are left out. However, in both novels one can detect a number of submerged stories, which might not immediately engage the attention of the reader.

The text's motivation to suppress narratives that reemerge in the reading and interpretation of the self-same text might be viewed as similar to the repressive efforts of the mind, which tend to disassociate from undesirable emotions. However, they remain in the mind. In Freud's view, "[t]he theory of repression [...] asserts that these repressed wishes *still* exist—though there is a simultaneous inhibition which holds them down (Freud 1955: 235)." In the same way, Proust's voluntary memories work to eliminate anxiety, opportunism and the unwanted emotions we feel during this process.

"Memory traces, then, have nothing to do with the fact of becoming conscious; indeed they are often most powerful and most enduring when the process which left them behind was one which never entered consciousness (Freud 1921, 19)." The mention of Freud brings us back to Proust's *mémoire involontaire* ringing with Beckett's question, which he posed in the same essay on Proust. Is not the involuntary recollection, Proust's *mémoire involontaire*, much closer to forgetting than what is usually called memory?

Isn't this kind of process best described as "an interplay between a remembering 'I' and a forgetting 'I' (Reid 2003, 14)?" Particularly as the events need to be "forgotten", suppressed and stored in the unconsciousness in order to reemerge as a random narration of our past self. In the narration of Ishiguro's protagonists the abandoned stories reemerge as silent narratives whose traces are entangled in the fabric of the text and form an aura of meaning around the main storylines. To borrow Woolf's metaphor from the novel *To the Lighthouse*, the traces in the text resemble ripples in the smooth texture of the narrative as marks of something that has sunk.

In both Ishiguro's novels, hidden narrations are intertwined with the main narrative stream. Thus the narrative is double voiced as it simultaneously reveals and

hides. The alternative stories are submerged by the current of the main narration in a process similar to the suppression of undesirable memories by the conscious mind. Just as unwanted memories remain in the unconscious, the subordinated narrations remain hidden in Ishiguro's text and are suppressed by the conscious, that is, the voluntary efforts of his narrators. The involuntary memories thus remain hidden in the crevices of the text. The narration carries along the spectral presence of hidden narrations, and the narrations associated by the troubled memories are marked by their void in the main narration. In the novels *The Pale View of Hills* and *When We Were Orphans* the story is presented as the autobiographical account of the narrator.

At the onset of the novel *A Pale View of Hills* we meet an elderly Japanese lady Etsuko who lives in England, although she was born in Japan. While living in Japan she survived the Nagasaki bombing but ultimately decided to leave Japan in order to marry an Englishman. Right from the beginning, the reader is informed about the essential facts of Etsuko's life. Her younger daughter Niki from her second marriage, an 'affectionate child', living in London, came to visit her after the death of her daughter Keiko by her first Japanese husband. Niki and Keiko were not on good terms, 'I just remember her as someone who used to make me miserable' (Ishiguro 1982: 10), says Niki. The reader immediately, in a most curt manner, learns that Keiko recently committed suicide. Shortly after that brief introduction, Etsuko goes on to tell Niki about a woman called Sachiko that she knew in Japan. The brief relationship with Sachiko had an enormous impact on Etsuko and its specter has never ceased to haunt her. Thus, in the first few pages Etsuko tackles all the major themes of the book - the personal and national tragedy negotiated in terms of sorrow and guilt.

Almost disinterestedly, Etsuko intimates the ghostly presence of her dead daughter Keiko: "[A]lthough we never dwelt long on the subject of Keiko's death, it was never far away, hovering over us whenever we talked." (Ishiguro 1982: 10). It is revealing to note that this oblique way of referring to Keiko is the first mention of Keiko's name in Etsuko's narrative. With this statement she sets the matrix in which she will address the subject of Keiko's death in her subsequent narration. A little further in her narration she will say, "I have no great wish to dwell on Keiko now". (Ishiguro 1982: 10) The busy manner in which Etsuko handles that issue is the first mark of the submerged narrative of Etsuko's tragedy. As Toni Morrison has it, she leaves the "unspeakable things unspoken". Yet the *unhemlich* presence of Keiko's death asserts itself, as repressed moments would, as a spectral narrative of Etsuko's grief and guilt.

Etsuko herself in a way ties the two stories, that of her family situation and of her friend Sachiko as a (hidden) key to understanding her own self: "I only mentioned her [Keiko] because those were the circumstances around Niki's visit this April and because it was during this visit I remember Sachiko after all this time (Ishiguro 1982: 11)." As Cynthia Wong justly remarks: "[I]n Etsuko's narrative, the two events found in past and present are tied to her subsequent dissociation of pain itself. Remembering Nagasaki, Etsuko is able to forget the premonition of death she connects with that period (Wong 1995: 129)."

Sachiko is a strange woman and a struggling mother whose relationship with Etsuko remains enigmatic throughout the book. She is the only parent of a disturbed girl Mariko who is herself uneducated, disobedient and withdrawn. Sachiko lets her daughter spend whole days alone in a dangerous land on the outskirts of the ruined city of Nagasaki. Etsuko, who is pregnant at the time, feels concerned about Mariko's

welfare but Sachiko always dismisses her worries. Once, when Etsuko sees her preparing to leave and remarks upon the situation, Sachiko says calmly: "But as you see, I'm rather busy just now. I have to go to Nagasaki. [...] If you have nothing else to concern yourself with, Etsuko, then perhaps you'd care to look after my daughter for the day (Ishiguro 1982: 15)." Indeed, Etsuko looks after Mariko whenever she can, and the stories of the three women become strangely intermingled - the pregnant Etsuko and Sachiko with her daughter Mariko, whose story prefigures Etsuko's subsequent life.

Sachiko keeps a difficult liaison with an American and nurtures a hope of moving to America with him in order to give her daughter a better future. The words with which she intimates her plans to Etsuko anticipate Etsuko's own words later on in the text. Sachiko says: "My daughter's welfare is of the utmost importance to me, Etsuko. I wouldn't make any decision that jeopardized her future (Ishiguro 1982: 44)." While Etsuko claims: "My motives for leaving Japan were justifiable, and I know I always kept Keiko's interests very much at heart (Ishiguro 1982: 91)."

In the episode of Sachiko's final meeting with Etsuko, while packing to leave Japan, Ishiguro plants a trace, an unmistakable piece of evidence of their intertwined destinies. While Sachiko is busy packing, Etsuko grows worried about Mariko wandering alone in the dusk on the slippery riverbank. She goes out looking for her with a lantern and starts searching a swampy ground infested by insects of all sorts. When she finds her sitting in the dark on a wooden bridge their conversation is revealing:

"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 is like a pig."

"You are not to speak like that", I said, angrily. [...] 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 and see if we like it there.* I'm sure *we will* (Ishiguro 1982: 172–173)." (italics mine)

First, this conversation resembles the conversation between mother and daughter more than between chance acquaintances judging by her persuasive words, 'I promise'. As does her reprimand, 'You are not to speak like that'. Besides, Etsuko's using "we" instead of "I" is probably not a sign of confusion at all. Ishiguro himself referred to that episode in an interview: "[A]t the most intense point, I wanted to suggest that Etsuko had dropped this cover. It just slips out: she's now talking about herself. She's no longer bothering to put it in the third person (Mason 1989: 337)."

On another occasion remembering a day trip to the hills overlooking the harbor in Nagasaki, Etsuko again slips out: "Keiko was happy that day. We rode on the cablecars (Ishiguro 1982: 182)." It is not clear, perhaps deliberately unclear, whether Etsuko refers to a previously mentioned trip to the hills with Sachiko and Mariko. As Keiko was not born yet, she might be referring to the girl who was present on the earlier trip, Mariko. On the other hand, this might be an intentional slip to the effect of finally showing that their destinies are one and the same.

Another point of Etsuko's confusion is revealed in her dream about the girl on a swing. Etsuko has a recurrent dream induced by an image of a happy child on a swing while she is strolling in the village with Niki. Their conversation about the dream reveals her confusion about the identity of people and the nature of sensations.

"I had that dream again this morning [...] I dreamt about this little girl again. [...] Well it isn't that little girl at all. [...] Niki looked at me again. [...]" I

suppose you mean it was her. Keiko." [...] "Keiko?" I laughed a little. Why should it be Keiko?" [...] "It was just a little girl I knew once." [...] "A long time ago." [...] "[There is] something else about that dream. [...] "... the little girl isn't on a swing at all. [...] It's not a swing she is on (Ishiguro 1982: 95–6)."

However, what exactly she is on, she doesn't say. Obviously, the image of Keiko hanging on the rope in her Manchester flat haunts her imagination and mingles with the image of the happy child on the swing. And both images are aspects of the Mariko story, which she herself indicates by the omission of any name.

Further, the submerged narration of the tragedy and horror of the Nagasaki bombing is again marked by the void in Etsuko's story. Instead, Etsuko offers the image of the wasteland of the postwar city and her own dwelling place.

As the summer grew hotter, the stretch of wasteground outside our apartment block became increasingly unpleasant. Much of the earth lay dried and cracked, while water which had accumulated during the rainy season remained in the deeper ditches and craters. The ground bred all manner of insects, and mosquitoes in particular seemed everywhere. In the apartments there was the usual complaining, but over the years the anger over the wasteground had become resigned and cynical (Ishiguro 1982: 99).

The great historical narrative is negotiated by numerous episodes in the text like stories about crippled existences, displaced people, migrating and fluid lives, lack of talk of the tragic events and its ruined places. These episodes include various sagas about Mrs. Fujiwara who lost several children and her husband, Etsuko's father-in-law Ogata San who is the representative of the old and dying world and Sachiko with her ruined life and the awareness of failure, "Do you think that I imagine for one moment that I am a good mother to her? (Ishiguro 1982: 171)." These were Sachiko's parting words.

As personal and national tragedy are intertwined into Etsuko's experience, she is through narration picking remnants of her past selves which are held in the residues of the main events and revealed mostly in the voids in her tale.

When Niki asks her before leaving for the postcard of Nagasaki, Etsuko gives Niki an old photograph from a calendar, which triggers her memory that follows an established pattern. In that image, her personal and the national tragedy are closely connected in her narration about the photograph. She refers to a day trip to a harbor with Keiko, which she had not mentioned before. On the contrary she did mention a day trip to the hills with Sachiko and Mariko during which Mariko was very happy. In fact she relocates her memory from one trip to another. The silent mystery is the only answer to the emotional transfer and confusion, while her narration about the photograph reveals the essence of her past self - her hope and anxiety about the future in a shattered world. As those feelings were ruined by the reality of Keiko's death and her possible guilt they remained locked in the time when the photograph was taken. At the time when she gives it to Niki, it is a living proof of Proust's words that photographs contain nothing of the past and her secret is safe.

In the novel *When We Were Orphans* the narrator Christopher Banks recounts his life story, partly as an account of his present situation, partly in flashbacks of his past life and the events of his childhood that defined him. The novel opens in the 1930s when Banks is already a famous and prosperous detective, a Cambridge graduate. He has been living for more than a decade in England after hurriedly leaving his hometown Shanghai in the most distressing circumstances, following the disappearance of his parents. After a period of an allegedly easy adaptation to English life, he travels back to Shanghai.

The realization of the inevitability of investigating his past is introduced by frequent references to the discrepancy between his own voluntary memory and the blurred image of the past, which he can reach only in flashbacks. At the beginning of his recollection he mentions an episode with his old friend from school, James Osborne, who at meeting him again said: "My God. Christopher, you were such an odd bird at school (Ishiguro 2000: 5)." It irritates him: "In fact it has always been a puzzle to me that Osborne should have said such a thing, since my own memory is that I blended perfectly into English school life (Ishiguro 2000: 7)."

A little later in the episode with Colonel Chamberlain, he is irritated again, "for his repeated insinuation that I had gone about the ship withdrawn and moody, liable to burst into tears at the slightest thing (Ishiguro 2000: 27)." Banks concludes that the Colonel wanted to be the "heroic guardian" since his own recollection was quite different:

[A]ccording to my own, quite clear memory, I adapted very ably to the changed realities of my circumstances. I remember very well that, far from being miserable on that voyage, I was positively excited about life aboard the ship, as well as by the prospect of the future that lay before me. Of course, I did miss my parents at times, but I can remember telling myself there would always be other adults I would come to love and trust (Ishiguro 2000: 27).

Banks has forgotten his pain of leaving, his probably painful attempts to fit into the society where his intelligence and rationality secured him a prominent position. The act of involuntary forgetting has tightened his grip on reason and stability in his new life.

A paradoxically hidden narration, which speaks through its silence, or virtual absence, is the missing narration of romance. While living in England, Banks became acquainted with Sarah who was orphaned and lonely and in search of social

promotion. They remained oddly connected through the years. Their relationship never crosses the borders of conventionality and is even unnecessarily cold at times. In other words, the reader is somehow taken aback by the absence of the romantic entanglement in a place where it is expected. On the contrary, the narration draws attention to its absence. For, although they meet frequently enough, their exchanges are brief and devoid of emotion. Her person is a silent mystery for Banks that he refuses to solve. He meets her again in Shanghai. Only there in the proximity of his quest does Sarah become a significant presence. At one point in Shanghai, Banks and Sarah plan to elope together but the single vaguely romantic episode between the two mocks a romantic liaison.

She carefully put down her cigarette holder and stood up. Then we were kissing just like I suppose a couple on a cinema screen. It was almost exactly as I always imagined it would be, except there was something oddly inelegant about our embrace, and I tried more than once to adjust my posture... (Ishiguro 2000: 222).

The travesty of romance in fact tells of the universal displacement and alienation in place of deep emotions of affection. Sarah's true vision of their relationship in a hostile world is revealed when out of the blue Sarah suggests that they should flee together.

Go with me to Macao tomorrow. We could decide after that where we could go next. If you wanted to we could just drift around the South China Sea for a while. Or we could go to South America. Run away like thieves in the night (Ishiguro 2000: 212).

Sarah's vision of their future together provides the area where many hidden narrations of the text intersect. Her words expose their mutual tragic secret of suppressed trauma of orphanhood by inverting the conventions of romance in order to express their loveless affair. Instead of escaping with unloved Sarah, Banks hurries

to meet his destiny in the shape of a quest for maturity and truth and to reveal the hidden narrations of the mind.

The submerged narration of universal orphanhood held in Sarah's words is even more subtle when underlined in terms of Banks's quest for his lost parents. As he never realized what happened to him in his childhood his holding on to rationality, normality and conventionality of English life hid temporarily his traumatic recollections. His own narration of his childhood is rational, descriptive and stripped of emotions coming from a relaxed, calm and self-confident adult. As Reid would have it, "habit, fear, and guilt erase unfamiliar and uncomfortable representations of the world from our mind. They replace these representations with familiar and non-threatening ones by constituting our consciousness in a socially acceptable manner (Reid 2003: 26)." So Banks in his English life "forgets" the pain of his childhood.

Banks returns to his hometown Shanghai in the middle of the Sino-Japanese war, allegedly to solve another case. However his detective quest soon becomes his personal quest for the lost meaning of his life as he starts collecting the clues of his past. Simultaneously, his narration is radically transformed so as to accommodate the content of his inner drama. His narration suddenly fills with traces of the hidden narrative of guilt, grief and identity quest. The necessity for the quest emerges from his attempts to meet the biggest challenges of his childhood, his friendship with Akira and his failure to save the parents for which he, as all children would, feels guilt.

Banks attempts to discover what happened to his parents almost three decades previously. Following the rumors about his parents' destiny, Banks finds himself in the midst of a dangerous zone, close to the war activities. The submerged narration of the hero quest leads him along a path ... where his strength and rationality must be challenged. The whole description of the quest

marks a breach with the previous narrative discourse of a controlled and highly rational self of the narrator. Banks's plunge into the unconscious is negotiated by the transformation of his rational, detective self into a childish one hoping against hope that his toys will come alive, or that he can trace his parents as he traced his childish self.

Searching for the house where his parents are kept, Banks gradually becomes more and more irrational, already in the realm of archetypes. Rumor has it that the house lies opposite that of a blind man, Yeh Chen. Banks follows directions of chance acquaintances, people he meets, various officials, no matter how extraordinarily odd their claims might be. The "house" is in the war zone. A lieutenant gives him instructions:

'Mr Banks, please take a good look at this.' He was indicating a little over to our left towards a large boiler-like construction, which, though covered in masonry dust, had remained more or less intact. 'This is the West Furnace. If you look up there you will see the nearer of the two tall chimneys we saw earlier from the roof. The East Furnace is similar in appearance to this. When we reach it, we shall know we are very near to the house' (Ishiguro 2000: 241).

However, the more he searches, the further and more beyond reach the house seems to be. Banks sets upon a surrealist quest, which breaks the conventional notions of time and space. Banks's attempt to escape his destiny and replace it with his current ambition is motivated in archetypal terms by his subsequent descent into unconsciousness in a both metaphoric and literal sense. His insane race through the ruined city represents his painful struggle to come to terms with the illusions and monsters of his childhood and to unite his two selves. His "road of trials" mirrors his confusion. Abruptly Banks finds himself in the midst of a nightmarish landscape, half ruined building, apartment blocks, hole in the walls leading to even stranger places and people. Even more strangely, Banks

meets his childhood friend Akira. The reader never learns where the borderline between this world and the fantasy is. "Once we have come through two further walls and there was still no sign of our being pursued, I felt for the first time a kind of exhilaration of being reunited with my old friend.... The years seem to melt away between us (Ishiguro 2000: 254)." Later when he thinks he finds the house he exclaims, "Akira this is it, we must go in, let's go in together (Ishiguro 2000: 269)."

His anticipation, hope, restlessness, and irrationality are almost childish as he blindly strives to liberate his past self of childish guilt mixed with desperation. Banks is journeying through the wasteland of ruined city quarters in a war-zone.

The damage was so extensive, we would frequently have to halt, unable to find a way through the debris. And while it was undeniably helpful to see where we were setting down our feet, all the ghostliness that had been hidden by the darkness was now visible to us taking a profound toll on our spirits. Amidst the wreckage, we could see blood – sometimes fresh, sometimes weeks old – on the ground, on the wall, splashed across the broken furniture [...] But at that moment I was looking first and foremost for my parents and I was not sure what I registered (Ishiguro 2000: 270).

Although he is obviously unable to find his parents alive, Banks completes his quest by ultimately learning and accepting the truth about his parents and the world of his childhood. It is his disillusionment that brings him to an "atonement with the father," or the world of the father. The truth enables him to put his past guilt behind him and to adapt to the adult life in which, as he must acknowledge, everyone is orphaned. The shadowed narrative of the hero quest stands for universal orphanhood. An accomplished quester is, in terms of the archetypal quest, metaphorically orphaned.

The narrators' intention to "forget" and hide brings to mind Maurice Blanchot's idea of a close relationship between

narrating and forgetting. Blanchot claims that every attempt to tell the story is an attempt “perpetually turned away” from the original event (Blanchot 1993: 385). Therefore, the goal to come to terms with the past can be accomplished only by unconsciously tracing the mysteries of memory in dreams or in the narrative act. Following Blanchot we could say that Ishiguro’s protagonists are woven both of what is present and what is absent from the discourse of their narration. As in the case of repressed emotions, what seems to be crucial is exactly what is hidden and can only be traced and retrieved by various strategies of analysis. In this view, the silent narrations in Ishiguro’s fiction contribute to a more vibrant picture of the protagonists’ past and assert the psychologists’ claim that the true essence of that self is contained in the gaps of the obvious.

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„TRAG“ U PRIPOVEDANJU

Rezime

Deridin pojam „traga“ ili saplementa (dodatka) podržava njegove studije o nesvesnoj komponenti značenja teksta. Pojam tekstualno nesvesnog jedan je od ključnih u procesu odlaganja značenja koje proističe iz tekstualne dinamike opisane kategorijama *différence/difference*. U skladu sa Deridinim idejama, romani Kazua Išigura *Bledi obrisi brda* i *Kad smo bili siročad*, o kojima se govori u ovom tekstu, analiziraju se sa stanovišta narativnog pokušaja da dekonstruiše konstrukciju stvarnosti koja je utemeljena na konvencionalnom diskursu. Ovaj tekst se zasniva na pretpostavci da naracija u Išigurovima romanima nudi ključ za razumevanje procesa na osnovu kojih ljudski um shvata sopstveno iskustvo. Stoga se kompleksna naracija u Išigurovim romanima posmatra kroz prizmu procesa u ljudskom umu koji tu naraciju proizvode. Analiza romana temelji se na Becketovim i Prustovim stavovima o memoriji. Prust shvata dinamiku memorije kao igru voljne i nevoljne memorije, u kojoj je prva izvor svesnih, a druga nesvesnih procesa u ljudskom umu. S druge strane, Pru-

stova razmišljanja o memoriji mogla bi se povezati sa Frojdovim studijama o potisnutim emocijama i idejama Semjuela Beketa o zaboravu kao osnovi sećanja.

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