

PARADOX OF EXISTENCE IN MURAKAMI'S *KAFKA ON THE SHORE* AND ISHIGURO'S *THE REMAINS OF THE DAY*

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Abstract

This study explores how Haruki Murakami's *Kafka on the Shore* and Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* delve into the complexities of human existence and identity. Both novels explore profound paradoxes related to the nature of life, self-discovery, and the passage of time. These two novels deal with the stories of people constantly fighting between themselves and the version of themselves created by and for the world. *The Remains of the Day* explores the life of Stevens, whose authentic sense of existence is closely associated with what he does or shows to others. Kafka of *Kafka on the Shore* is fighting against a prophecy, which he considers his ultimate fate, and is insecure about his freedom of choice. With Keiji Nishitani's theory of Nothingness, this paper aims to conclude an answer on what makes one's existence authentic, whether one's external world constructs it or it is an innate sense of self-free from external influence, and also to what extent free choice can win over the dependence on fixed fate.

Keywords: Existentialism; Nothingness; Sunyata; Fate; Humanity.

1. INTRODUCTION

Haruki Murakami's *Kafka on the Shore* consists of two protagonists, Kafka and Nakata. Kafka's journey is more on the focus, while Nakata's story parallels Kafka's. Nakata is a person who is dissociated from his sense of self, and the only way he can get closer to his existence is by getting the validation of the Entrance Stone. The quest to find the stone gives him a purpose and forms his presence in association with people. Kafka is a young boy who has made his Oedipal curse his identity. His repressed trauma of abandonment has manifested into this fearful fate that torments him and diminishes his existence among people. Eventually, he initiates his presence when he recognizes the trauma and releases the pain. Stevens, the protagonist of Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*, has also let his father's ideals and identity consume his identity, stifling his existence with the imposition of perfection. When he realizes the impossibility of perfection and releases his internal conflict of ideologies, he also initiates his presence with a clean slate of compassion for people.

For Stevens, butlership has been his only option, and the journey gave him the direction of existence despite the flaws. Kafka's curse also pushes him into the adventure that leads him to the lesson of letting go. Their problem was that they never lived for themselves. Hence, they

never lived for others, as they were stuck in the boundary of rules and fate. When Stevens breaks down crying and realizes the futility of his obsession with perfection, and Kafka forgives his mother, they both get free from the anxiety of the ego's control and embark on the path of Sunyata. By the end of the stories, Kafka and Stevens decide to form relationships with people regardless of the rules or the curse. Stevens and Kafka's insides are essential in the question of the inside instead of the outside, as they overcome the fear and pain by acknowledging the rooted issue and trauma. Significantly, they are free from the inside and open to outside experiences and interactions. The Nothingness inside brings about the liberation of Sunyata.

2. OBJECTIVES

Based on the discussion above, researchers have stated the following goals for this research article.

1. To explore the Paradox of Existence in both Murakami's *Kafka on the Shore* and Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* in their unique ways.
2. To look for similarities and dissimilarities between two texts in different contexts like the complexities of human life, identity, and the search for meaning.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

This research aims to elaborate on Murakami's *Kafka on the Shore* and Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* with Keiji Nishitani's *Religion and Nothingness*. The literature review discusses the peer-reviewed articles that are relevant to the topic of this research.

Silvia Chiarle associates the identity of the butler of *The Remains of the Day* with femininity, looking at the butler's extreme loyalty to his master as a marriage. Stevens is committed to the externally exposed performance of service to the extreme, while the master works as the male dominance in the context of the butler's excessive feminine devotion. To clarify the argument, the researchers analyze Stevens' character with Freudian psychoanalysis of self-identification with a role model. In Stevens' case, his father is his identifier.

The Confidence Man: His Masquerade by Melville and *Kafka on the Shore* by Murakami are contrasted in research by Jason M. Wirth. The essay discusses a "gap" (Wirth 1), the characters' distinction between their outward persona, called the mask, and their underlying self. The researchers conclude that the understanding of persona and authentic self is a cathartic revelation "that allows one to awaken to the productivity and impermanence of the self and begin to heal the traumas that harden the self into the trap of a hollow character."

Wattanagun and Chotiudompant explore "The struggle of finding one's identity for the characters of *Kafka on the Shore*. This paper concludes that the protagonist Kafka's struggle with identity was solved with a clearer understanding of his memories. Hoshino's life conforms to the capitalist ideology, and Nakata represents the futility of the capitalist society as he struggles to make sense of capitalism's ideology."

Assil Ghariri analyzes the role of the phenomenon of persona in *The Remains of the Day*. The researcher observes that Stevens' journey in the story is a journey to his unconscious to reveal his authentic self by exploring the shadow and bringing down the persona. Carl Jung's theory of individuation is used here to analyze Stevens' character. Grariri suggests that Stevens' loyalty to Darlington Hall has been a situation of being a prisoner for him, and he allowed himself to be in this state because of the archetype of persona that makes him do the unwanted but conventionally appropriate deed.

"The Name 'Kafka': Evocation and Resistance in Murakami's *Kafka on the Shore* by Betiel Wasihun focuses on the significance of the protagonist's name Kafka and what it symbolizes. Wasihun comprehends the name, Kafka, a reference to Franz Kafka, as a symbol of something mysterious that is difficult to grasp. Curiously enough, Kafka's execution machine dissolves into something very abstract, somewhere 'all around' and yet not graspable" (Wasihun, 2014: 1203). The elements of solitude and mysticism also function around the character Kafka, which plays into the novel's magical realist aspects.

Maria Flutch draws on the psychoanalytic literary criticism of *Kafka on the Shore* along Kristeva's line of intertextuality and intersubjectivity, focusing on the portrayal of women in the novel. The researcher concludes that the women in the story are depicted with heterosexuality as the subjective normativity that only focuses on the male protagonist, comparatively sidelining the development of the female characters that play an essential role in the protagonist's life, rejecting the scope of intersubjectivity in the novel.

Mathew Carl Stretcher discusses the quest for identity in Haruki Murakami's fiction, especially the unconscious's psychological journey, along with Lacan's vision of the self and the other. Associating Lacan's theory with Murakami's quest for self, especially in *Kafka on the Shore*, Kafka's journey has been a series of attempts to adjust himself to the outside of the other and not get consumed by the fearful discomfort of the other by taking control of himself amidst the turmoil of the influential outside.

"Personal and Professional: Exploring the Father-Son Relationship in Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*" by Kasturi Sinha Ray explores how Stevens' relationship with his father absorbs him so much that he is adamant about becoming another version of his father himself, willing to suppress any chance of authenticity of himself.

Sonali Thakkar looks into *The Remains of the Day* from a postcolonial point of view. As noted by Thakkar, the historical evolution of the Suez crisis corresponds with the July 1956 setting of the story, and its imperialist assertions imply a colonial status syndrome: "These anxious invocations of national and imperial greatness might seem to invite a symptomatic reading that would identify the narrative's repression of Suez and imperial crisis" (Thakkar, 2017: 91).

The existing research on *Kafka on the Shore* and *The Remains of the Day* has observed the texts mainly through psychoanalysis, focusing on the father-son crisis of both protagonists. Besides psychoanalysis, *Kafka on the Shore* has been analyzed through magic realism; the concepts of self-deception and self-identity have also been analyzed in *The Remains of the Day*.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 Data Collection

Researchers have used secondary data in this study. They have a soft copy of *Kafka on the Shore* and *The Remains of the Day*. Some information collected from websites, blogs, and online journals has been used here. Some of them are collected from research articles on Google Scholar. Furthermore, researchers have watched videos regarding these texts on YouTube, which helped them throughout the study.

4.2 Data Analysis

The study focused on the paradox of existence, the complexities of human existence and identity. Both novels explore profound paradoxes related to the nature of life, self-discovery, and the passage of time.

Haruki Murakami created *Kafka on the Shore*, a strange story that blurs the line between fact and fantasy. The story follows two protagonists, Kafka and Nakata, on separate but interconnected journeys of self-discovery. Kafka's quest for identity and purpose is marked by dreamlike sequences and encounters with enigmatic characters, while Nakata possesses an inexplicable ability to communicate with cats and embarks on a surreal odyssey.

In contrast, Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* presents a more restrained exploration of the paradox of existence. Set against the backdrop of post-World War II England, the novel follows Stevens, a devoted butler, as he embarks on a reflective journey to visit Miss Kenton, a former colleague. Through Stevens' introspective narration, the novel delves into themes of duty, regret, and the passage of time.

4.3 Data Analysis with Keiji Nishitani's Theory of Nothingness

Keeping Jean-Paul Sartre's ideologies of existence preceding essence and choice or actions superseding fate (2) as the blueprint for Existentialism, Keiji Nishitani's Religion, and Nothingness emphasizes the significance of the deeds of people defining a religion. Religion and Nothingness incorporates the nihilistic acceptance of the meaninglessness of arbitrary choices, simultaneously acknowledging that people's free choices and actions eventually form the values of a universal religion applied to all, freeing them from the box of self-centeredness.

While Sartre puts significance on humans' conscious choice and the universality of human nature, Nishitani points out the importance of the power of the larger universe, something that human choice and universal human nature cannot control. The two novels in this research bring out a paradox of choice and action. While Kafka's choices were always influenced by his fixation on fate, Stevens also chose to pursue a career given to him. In both cases, choices cannot be free from fate or a manipulation of a bigger reason. Nishitani's suggestion of embracing this helplessness of restrained individual independence provides a solution to this paradox. The solution is not to let the anxiety of self, or the compulsion of a preconceived notion, take over the consciousness.

The ability to embrace the emptiness within, that is, the understanding that nothing matters other than the genuine communicative association with the surroundings, can solve the conflict of confusing existence. For Stevens, butlership has been the only option available for him, and the journey gave him the direction of existence despite the flaws. Kafka's curse also pushes him into the adventure that leads him to the lesson of letting go. Their problem was that they never lived for themselves. Hence, they never lived for others, as they were stuck in the boundary of rules and fate. When Stevens breaks down crying and realizes the futility of his obsession with perfection, and Kafka forgives his mother, they both get free from the anxiety of the ego's control and embark on the path of Sunyata. By the end of the stories, Kafka and Stevens decide to form relationships with people regardless of the rules or the curse. Stevens and Kafka's insides are important in the question of the inside as opposed to the outside, as they overcome the fear and pain specifically by acknowledging the rooted issue and trauma. Significantly, they are free from the inside and open to outside experiences and interactions. The Nothingness inside brings about the liberation of Sunyata.

5. ANALYSIS

5.1 Existence in *Kafka on the Shore*

5.1.1 Kafka on the Shore of Self-Suffocation

The preface titled "The Boy Named Crow " provides the gist of Kafka's struggle in the novel. The boy named Crow is an imaginary friend who represents Kafka himself. It is almost like he is talking to himself. But the boy named Crow has an outwardly braver perspective of himself. Kafka is like he interacts with a mirror, but the reflection is better than him. He perceives this persona and Kafka's conscious sense of self separately because he has not reached the stage, where he confronts the fact that his persona is himself.

On the run, Kafka meets Sakura, who also believes in fate. They believe that meeting each other is a part of their fate that gives meaning to their life "That our previous lives fate things in life. That even in the smallest events there is no such thing as coincidence" (Murakami, 2003: 31). However, the choice made by Sakura to approach Kafka and Kafka's option to agree to interact with her, only their choices make fate possible. Later, when Kafka feels attracted to the girl and fears that she could be his sister, whom he is cursed to get sexual with, this situation results from his choice of reciprocating her approach. Kafka is running to escape the same curse, choosing to fight his alleged fate. Ironically, his choice makes him feel closer to actualizing the curse. Though there is no surety of Sakura, being Kafka's lost sister, his obsession with the curse and considering the curse as his ultimate destiny are now spoiling his experience of attraction to the opposite sex. Kafka escapes this fear by assuring himself that the name Sakura is too unusual to be his sister's. This moment of escape relieves him as he briefly accepts the arbitrariness of happenings. However, in reality, the randomness of Sakura's name assures Kafka, not his deliberate choice. He still feels attracted to Sakura without proving whether she is his sister. His mental negotiation regarding his attraction towards Sakura blurs the distinction between fate and choice because his conscious choice is influenced by fate. "The individual affair of each individual" (Nishitani, 2007: 2).

According to Nishitani, when nihilism overcomes itself and Nothingness negates Nothingness itself, the freedom of Sunyata takes place (97). When Kafka breaks from all the confusion of coincidences, he confronts the Nothingness that has not yet overcome itself, haunting him because it still is not an understandable void to him. He still attaches himself to the hole. Nishitani refers to Buddhism, where Nothingness is the non-ego (33). The Nothingness controls Kafka before becoming the non-ego, symbolized as the Crow. When he has an awareness of self, that is the realization that the Crow or the ego is his himself and that there is nothing behind himself other than his existence in association with people of the world, he will acquire Sunyata.

In his solitude in the woods, he also feels lonely and helpless, as if the lack of a particular goal for the time being has opened a new pit of darkness drowning him. He has the opportunity to rest in a void, but because the gap is filled with the fears gripping his ego, he cannot attain the freedom of Nothingness. This blurs the solidity of the curse that he is running away from and insinuates the question of whether he is actually lonely to have grown up without a proper family and is running away from the hauntedness of the loneliness under the guise of the curse. Oshima finally puts a label into the darkness or the curse that Kafka has always known and feared: the Oedipal curse. However, this alleged curse can also be interpreted as a humane reaction to an adverse childhood that Kafka endured. He grew up lonely; he missed his sister and mother, whom he hardly knew. His father did not love him. The unaffectionate childhood implanted the feeling of darkness within Kafka, which made sense to his perspective as a curse. He never had any experience of a relationship with a female family member. Though the expertise never existed, the absence of it has been hurting Kafka, as he feels abandoned. So, the complicated emotions of abandonment broke, and the need for familial affection manifested into a complex sexual desire, which Kafka could not ignore. Making sense of this complexity with the label of an inescapable cursed fate keeps things sure for Kafka amid his perplexed existence far from the real cause of the torment. When he can recognize the point of anxiety by letting go of the fixation on the grounds of "fundamental uncertainty about the very existence of oneself and others" (Nishitani, 2007: 16), he will fulfill Nothingness.

In the library, Kafka meets Miss Saeki, whom he suspects is his mother. Miss Saeki has had a history of pain in love. She used to be emotionally dependent on her boyfriend. She became devastated after he died. Coincidentally, when she met her boyfriend, he used to be the same age as Kafka; when he met her with romantic attraction and the fear that she might be his mother. "Miss Saeki's life stopped at age twenty when her lover died. The hands of the clock buried inside her soul ground to a halt then" (Murakami, 2003:146). Miss Saeki feels that meeting Kafka at his age at this point of her life is the mysterious work of fate, where both Kafka and Miss Saeki's situations align together, and the halt of her soul can be lifted. But for Kafka, his nightmare comes true with every step he takes to survive. Here also, Kafka makes the coincidences essential to align with the narrative of his supposed fate, to keep the confusing emotions less confusing for himself.

Kafka and Miss Saeki have strange interactions with each other. The magic realism of the novel makes it acceptable that the younger alternate version or ghost of the middle-aged Miss Saeki has been visiting Kafka. "Just like when I am in the middle of a deep dream" (Murakami, 2003: 210). While Miss Saeki is fascinated by Kafka because he reminds her of her dead lover, Kafka is attracted to the young ghost of living Miss Saeki, whom he constantly visits. At the same time, he also feels fascinated by the middle-aged Miss Saeki. In all these cases, mutual attraction is both by choice and by the influence of the past or what is believed to be a fixed fate. Kafka and Miss Saeki, in a dream-like state, get into a sexual relationship, consensual from both sides. As for Kafka, considering his suspicion of Miss Saeki being like his mother does go according to the curse. He has been fulfilling the conditions of the fate he feared and ran away. He chose to make the fateful thing happen. He confirms to himself that every emotion and feeling is aligned with fulfilling the prophecy, and his desires for Miss Saeki are also pushed by fate. The idea of this fate has accompanied Kafka for so long that he cannot validate his free will, surpassing any prophecy.

5.1.2 Kafka's Self-Sufficiency

Now, Kafka is on the line of paradox and conflict with the prophecy. He first wanted to run away from what he thought to be his gruesome fate. But now he believes he has crossed the limits. As always, even now, he chooses to enable the ways of the curse, both him and destiny leading each other. He is hopelessly perplexed that even Crow, his wiser alter ego, has left his side. His coping mechanism is not helping him in his torment. Either the alter ego has vanished as he is now directionless, or he is in the dreadful but essential process of merging himself with Crow to restore a sense of direction. Kafka finally gets a hold of himself on his own, this time, without the help of an alter-ego, but becoming that alter-ego himself. This aligns with the self-sufficiency of Nothingness when one embraces the power of choice and decides not to get controlled by the restrictive rules of the fearful self, transforming from the inside to exist on the outside. "The negation of person-centeredness must amount to an existential self-negation of man as a person." (Nishitani, 2007: 70).

He embraces himself as his savior and convinces himself with the logic that he has been devoid of his whole life. Kafka, as the crow, guides Kafka, the heartbroken child who grew up believing that his mother didn't love him. Crow Kafka consoles human Kafka and advises him to move on from the fixation of a presumed curse or prophecy by forgiving his mother, who left. Though he still hesitantly suspects that Miss Saeki is his mother, Crow Kafka decides it is vital to understand that she is vulnerable too. Split into two parts within himself, young boy Kafka cannot fathom this advice and does not understand why love has to be so painful. "If there is a curse in all this, you mean to grab it by the horns and fulfill the program laid out for you. Lift the burden from your shoulders and live caught up in someone else's schemes but as you. That is what you want" (Murakami, 2003: 343). His alter-ego submerges with himself attempting to make him realize the importance of letting go of the fixation itself, indicating progress associating his existence with tangible human nature and connections.

But before embarking on a complete healing process in the woods, Kafka falls into the more profound illusions of his fantasies. As this novel is filled with magic realism, Kafka also goes through a magically real illusive journey where he finds both younger and older versions of Miss Saeki inviting him to stay in the mysterious place with her, assuring him that now he will be all right. It feels like a comfortable escape for him. But he leaves this illusion and finally saves himself by escaping the fantasy. Kafka lets go of the fixation, thinking the whole process, from learning about the curse to going through all the turmoil, ending with Miss Saeki's death, has been predestined. "Mother, you say. I forgive you. And with those words, audibly, the frozen part of your heart crumbles" (Murakami, 2003: 411). By being understanding of his mother's abandonment, he has come out of the limiting box, the supposed curse that dominated his essence with narrow subjectivity. He has initiated universal humanism with a human existence and communicative subjectivity. Kafka still has faith in destiny because it is the only means to make sense of things that traumatize him. He still believes that Sakura is his sister and Miss Saeki is probably his mother. He turns himself in to the police, and Crow returns to tell him to rest. He has not unified with his alter-ego, but now the alter-ego is sympathetic and kind to him, which implies that he is kinder to himself and can let go of the pain, with the ego's ability to not be controlled by the anxiety of 'the supposed to be.' His reliance on destiny does not let him embrace the fulfilling freedom of Nothingness. Still, he has initiated his existence of autonomy by accepting things as they are, even if they are fated, but without an additional weight of anxious anticipation, embracing his version of Nishitani's freedom of Nothingness. "True nothingness means that there is nothing that is nothingness, and this is absolute nothingness." (70)

5.1.3 Embracing the Helplessness of a Larger Reality

This paper aims to contemplate if there could be a balance between the extreme ends of the spectrum of existentialist theories examining *Kafka on the Shore* and *The Remains of the Day*. Kafka's story shows the negative effect of his excessive awareness of fate, which turns even his free will into a choice made under predestination. However, this understanding of the fate of a curse gives directions to his empty life. It creates the meaning of something he is ignorant of, misleading trends, and meaning swing. Kafka's emptiness in life, the lack of familial affection, and interaction with the opposite sex prompted a correlation between his longing for love from his mother and sister and his heterosexual attraction towards women, all resulting in a disturbed mindset of the curse of incest. His intense disturbance, working as his benchmark of fate, also becomes essential for him to come to terms with his outward persona, to be more sympathetic towards himself, and to let go of the pain of abandonment with forgiveness. His intimate and personal journey eventually forms his existence when he chooses to release the strings of the curse. Hence, though free will prevails following his internal transformation, this existence occurs because of the negotiation of his complex relationship with his essence.

Co-protagonist Nakata represents the dissociation of consciousness rather than the push and pull of choice and fate because he has no control over his condition. He got into a coma and lost all his memories after waking up due to some illness that struck him during the war. Nakata develops a dependency on fate with the idea of the Entrance Stone, believing that his mind, as

a separate entity apart from himself, is guiding him to find this stone. Nakata refers to himself in the third person as a sign of dissociated consciousness. However, he understands his consciousness has been adrift somewhere, especially in a coma. So, there must be a consciousness subdued inside him that he cannot acknowledge unless it gets the promise of validation and a goal to get that validation.

The discomfiting out-of-place feeling he gets in his mind after waking up from the draining coma now makes him consider his mind a separate entity with separate autonomy ordering him to follow the destiny of finding the stone as he feels like an empty container whose consciousness is outside, a blind belief on whatever explanation comes in his disassociated condition is something that helps him make sense of himself and the world, and to believe in something out of the nothing, just like Kafka made sense of his sufferings with the explanation of the curse. He has an ignored consciousness, with which he chooses to find the Entrance Stone. He forms the notion of the stone's prophecy to make his existence survive. Nakata can agree with Sartre's theory of existentialism the most. Even though Nakata has to rely on the idea of a prophecy due to his situation, he decides to believe in some fate to make meaning. He is looking for the stone, and that action is now the backbone of his existence more than his original essence. Nakata's situation shows that having an idea of what one is supposed to be or do helps one choose action and create their existence in the world. He had no direction other than his comfort on the Entrance Stone, which allows him to live with a purpose until he dies in his sleep, believing that he has been on the route of finding himself and his purpose.

5.2 Existence in *the Remains of the Day*

5.2.1 The Remains of the Day Filled with Preconceptions

The novel starts with Stevens' narration explaining why he is going on a trip to see around the country, and it is because his employer Mr. Farraday has told him to. Right from the beginning of Stevens' first-person narration, he admits that his choice to get a break and enjoy some time is because his employer gave him a chance, not because Stevens wanted it. He confirms that he believes everything Mr. Farraday tells him to do is his firmly determined responsibility to follow so much that his enjoyment depends on the employer's allowance. Stevens relies heavily on the ideals of his job and the words of his employer instead of the authentic experience of living. Stevens' dedication to his profession reflects his desire for perfection, which he lets control himself, allowing his essence to be manipulated by an idea of perfection that he has yet to overcome. He is constantly anxious about living up to the standard of perfection. "When a man chooses an existence for his "self," he chooses at the same time an image of what he believes man ought to be. In choosing himself, he is "thereby at the same time a legislator for the whole of mankind" (Sartre as qt in Nishitani 31). From an Existentialist point of view, Stevens' deeds do not contribute to his existence for humankind but only feed his essence's self-centeredness.

Whatever little choices Stevens has been making are to align with his strict ideal of being his master's server. Stevens' conflicts often concern the perfectionism of his job and the English-hood. He reveals he can no longer socialize with other butlers because Farraday does not host

guests often. It indicates that Stevens is lonely. But he makes himself bothered that he cannot discuss his work-life dilemma with fellow butlers. He is looking for companionship but is too rigid to form human connections. His desire for companionship is also catered to his fixation on the job. The lack of discussion about work is believed to be a bigger problem than his loneliness because his ideology tells him that work is supposed to be the end all be all and not his personal life.

"I would say that the very lack of obvious drama or spectacle sets the beauty of our land apart" (Ishiguro, 2008: 24). As Stevens enjoys the beauty of countryside England, he emphasizes the restraint of the scenic beauty. This plain restraint symbolizes Stevens' devotion to being a strict and formal butler of England, which he admires. His perception of existence is inflexible and heavily depends on what it should be. He also follows some definitions or ideals for the dignity of a good butler that he wants to uphold. These ideals are inspired by stories of butlership Stevens heard from his father, who was also a butler, all of which implicate an extreme amount of devotion towards service to the point of being unhealthy. The stories imply that in any adverse situation, even if it is personally traumatizing, a good butler should never think for himself and prioritize his service and loyalty to his master. "A great harmony among all things in the universe that brings them into being and sustains them in mutual dependence and cooperation" (Nishitani, 2007: 8); Stevens' ideals do not support this harmony because he is not only out of connection with the world, he is also determined to betray himself and his feelings to satisfy the desire for perfection.

Stevens religiously follows the ideals of a butler's dignity and rejects the possibility of any choice to deviate from these self-imposed binding rules. He wants his existence as a butler filled with the dignity and greatness of restraint, deliberately blocking any space for his individuality and emotionality. Stevens' dedication to his work simultaneously follows Sartre's notion of one's deeds and accountability of choice being their existence and not anything predestined and contradicts Sartre's advocacy of choice. Stevens' deeds and responsibilities encompass his whole existence, and he ignores the possibility of an alternate personal reality. On the contrary, he is so focused on how a butler is supposed to be great that he leaves no room for choice and personal accountability. His obsession with extreme professional perfection is the desire he aims to achieve by perceiving through the reflection of his father's ideal. In submitting to this desire, he has suppressed his essence into a shell of rules, not genuinely contributing to a larger scale of humanity, as Nishitani suggested (8).

During the last moments of Stevens' father, also, when the house was busy with guests and the butlers had a lot to do, Stevens' father finally became emotional. He called Stevens a good son, though not in regards to his emotionality as a good son, but in regards to a good learner internalizing the ideals of a blindly devoted butler. Even Stevens got emotional and shed tears for his father, but brushed them off, calling them the result of tiredness of work, obeying his father's morals despite being emotionally tolled. Stevens' father eventually died the same day, and when Stevens was grief-stricken, he chose to complete his duties of serving the guest instead of mourning, believing that his father would want the same from him. In following, what he thought his father wanted him to do regardless of the father being death; Stevens

suppressed his humane emotions and completed his duties. His fixation on his strict rule of professionalism stops him from processing emotions.

Furthermore, engulfed by the myth of a butler's dignity amid the traumatic experience day of his father's death, Stevens is happy to have achieved a professional milestone by suppressing his emotions and performing his duties in adversity. In his dedication to the existence of deeds over the essence of predetermination, Stevens has been letting the predetermination of rules overtake his reality and completely diminish his core of human emotionality. "A world cold and dead, governed by laws of mechanical necessity, completely indifferent to the fact of men." (Nishitani, 2007: 48)

In Stevens's case, his hermit cave of the ego binds him inside his image of a perfect butler who cannot be affected by Darlington's bad reputation. But, if he claims that the acts of service to the employer are the priority, then his caring about his pleasant image of butler more than his previous loyalty to Lord Darlington is in a contrary stance. It makes it unclear where Stevens stands and what he believes and finds significant. It also proves that his conflicting internal essence makes his outward existence void. In Nishitani's analogy, his actions are not broken through himself and are not from a field of consciousness but from a confusing notion of a strict standard.

Stevens confirms that he suffers from indecisiveness. His interactions with Miss Kenton make his indecision more visible to himself. When Miss Kenton and Stevens worked together, he noticed Miss Kenton crying and considered going to her to make her feel better. "Having left her to be alone with her grief, I realized out in the corridor that I had not offered her my condolences. I may have been a little confused about this matter; this fragment of memory derives from events that took place on an evening at least a few months after the death of Miss Kenton's aunt." He was considerate for a moment but chose to change his decision and continued serving his employer's guest, with the justification that helping men who would change history was more important than soothing a crying person. He justifies his emotional insensitivity by leaning on the division of imposed priority and choosing to forego confident choices as a justification for preconceived ideas. Though Miss Kenton is disappointed at Stevens for his excessive robotic nature, she also makes fun of him. She lets him know she makes fun of him, understanding that Stevens has feelings he cannot process and acknowledge or feels he should not admit. Stevens does not recognize the gap between his preconceived perception and the reality of what he consciously understands. He is too engulfed in the imposed seriousness of some fixed ideals that prevent him from embracing the natural flow of the universe that has been a reluctant part. He prioritizes the supposedly essential people of his employer by ignoring a person to whom he is connected. "All things in the world are linked together, one way or the other. Not a single thing comes into being without some relationship to every other thing" (Nishitani, 2007: 149).

5.2.2 The Day Rests in Epiphany

"Behind a person, there is nothing at all, that is, that "nothing at all" is what stands behind a person" (Nishitani, 2007: 70). Stevens' narrative of firmness takes a turn when he acknowledges the Nothingness inside him by realizing that he has always loved Miss Kenton. With this realization of the futile rigidity of living and the acknowledgment of the emptiness of absorbing unnecessary seriousness, he understands that most of the gravity is in vain without genuine human connections. Finally, he is not ignoring what he has been ignoring all this time and outwardly acknowledges that his heart is breaking. Miss Kenton is married to someone else. While Stevens was with her at the Darlington, he avoided being emotionally vulnerable. He was so submerged in his essence of a butler that he avoided creating his existence as someone who could love. Now, realizing the lost opportunity of love, the fact of choice has slipped out of his hands. "And you get to thinking about a different life, a better life you might have had. For instance, I get to thinking about a life I may have had with you, Mr. Stevens" (Ishiguro, 2008: 192). This epiphany of unrequited love triggers a surge of emotion in Stevens, and he sees his uncertain ideal of a determined, organized existence fall apart. He sits down with a man and another butler, and they share their thoughts. Stevens breaks down in tears, admitting that he feels insufficient and unable to satisfy his master. Stevens' initial sense of pride as a righteous butler somewhat derived from Darlington's own mistakes from the blame of which Stevens was protected, as he believed.

The previous feeling of comfort in his identity as a butler is now bothering Stevens because even though Darlington was imperfect, Stevens blindly believed, or at least made himself believe, that he was perfect. Now he is accepting that Darlington, as a human, was indeed imperfect, and Stevens', as his butler, is not at fault for anything in his employer's life. His responsibility was to interact with his employer, but not to ensure someone else's high standard of perfection. In the present, with Mr. Farraday, Stevens cannot keep the shell of the model intact because the errors are happening due to Stevens' orthodox rigidity. Nishitani's confusing suggestion that true Nothingness means that there is nothing that is Nothingness (70) works as an advisor for Stevens to look at disappointment in a hopeful way to get rid of attachment to something that does not matter anymore. Stevens calms down and decides to get better, this time after a transformation of the confrontation of the illusion, genuinely choosing to get along with his employer instead of being stuck in a master-slave dynamic. Now he is merging his consciousness with a butler's outward persona and letting the external perception of existence affect his internal identity or essence. This is his conscious self-verifying the anxiety issue, recognizing the gap of inability to achieve a certain standard, and accepting the possibility that he can live entirely without the added pressure of the unrealistic standard of perfection.

At the beginning of the narration, Stevens looks down upon Mr. Farraday's nature of bantering with him, considering it something that wasn't supposed to happen in the butler-employer relationship. Now, Stevens' agreeing to banter with Mr. Farraday to please him more indicates that he is choosing the autonomy of his existence and coming out of the binds of the deterministic essence of butlership. His external perception of reality as a butler and the internal essence as an emotionally active human merge as he realizes how he has been suppressing his

existence with a superficial notion of essence. The realization works as an epiphany that gives birth to his new personhood. He decides to live through active human relationships and with spontaneity without being fixated on rules and predestined meaning. His subjectivity is not limited to his essence. Still, it is spread towards his existence of universality, indicating his ability of compassion and open-mindedness, as opposed to his previous strictness of being. He attempts to embrace Nishitani's idea of fulfilling Nothingness, where he accepts his profession as merely a job that involves work and interaction rather than a high benchmark with imposed significance.

His job as a butler kept Stevens bound to this idea of predetermination, halting his movements and free will to create his existence by choice. Unlike Kafka, whose obsession with his fate eventually led him to a conclusion with freedom, Stevens has restricted himself with his obsession with what he is supposed to be. "The hard reality is, surely, that for the likes of you and I, there is little choice other than to leave our fate, ultimately, in the hands of those great gentlemen at the hub of this world who employ our services" (Ishiguro, 2008: 197). By the end, he is still stuck in his butler's job; his livelihood still depends on his wealthier employer, who is like an authority figure. But he becomes authentically connected with his butler's identity by releasing his spontaneous emotions and understanding that this is a job to earn survival, not an ideal to blindly follow at the cost of individuality. "An indifference of love. It is a non-differentiating love that transcends the distinctions men make between good and evil, justice and injustice." (Nishitani, 2007: 58). He actively compromises with his rigidity, and the conscious decision to adjust to the rules alleviates the authenticity of his existence.

5.2.3 Fulfillment of Sunyata

Nishitani discusses the problem of nihilism, that is, nihilism brings humans to a directionless point without the answer to why one exists, to begin with, helpless with the infinite choices of making their destiny, also hopeless with the awakening of meaninglessness. This is where the paradox of existentialism occurs. The benchmark of the 'supposed to be' is indeed binding to the free flow of actions. But in which directions the activities can go from a series of coherent events is uncertain without a safety net of the benchmark. The profession of a butler has been an available option for Stevens, which he took. Without that option, he either could be something else, or he would be directionless.

Nonetheless, he chose to be a butler to follow in his father's footsteps and to become perfect in his father's eyes, not for himself. Kafka and Nakata went on a journey that they thought was fated for them, and in the process, Kafka got liberation, and Nakata got a purpose in his emptiness. For Stevens, though he has wasted a huge chunk of his life following a strict path, he eventually understood the value of flexibility in this path. So, the question remains if a mixture of fixedness and flexibility is better than the utter voidness of nihilism's freedom.

Nishitani suggests that the solution to the existential paradox is love that does not differentiate between human-made standards of practicality, a mindset to appreciate whatever comes along the way without the obsession of giving it a more significant meaning, accepting the arbitrariness and the free flow of flexibility with undifferentiated love, which the concept of

Sunyata can also understand. Nishitani suggests Sunyata get liberated from the void of nihilism, where everything is free from the assigned significance of some imposed significant meaning and is what it is. After a lot of turmoil, Kafka and Stevens have learned that Kafka's curse and Stevens' job are given much more significance than what is deserved, that Kafka's curse is not a curse but a manifestation of loneliness. Stevens' job is not an unchangeable destiny but a job that doesn't need to consume his life. This lesson could have saved them from all the suffering, but the journey made it fruitful and earned. "This means that man is no longer merely personally in the world. As a being who is both completely material and completely biological, the indifferent laws of nature rule him" (Nishitani, 2007: 50). While Sartre believed that chosen action is the absolute existence of humans, Nishitani acknowledges the powerlessness of choice and the necessity of giving in to the power of the bigger universe, something that cannot be helped by choice or actions. Accepting that powerlessness frees one from the torment of fixation. Kafka's abandonment trauma cannot be helped, but how he overcomes it with his choices is essential.

Similarly, Stevens's past cannot be changed, but what he does now after the transformation of disillusionment is essential. Sunyata is where the emptiness of nihilism negates itself, and then nihilism becomes valuable with awakened enlightenment, making life complete again with a different, healthier perspective. Kafka and Stevens go through the death of their restrained selves, reborn with a new life.

6. FINDINGS

Both novels delve into complex philosophical and existential questions, although their approaches and conclusions differ significantly.

6.1 Researchers in this research have found the following similarities between the two texts.

- 1. Retrospection and Self-Reflection:** Both novels involve protagonists who engage in deep introspection and self-reflection. In *Kafka on the Shore*, Kafka and Nakata reflect on their pasts and question the nature of their existence. Similarly, in *The Remains of the Day*, Stevens, the butler, looks back on his life and choices, leading to profound self-examination.
- 2. Suppressed Emotion:** In both novels, the characters grapple with suppressed emotions and desires. Kafka, Nakata, and Stevens all hide their true feelings and desires, which ultimately leads to inner conflicts and regrets. This suppression of emotions contributes to the paradox of their existence.
- 3. Existential Questions:** Both novels explore existential questions related to the purpose and meaning of life. Kafka and Nakata in Murakami's novel, as well as Stevens in Ishiguro's work, find themselves questioning the paths they have taken and the choices they have made, which is a common thread in the exploration of existence.
- 4. Retrospective Narrative:** *Kafka on the Shore* is a complex and surreal novel that employs a non-linear narrative structure. The story is told from multiple perspectives and follows two

main characters, Kafka Tamura and Nakata, whose journeys eventually intersect. The retrospective narrative technique is used throughout the novel to provide insights into the characters' pasts and the events that have led them to their current situations, which explore the theme of the paradox of existence.

The Remains of the Day is narrated by Stevens, an English butler, as he looks back on his life. This retrospective narrative creates a sense of existential reflection as Stevens grapples with the choices he made and the path he followed.

6.2 Researchers in this research have found the following dissimilarities between the two texts.

- 1. Tone and Style:** The novels have distinct tones and narrative styles. Murakami's *Kafka on the Shore* features a more surreal and metaphysical narrative with elements of magical realism. Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* is more grounded in realism and subtlety, focusing on the inner thoughts and emotions of the characters without overt metaphysical elements.
- 2. Setting and Cultural Context:** The novels are set in different cultural and geographical contexts. *Kafka on the Shore* is set in contemporary Japan, where cultural elements, folklore, and Japanese mysticism play a significant role. In contrast, *The Remains of the Day* is set in post-war England and explores themes of British society, class, and tradition.
- 3. Character Journeys:** The character journeys in the two novels are distinct. In *Kafka on the Shore*, characters like Kafka and Nakata embark on physically and metaphysically surreal journeys. In *The Remains of the Day*, Stevens' journey is more introspective and psychological as he grapples with his role as a butler and his repressed emotions.
- 4. Nature of Existence:** While both novels explore the paradox of existence, they do so in different ways. Murakami's novel delves into the blurred boundaries between reality and the subconscious, using surreal and fantastical elements. Ishiguro's novel focuses on the conflict between personal desires and professional duty in a more realistic and understated manner.

Both novels delve into the theme of the paradox of existence, self-reflection, and suppressed emotions but do so in distinct ways. Murakami's *Kafka on the Shore* employs surreal and metaphysical elements to challenge conventional notions of reality, while Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* explores the theme through a character's introspective reflection on a life defined by duty and suppression of emotions. However, they differ significantly in their narrative styles, settings, and the nature of the existential questions they pose, making each novel a unique exploration of the human experience.

7. CONCLUSION

The ideology of living with individual satisfaction and letting others live satisfied is the result of positive Nothingness, and Sunyata is derived from *Kafka on the Shore* and *The Remains of the Day*. Understanding the universality of human nature and being considerate of the individuality of others contribute to the fulfillment of one's identity as well. Stevens lets himself

go from the shackles of self-centered rules and embraces his individuality concerning people by admitting that he has loved Miss Kenton, agreeing to genuinely communicate with Mr. Farraday, and accepting that Darlington has flaws. Kafka also lets himself go from the restrictions of painful hidden trauma and embraces himself spreading kindness further among others. He forgives his mother and wants to reach out to Sakura, this time, without the pressure of the curse but with the intention of an authentic connection. Both have come out of the boundary of attachment to anxiety and have taken the steps to live for and with humanity.

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