

## Althusserian's Subjectification of the Individual in Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*

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**Received:** 2026/01/16

**Accepted:** 2026/04/24

**Available online:** 2026/06/01

### Citation:

Pourshahabadi, Hossein Alikhan, Maryam Asadzadeh, and Seyed Ehsan Askari. "Althusserian's Subjectification of the Individual in Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*." *Journal of Literature Across Borders*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2026. PP.95-114.

### Abstract

This essay provides a comprehensive analysis of Kazuo Ishiguro's novel, *The Remains of the Day*, through the lens of Louis Althusser's post-Marxist concepts. The study explores the processes of subjectification, interpellation, and ideological repression that shape the protagonist, Mr. Stevens, within the socio-historical context of the narrative. Drawing on Althusser's theories, the research delves into how dominant ideologies influence character development and identity formation. The thesis examines key moments in the novel to uncover the intricate ways in which Stevens navigates duty, loyalty, and social hierarchy, highlighting the pervasive influence of ideology on individual consciousness and agency. The study further explores the implications of Stevens' repression of personal emotions and desires, aligning with Althusser's insights on ideological control. By mapping the ideological structures within *The Remains of the Day*, this research highlights the complexities of power dynamics, social hierarchies, and the constraints imposed by ideological norms. Through this analysis, the article contributes to broader discussions on subjectivity, power relations, and the impact of ideology on individual lives, both within literature and beyond. Ultimately, this research enriches our understanding of Ishiguro's masterful work, offering deeper insights into the thematic concerns of identity, power, and resistance. The Althusserian reading of *The Remains of the Day* fosters a greater awareness of the ideological forces that shape human experience and identity formation in a world marked by social and economic inequalities.

**Keywords:** Power Relations, Ideology, Interpellation, Repression, Subjectification

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## Introduction

This research delves into the complexities of individual subjectivity within Kazuo Ishiguro's novel, *The Remains of the Day* (1989), employing Louis Althusser's post-Marxist theories as a critical lens. By studying this novel, one can see the dominant ideology interpellating the protagonist of the novel, Stevens. The characters are masterfully devoted to their duties in a way they have forgotten their self-worth, which is highly emphasized in Althusser's theory of the subjectification of the individual. The primary objective is to unravel the character of Stevens, examining his internal conflicts, specifically his unwavering dedication to his role as a butler and the suppression of personal emotions. Drawing inspiration from Althusser's concepts, including subjectification, ideology, and false consciousness, the study seeks to shed light on the intricate relationship between societal ideologies and individual subjectivity.

Kazuo Ishiguro, the acclaimed British novelist, screenwriter, and musician, serves as the author of *The Remains of the Day*. Born in Nagasaki, Japan (1954), Ishiguro moved to Britain at a young age. His varied background and experiences contribute to the nuanced exploration of identity and societal expectations within his works. Ishiguro's unique perspective and literary craftsmanship become integral to understanding the intricacies of character dynamics and thematic elements within *The Remains of the Day*.

*The Remains of the Day* revolves around Stevens, a butler, and his unwavering dedication to his role, a dedication that shields him from confronting personal emotions and the changing world around him. The novel, with its exploration of duty, regret, and the passage of time, aligns with the title, suggesting the remnants of a bygone era and the lasting impact of choices made. The narrative intricately weaves through Stevens' memories and experiences, providing a poignant portrayal of individual struggles within a larger societal context.

Louis Althusser (1918-1990), a French Marxist philosopher, provides the theoretical foundation for this analysis. His post-Marxist theories, including concepts like subjectification and ideology, offer a framework to understand the ways in which societal structures shape individual identities. Althusser's insights into the ideological apparatuses influencing human behavior and consciousness become instrumental in unpacking the complexities within Ishiguro's novel.

In this article, Kazuo Ishiguro's novel, *The Remains of the Day*, will be meticulously examined through the theoretical lens of Louis Althusser's post-Marxist concepts. The study aims to unravel the intricacies of individual subjectivity, shedding light on how societal ideologies, as articulated by Althusser, shape and influence the character of Stevens, the central figure in the novel. This unique perspective holds profound significance as it provides readers with a

deeper understanding of the impact of ideological structures on personal identity and the complexities involved in subjectification.

By employing Althusser's post-Marxist theories, this research endeavors to elucidate how Stevens navigates his role as a butler, grapples with false consciousness, and adheres unwaveringly to societal norms. The application of Althusser's theoretical framework offers readers an opportunity to gain nuanced insights into the character's struggles and the transformative potential of critical awareness. The study explores how ideological structures intersect with personal identity, prompting readers to reflect on their own experiences within societal frameworks.

Overall, the significance of this study lies in its contribution to post-Marxist perspectives and its potential to enlighten readers about the subtleties of subjectification, false consciousness, and the negotiation of individual identity within the framework of societal ideologies. Through this Althusserian reading of *The Remains of the Day*, readers can develop a heightened awareness of the socio-political conditions that shape human existence and engage in critical reflections on the constraints and possibilities of individual subjectivity.

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### Literature Review

Many critics and thinkers have analyzed Ishiguro's novels and his writings. In her article, "Tradition and the Individualist Survivor,"

Yvonne Iversen delves into the theme of isolation as a fundamental element in works of tragedy, focusing primarily on Kazuo Ishiguro's novel, *The Remains of the Day*. This can be shown in one of the occasions where Stevens' master asks him to leave the house for a while and not to be locked up in the house all day. He wants him to drive off somewhere for a few days. Iversen argues that the individual characters' inability to respond to social changes leads to their isolation, serving as the central problem explored in the tragic mode (Iversen 45). To enrich her analysis and provide a comparative perspective, Iversen includes Simon Gray's play 'Quartermaine's Terms.' Through this inclusion, she aims to pinpoint both similarities and differences between the two works. The protagonist, Mr. Stevens, is a key figure in Iversen's examination, particularly in relation to Quartermaine. The analysis extends to characters, plots, settings, and narrative modes in both works, emphasizing how isolation becomes the catalyst for their downfall and the ensuing tragedy. In addition to the literary analysis, Iversen incorporates background information about Kazuo Ishiguro to provide a comprehensive understanding of *The Remains of the Day*.

In Stefanie Grill's article, 'About: Kazuo Ishiguro: *The Remains of the Day*,' she provides a comprehensive overview of Ishiguro's acclaimed novel, offering insights into its background, themes, and narrative structure. Grill emphasizes Ishiguro's unique perspective, shaped by his

Japanese heritage and English upbringing, portraying him as a distinguished British writer known for exploring themes of self-deception, truth, and the interplay between public and private images of characters (Grill 9).

In Philip Whyte's article, "The Treatment of Background in Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*: *The Remains of the Day*" the author delves into the intricacies of Ishiguro's novel, emphasizing the significant role that shared frames of reference play in constructing meaning within the text. Whyte posits that the novel, particularly in the case of *The Remains of the Day*, relies heavily on the writer's adept use of common frames of reference to establish a credible world that extends beyond the written page.

Focusing on the considerable gap between the implied reader's perception of the "real" world and the misguided vision of reality held by the protagonist, Mr. Stevens, the butler, Whyte explores how Ishiguro employs historical references to create an illusion of reality. The article sheds light on the post-war period's assault on "grand narratives," revealing how Ishiguro strategically uses literary realism to unravel the anachronistic worldview of Stevens (78). Simultaneously, Ishiguro places the novel within the realm of postmodernism, demonstrating a nuanced approach to narrative conventions.

This source is crucial for my literature review, as it provides insights into Ishiguro's deliberate use of historical references and realism,

offering a foundation for understanding the novel's treatment of background and its alignment with postmodernist frameworks. In Shikha Agarwal's article, "Thematic Concerns in *The Remains of the Day* by Kazuo Ishiguro," the focus is on delving into the prominent themes of Kazuo Ishiguro's acclaimed novel. As a recipient of the Man Booker Prize, Ishiguro's work has left a lasting impact on literature. The primary themes explored in the paper include loyalty, dignity, professionalism, and regret, with a central emphasis on the life of the protagonist, Stevens, who dedicates himself to the role of a butler at Darlington Hall to Mr. Faraday (Agarwal 4). The narrative highlights Stevens' unwavering commitment to his duties, showcasing the dignity and professionalism integral to his character. Agarwal's analysis extends to uncovering the reasons why *The Remains of the Day* merits widespread readership.

Liu Tingxuan in "Ambivalence of Cosmopolitanism: A Study of Kazuo Ishiguro's Writing" states that in *The Remains of the Day*, Ishiguro deconstructs Britain after World War I, using the symbols of traditional British culture such as "housekeeper" and manor to express the traumatic feeling of British people after World War II, the change of European pattern, the split Empire and the loss of cultural authority. Ishiguro runs through the whole process to redefine Britishness and dispel the central narrative from the perspective of a non-intrusive spectator, without any critical color. *In Never Let Me Go*,

Ishiguro speaks for the “marginal” group, paying attention to the survival and creation desire of minority groups, and puts forward ethical issues and emotional demands closely related to cultural differences and social discrimination -- acceptance and exclusion as well as dignity and humiliation. Through returning to individual narration, Ishiguro expresses his appeal across the nation and community (Tingxuan 614).

Silvia Chiarle in *The Butler Who Married His Lordship: Feminine Identity in Kazuo Ishiguro's The Remains of the Day* asserts that Stevens's devotion to his job, and to his lord, is only a superficial expression of his involvement in the public world, and that it is Stevens who, above all, represents the feminine principle at Darlington Hall, serving to create that ‘domestic comfort’ which Terentowicz-Fotyga claims to be absent in the house and, in doing so, epitomising Ruskin's definition of the ideal wife: he stated that she must be instinctively, infallibly wise – wise, not for self-development, but for self-renunciation: wise, not that she may set herself above her husband, but that she may never fail from his side: wise, not with the narrowness of insolent and loveless pride, but with the passionate gentleness of an infinitely variable, because infinitely applicable, modesty of service (Chiarle 8).

Susie O'Brien in "Serving a New World Order: Postcolonial Politics in Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*" argues that in *The Remains of the Day*, we can take a look at it in two

ways: first, as a narrative which is thematically constructed around an opposition between what are commonly regarded as Victorian values—formality, repression, and self-effacement, summed up under the general heading of “dignity”—and those associated with an idea of “America” that has expanded, literally into a New World—freedom, nature, and individualism—and second, as a text which has come to occupy a significant place in global popular culture, not just as source material for Merchant Ivory, but, more significantly as an exemplary product of a burgeoning “world” fiction industry (O'Brien 790).

### Theoretical Framework

In exploring the subjectification of the individual in Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* within the framework of Louis Althusser's post-Marxist criticism, this article adopts a methodological lens grounded in Althusser's theoretical framework. Key terms such as 'false consciousness,' 'ideology,' 'interpellation in character,' 'repression and ideological structures,' and 'subjectification' form the crux of the analytical approach. Drawing inspiration from Althusser's work, the article aims to unravel the complex dynamics through which characters become subjects within ideological systems, elucidating the impact of power structures on their internalization of specific norms.

In *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, Althusser offers a nuanced definition of false consciousness, highlighting its role in shaping individuals' understanding of their social and economic conditions. According to Althusser in *Lenin and Philosophy*, this phenomenon emerges when individuals perceive their interests as aligned with the ruling class, even when those interests run counter to their actual circumstances (Althusser 24). The concept becomes a crucial lens through which the researcher examines the phenomenon of false consciousness, as elucidated by Althusser, shedding light on the distortions in individuals' perceptions of their social and economic conditions.

Based on Allman in *On Marx*, Marx's theory of consciousness presents a dialectical unity of human thought and practice; it is a theory of praxis. According to Marx, K. & Engels, F in *The German Ideology*, thinking and action, consciousness and human active experience cannot separate. The theory also proposes that, people's experience within the social relations in which they engage to produce their material world is the greatest sensuous activity that has an impact on consciousness, (their experience within historically specific social relations of production, relations that determine what they produce and how they produce) (Allman 37).

Based on his reading of Marx in *Reading Capital*, maintained that individuals occupy definite and limited social roles within the system

of production and social relation which determine the way individuals act and behave within a society. As a result, the individual is locked up within a system with definite roles which leaves no room for the free play of his faculties. In *Reading Capital*, Althusser confirmed the passive function of individuals throughout history:

The structure of the relations of production determines the places and functions occupied and adopted by the agents of production, who are never anything more than the occupants of these places, insofar as they are the 'supports' of these functions. The true 'subjects' (in the sense of constitutive subjects of the process) are therefore not these occupants or functionaries, are not, despite all appearance, the 'obviousness' of the 'given' of naive anthropology, 'concrete individuals' 'real men'- but the definition and distribution of these places and functions. The true 'subjects' are these definers and distributors: the relations of production (and political and ideological social relations). (Althusser 180)

Althusser's fifth contribution to the theory of ideology is his concept of interpellation. As Althusser in *Lenin and Philosophy* states "ideology interpellates individuals as subjects", and he also argues that "ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects" (173). Freeden says that the concrete

individual subjects are functioning to serve as carriers of ideology. For such a purpose, the very notion of ideology itself rests on the ideological concept of the subject, in the way individuals are constituted by ideology as carriers of consciousness, will, and agency (Althusser 172).

In discussing the role of ideology in shaping individuals as subjects, it is essential to understand the nuanced dynamics involved. Researcher's perspective aligns with Rehmann's argument in *Theories of Ideology: The Powers of Alienation and Subjection*, where he emphasizes the multifaceted nature of subject formation within ideological frameworks. According to Rehmann, ideology plays a pivotal role in establishing concrete individuals as subjects, a process that involves both subjection to superior authority and the manifestation of self-confidence and autonomy (Rehmann 301-303).

In the same account, Althusser continues in *Lenin and Philosophy and other Essays* that individual is interpellated and thus he or she becomes a subject, and then he or she enters ideology. Althusser says that "individuals are always-already subjects" (Althusser 175). It means people are born into subject-hood since they are named before they are born; henceforth they are always-already subjects. The individual does not have the opportunity to select his name and identity. Before its birth, the child is then an always-already subject, chosen as a subject in the definite familial ideological formation. Thus,

Althusser once again entreats Lacan's ideas, definitely Lacan's understanding of the 'Name-of-the-Father'.

Subjectification, within Althusser's framework, refers to the process through which individuals become subjects within the ideological apparatus. As a case in point, Stevens does not take Mr. Farraday's suggestion seriously to take a tour around the country though it was an increasing hold in her thoughts. He wondered whether to hide it or not. It involves the internalization of prevailing norms, values, and social roles, shaping an individual's identity and understanding of their place in society. Althusser's conceptualization underscores the active role ideology plays in constituting individuals as subjects, influencing their thoughts, behaviors, and self-perceptions. Althusser in "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" almost admits this himself when he states:

The true subjects (in the sense of the constitutive subjects of the process) are therefore not these occupants and functionaries, are not . . . "concrete individuals", "real men"-but the definition and distribution of these places and functions. The true "subjects" are these definers and distributors: the relations of production (and political and ideological social relations). (Althusser 180)

Althusser in *Reading Capital* introduces a concept of subject that challenges the Cartesian notion,

emphasizing a symbolic dimension. Individuals, interpellated by ideology, act according to the identification found in existing discourses, becoming discursive subjects. The Subject, exemplified in religion, structures the interpellation of individuals, subjecting them to universal recognition. Ideology appears as if it has taken distance, hiding its operation from most subjects (Althusser 113). This collective dimension of subjectivity highlights the broader societal implications of ideological interpellation, revealing how ideologies function not only at the individual level but also at the level of social institutions and cultural practices.

Drawing from Althusser's work in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, this phenomenon emerges when individuals perceive their interests as aligned with the ruling class, even when those interests run counter to their actual circumstances (Althusser 24). The study delves into his nuanced definition of false consciousness, emphasizing its influence on individuals' comprehension of their social and economic contexts. Althusser posits in *Lenin and Philosophy* that false consciousness arises when individuals perceive their interests to be congruent with those of the ruling class, even when such alignment contradicts their actual circumstances. This theoretical framework serves as a critical tool for analyzing false consciousness within Ishiguro's narrative, illuminating the characters' motivations

and behaviors through the lens of distorted perceptions.

### Practical Reading and Discussion

Terry Eagleton's work on ideology offers a deep understanding of how individuals internalize and perpetuate the interests of the ruling class, often against their own best interests. In *Ideology: An Introduction*, Eagleton discusses the pervasive nature of ideology and its capacity to create false consciousness. Eagleton notes, "Ideology, then, is not just about ideas, but about material practice, about the ways in which human beings live out their relationships to their conditions of existence" (Eagleton 28). This perspective aligns with how Stevens internalizes his role as a butler, living out the ideological expectations placed upon him, thereby perpetuating his own subordination within the class structure.

In Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*, the character of Stevens grapples with false consciousness, wherein his perception of reality is influenced by ideological structures that obscure his true interests and perpetuate systems of domination. Through an Althusserian lens, one can dissect Stevens's worldview and uncover the mirage of perception that clouds his understanding of himself and the world around him. One of the central quotes from the novel that exemplifies Stevens's false consciousness is when he reflects "What is the point of worrying oneself too much about what one could or could not have done to

control the course one's life took? Surely it is enough that the likes of you and I at least try to make our small contribution count for something true and worthy'' (Ishiguro 177).

Furthermore, Stevens's adherence to the notion that "the evening's the best part of the day'' (Ishiguro 177) reflects a false consciousness that valorizes servitude and self-sacrifice. Althusser would contend that Stevens's perception of fulfillment in serving his employer is a result of ideological conditioning, wherein the ruling ideology reinforces the idea that one's worth is derived from obedience and loyalty to authority figures.

Raymond Williams' theory of cultural materialism, as discussed in *Marxism and Literature*, provides insights into how cultural and ideological forces shape individuals' perceptions and behaviors. Williams' concept of "structures of feeling" explains how deeply ingrained cultural practices and beliefs form individuals' realities and contribute to false consciousness. Williams argues, "Culture is one of the principal means of hegemonic control. It forms the conditions of lived experience which make it possible for individuals to accept their social roles" (Williams 110). Stevens' acceptance of his subservient role as a butler can be seen as a manifestation of these cultural and ideological structures, which align with Althusser's notion of false consciousness.

Fredric Jameson, in *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic*

*Act*, explores how literary texts encode ideological contradictions and unconscious desires. He argues that literature reveals the underlying ideological structures of society through narrative form and content. Jameson contends, "Every narrative is implicitly or explicitly allegorical; it is to be read as the narrative of a specific and particular ideology" (Jameson 17). This supports Althusser's notion of interpellation by suggesting that characters' actions and beliefs in literature are shaped by the dominant ideological formations of their social context.

Similarly, this quote from Mr. Farraday, Stevens's new American employer: "I can't even say I made my own mistakes. Really - one has to ask oneself - what dignity is there in that?" (Ishiguro 176) underscores the character's sense of powerlessness in the face of societal expectations and norms. Althusser would argue that individuals like Stevens are positioned within a structure of power and ideology that constrains their autonomy, making it difficult for them to assert agency or take responsibility for their actions independently.

Analyzing ideology's impact on character agency in Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* reveals how deeply Stevens is influenced by the ideological structures that define his role as a butler. This impact is vividly illustrated in Stevens' reflections on loyalty and service. When he states, "However, if a butler is to be worth to anything or anybody in life, there must surely come a time

when he ceases his searching; a time when he must say to himself: 'This employer embodies all that I find noble and admirable. I will hereafter devote myself to serving him.' This is loyalty intelligently bestowed" (Ishiguro 201), Stevens encapsulates a philosophy of life that is profoundly shaped by his ideological conditioning.

Moreover, Stevens' reflections on loyalty and service underscore the dangers inherent in such a worldview. His words suggest that he not only accepts but also endorses the notion of making oneself subservient to another, thus perpetuating a cycle of oppression and diminishing the possibility for personal agency and social mobility. This ideology, ingrained in Stevens through years of social conditioning, reveals the insidious nature of ideological control and its capacity to shape individual identities and behaviors to maintain societal hierarchies.

In simpler terms, 'ideology' and 'subject' are inherently linked. An example provided by Freeden illustrates the case of an individual who desires marriage and a fulfilling, well-paid career; he prioritizes his personal life goals and others acknowledge his right to do so. In such a scenario, the individual is shaped by an ideology that leads him to perceive himself as a free agent whose success lies in a committed relationship with a chosen 'spouse'. He engages in a profitable endeavor that ensures the ability to purchase the labor and products of others.

The quote from Lord Darlington, "What is more, sir," his lordship went on, "I believe I have a good idea of what you mean by 'professionalism.' It appears to mean getting one's way by cheating and manipulating..." (Ishiguro 77), illustrates the internal conflict experienced by Stevens, the protagonist. Althusser's theory suggests that Stevens' perception of professionalism is constructed by the prevailing ideology of servitude and loyalty ingrained within him as a butler. His rejection of the notion of professionalism as deceitful reflects his adherence to the ideological norms of duty and integrity, which dictate his actions and shape his identity. Similarly, the quote:

"Naturally—and why should I not admit this—I have occasionally wondered to myself how things might have turned out in the long run.... I only speculate this now because in the light of subsequent events, it could well be argued that in making my decision...I was perhaps not entirely aware of the full implications of what I was doing. Indeed, it might even be said that this small decision of mine constituted something of a key turning point; that that decision set things on an inevitable course towards what eventually happened (Althusser 180).

But then, I suppose, when with the benefit of hindsight one begins to search one's past for such 'turning points', one is apt to start seeing

them everywhere.... What would have transpired, one may ask, had one responded slightly differently...? And perhaps—occurring as it did around the same time as these events?" (Ishiguro 127)

Althusser's theory of interpellation suggests that Stevens' caution reflects his deep-seated adherence to the ideological norms of decorum and propriety that define his role and identity as a butler. This internalization dictates his interactions, emphasizing the pervasive influence of ideology on his behavior and communication. Stevens' fear of misspeaking reveals his understanding of the social hierarchy and the potential repercussions of overstepping boundaries. This ideological construct ensures that he remains within the confines of his role, highlighting how deeply ingrained societal expectations shape and limit his actions and expressions. Stevens' meticulous consideration of his speech underscores the broader theme of repression in the novel, where maintaining social decorum often comes at the expense of authentic self-expression.

Slavoj Žižek, a prominent philosopher and cultural critic, extensively employs Althusser's notion of interpellation in his critique of ideology. In *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, Žižek discusses how ideology structures reality for individuals, making it seem natural and self-evident. He argues that individuals are interpellated into ideological frameworks that

determine their desires, beliefs, and actions. Žižek notes, "ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence," which aligns with Althusser's idea of individuals being constituted as subjects by ideology (Žižek 30).

In the novel, Stevens' struggle with witticisms further underscores the impact of ideology on his interpersonal interactions. He remarks, "By the very nature of a witticism, one is given very little time to assess its various possible repercussions before one is called to give voice to it" (Ishiguro 96). This statement illuminates Stevens' self-censorship and the pressure to conform to his role as a butler, where spontaneity and personal expression are discouraged. The quotation illustrates how ideological interpellation stifles individuality, compelling Stevens to prioritize decorum and professionalism over authentic self-expression. During his journey of self-discovery, Stevens contemplates, "As I say, I have never in all these years thought of the matter in quite this way" (Ishiguro 86).

The villager states, "You've got to enjoy yourself. The evening's the best part of the day... Ask anybody, they'll all tell you. The evening's the best part of the day" (Ishiguro 177). This quotation highlights the disparity between Stevens' structured life and the villagers' simple enjoyment of leisure. The villager's viewpoint challenges Stevens' ideological interpellation, suggesting that there are alternative ways of living

and finding fulfillment beyond strict adherence to duty and professionalism. Moreover, Stevens' reflection on his past decisions reveals a sense of regret and missed opportunities.

He remarks, "Indeed, it might even be said that this small decision of mine constituted something of a key turning point... that decision set things on an inevitable course towards what eventually happened" (Ishiguro 127). This quotation underscores Stevens' realization of how ideology has influenced the trajectory of his life. His acknowledgment of missed opportunities reflects the consequences of ideological interpellation, as it prevented him from fully exploring alternative paths or questioning the values he upheld. Stevens' ultimate realization comes when he confronts the stark reality of his own interpellation.

Stevens' struggle to overcome his losses and establish a coherent identity is encapsulated in his desperate search for an anchor, which he seeks through revisiting his memories. The journey he undertakes across England symbolizes his internal journey to make sense of his life. He expresses the existential threat of this journey, feeling that he is "speeding off...into wilderness" and looking in the "thick foliage" (Ishiguro 24) for clarity. This imagery reflects his sense of disorientation and the daunting prospect of having lived a life without purpose or significance.

Throughout his journey, Stevens retraces his past, attempting to reconcile his fragmented

identity by aspiring to the ideal of a 'great butler'. However, his reflection is marked by a continual tension between acknowledging the truth of his past decisions and negating them. He admits, "One begins to search one's past for such 'turning points', one is apt to start seeing them everywhere" (Ishiguro 175), highlighting his struggle to pinpoint decisive moments that defined his life. This retrospective search is a manifestation of his attempt to justify and explain his past decisions from a detached perspective, aiming to construct a coherent narrative that aligns with his self-image.

Despite his efforts, Stevens finds it futile to rework the lies that shaped his life. Miss Kenton's revelations about her fulfilling life with her family starkly contrast with Stevens' empty existence, leaving him with the bleak realization that his only solace is in "work, work, and more work" (Ishiguro 249). This comparison underscores the depth of Stevens' alienation and the fragmentation of his identity, as he recognizes that his dedication to duty has deprived him of personal fulfillment.

Ultimately, Stevens reaches a point of resignation, acknowledging the futility of his attempts to attain the identity and meaning he sought. He reflects, "what is the point worrying oneself too much about what one could do or could not have done to control the course one's life took?" (Ishiguro 257). This epiphany marks a shift in his perspective, as he begins to accept the reality of his fragmented identity and focuses on "what

remains of my day" (Ishiguro 256). This acceptance indicates a tentative move towards finding new meaning and hope for the future, despite the irrevocable loss of his past.

This additional facet, termed by Althusser in *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* as 'The Ideological State Apparatuses' (ISAs), serves a different function. According to Althusser's "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," ISAs manifest as distinct and specialized institutions visible to the immediate observer, including the religious ISA (comprising various churches), the educational ISA (comprising public and private schools), the family ISA, the legal ISA, the political ISA (encompassing political systems and parties), and the cultural ISA (encompassing literature, arts, sports, etc.) (Althusser 202). Unlike the singular Repressive State Apparatus, ISAs exist in a plurality, each contributing to the overall function of ideological control. Their diverse nature means that while the Repressive State Apparatus operates through overt mechanisms of coercion, ISAs exert influence through subtle, pervasive means that are not immediately apparent.

Terry Eagleton, a notable literary theorist and critic, aligns with Althusser's concept of the Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) in his work *Ideology: An Introduction*. Eagleton discusses how various cultural institutions, such as literature and education, function as ISAs by shaping individuals' perceptions and beliefs. He argues that

"ideology is a matter of 'discourse' rather than a set of ideas, and as such it is inscribed in the practices of everyday life" (Eagleton 19). This reflects Althusser's notion that ISAs subtly influence individuals through everyday institutions and practices, reinforcing dominant ideologies.

In *The Remains of the Day*, Kazuo Ishiguro delves deeply into the theme of repression and its profound effects on character agency and expression. The protagonist, Stevens, epitomizes the restrained demeanor of a dedicated butler whose life is shaped by a staunch adherence to duty and professionalism. His internal monologue reflects a relentless commitment to upholding the standards of his profession, even at the expense of personal desires: "Indeed — why should I not admit it? — at that moment, my heart was breaking" (Ishiguro 173). This quote encapsulates Stevens' inner turmoil, revealing the emotional repression he endures in service of his professional facade.

Stevens' unwavering loyalty to Lord Darlington and his staunch adherence to protocol illustrate the ways in which repression limits his agency and authentic self-expression. His unquestioning obedience to authority and his reluctance to challenge the decisions of his employer highlight the extent to which repression governs his actions: "Certainly, when one works for someone for as long as I have worked for him, one does not expect to discover suddenly that one

has been mistaken all along about that person's essential nature" (Ishiguro 91). This passage underscores Stevens' blind devotion and the repression of critical thinking and self-reflection, which inhibit his ability to assert independent judgment and agency. Stevens never feels true happiness in his life. He is caught by Miss Kenton reading a sentimental novel. He is trembling with fear, to which she reacts by stating it is no scandalous act. He attributes that to the development of the English language rather than his true feelings about such love stories. He never knows what happiness is. He just wants to be a better servant.

The theme of repression is further illuminated through Stevens' relationship with Miss Kenton, the housekeeper at Darlington Hall. Despite their mutual fondness and shared experiences, Stevens maintains emotional distance and suppresses his feelings, adhering strictly to professional boundaries: "For all I know, she could be planning to come back here at this very moment to rejoin me and serve under me" (Ishiguro 90). This quote reflects Stevens' reluctance to acknowledge his personal desires, opting instead to maintain the status quo and preserve the hierarchical structure that defines his identity.

Stevens' journey to discover the true meaning of "dignity" during his road trip serves as a catalyst for self-exploration and a gradual unraveling of his repressed emotions. As he

reflects on his past choices and the significance of his life's work, Stevens confronts the consequences of his relentless pursuit of professionalism and the sacrifices he has made along the way: "But then, once I can consider the matter in the proper perspective, as I did earlier this evening, I realize there is no cause for such exasperation" (Ishiguro 150). This passage illustrates Stevens' evolving understanding of dignity and the gradual unraveling of his repressed emotions as he contemplates the purpose and value of his life's work.

The culmination of Stevens' journey underscores the tragic consequences of repression on personal fulfillment and authentic self-expression. As he encounters ordinary people during his travels and reflects on their capacity for emotional openness and spontaneity, Stevens begins to question the validity of his own rigid adherence to professionalism: "But now that I think back, I am pleased I did allow myself to take that small journey into the English countryside all those years ago" (Ishiguro 213). This quote symbolizes Stevens' acknowledgment of missed opportunities and the realization that emotional repression has deprived him of meaningful connections and genuine self-discovery.

Michel Foucault's work on power and knowledge, particularly in *Discipline and Punish*, aligns with Althusser's ideas on the Repressive and Ideological State Apparatuses. Foucault explores how power is exercised through

institutions and practices, similar to Althusser's ISAs. He states, "Power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society" (Foucault 93). This idea complements Althusser's assertion that ISAs operate through complex and subtle mechanisms to maintain ideological control.

In the novel, Stevens' struggle with witticisms further underscores the impact of ideology on his interpersonal interactions. He remarks, "By the very nature of a witticism, one is given very little time to assess its various possible repercussions before one is called to give voice to it" (Ishiguro 96). This statement illuminates Stevens' self-censorship and the pressure to conform to his role as a butler, where spontaneity and personal expression are discouraged. The quotation illustrates how ideological interpellation stifles individuality, compelling Stevens to prioritize decorum and professionalism over authentic self-expression. During his journey of self-discovery, Stevens contemplates, "As I say, I have never in all these years thought of the matter in quite this way" (Ishiguro 86).

Terry Eagleton, a notable literary theorist and critic, aligns with Althusser's concept of the Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) in his work *Ideology: An Introduction*. Eagleton discusses how various cultural institutions, such as literature and education, function as ISAs by shaping

individuals' perceptions and beliefs. He argues that "ideology is a matter of 'discourse' rather than a set of ideas, and as such it is inscribed in the practices of everyday life" (Eagleton 19). This reflects Althusser's notion that ISAs subtly influence individuals through everyday institutions and practices, reinforcing dominant ideologies.

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In analyzing the impact of repression on character agency and expression in Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*, it is essential to consider the perspectives of both Louis Althusser and E.P. Thompson. Althusser's theory posits that repression is a fundamental mechanism through which ideology operates to maintain the capitalist mode of production. This repression is enacted not just through overt state apparatuses

but also through subtle ideological means, shaping individuals' consciousness and societal norms. According to Althusser, ideology works to interpellate individuals into specific roles and identities, thereby limiting their agency and expression by aligning their interests with the dominant class (Althusser 127).

Contrastingly, E.P. Thompson in *The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays* offers a critique of Althusser's deterministic view of repression and ideology. Thompson argues that Althusser's structuralist approach abstracts human agency and historical context, reducing individuals to mere products of ideological apparatuses. Thompson emphasizes the importance of human agency and the potential for resistance against oppressive structures. He contends that individuals and social movements have the capacity to challenge and transform dominant ideologies, suggesting a more dynamic interplay between repression and agency (Thompson 320).

According to this quote, "It is sometimes said that butlers only truly exist in England" (Ishiguro 32), the opening line of the novel immediately establishes Stevens' identity as an archetype of the English butler. This statement introduces the theme of professional identity and national pride, framing Stevens' narrative within the cultural context of English tradition and societal expectations. By suggesting that butlers are uniquely English, Ishiguro sets the stage for an

exploration of duty and repression within a specific cultural framework.

Using Althusser's theory of ideology and interpellation, we can understand how Stevens, the protagonist in *The Remains of the Day*, internalizes and reinforces the class structure through his unwavering dedication to his social and professional role. This ideological framework shapes his identity and actions, often at the expense of his personal agency and emotional expression. Stevens' adherence to his role as a butler exemplifies Althusser's concept of interpellation, where individuals are "hailed" into specific social positions by ideological state apparatuses. In Stevens' case, the hierarchical class system functions as such an apparatus, shaping his beliefs and behaviors. Stevens' statement:

The fact is, such great affairs will always be beyond the understanding of those such as you and I, and those of us who wish to make our mark must realize that we best do so by concentrating on what is within our realm; that is to say, by devoting our attention to providing the best possible service to those great gentlemen in whose hands the destiny of civilization truly lies (Ishiguro 199).

underscores his acceptance of his subordinate position. He believes that his contribution to society can only be realized through perfect service to his social superiors. This belief aligns

with Althusser's idea that ideology operates by promoting specific roles and functions within society, which individuals then accept as their own. By fully internalizing his role within the social hierarchy, Stevens perpetuates the system that places him and others in subordinate positions. Stevens further reinforces this ideology by stating:

However, if a butler is to be worth to anything or anybody in life, there must surely come a time when he ceases his searching; a time when he must say to himself: 'This employer embodies all that I find noble and admirable. I will hereafter devote myself to serving him.' This is loyalty intelligently bestowed (Ishiguro 201).

Slavoj Žižek offers a nuanced understanding of ideology that complements Althusser's theory. In *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, Žižek discusses how ideology is embedded in the very practices and beliefs that constitute everyday reality. This aligns with how Stevens internalizes the class system, seeing his role not just as a job but as a defining aspect of his identity. Žižek writes, "Ideology is not simply imposed on ourselves; ideology is our spontaneous relationship to our social world" (Žižek 33). Stevens' unquestioning acceptance of his role as a butler exemplifies this, as his identity and sense of purpose are deeply intertwined with the ideological structures he serves.

The detrimental impact of Stevens' ideological adherence is also evident in his interactions with Lord Darlington and Mr. Spencer. He allows himself to appear "unintelligent and uninformed about political and cultural affairs," reinforcing their low opinion of the lower classes and justifying the hierarchical order (Ishiguro 448). This choice, while ostensibly a form of subservience, actually represents a deeper ideological entrapment where Stevens has been conditioned to believe in and perpetuate his own inferiority. His decision to reinforce Darlington's and Spencer's views highlights how ideology functions to maintain the power dynamics within the class system.

In *The Remains of the Day*, Stevens' conduct and identity are shaped not just by the ideological interpellation described by Althusser, but also by the material and bodily practices emphasized by Foucault. Stevens' meticulous adherence to the rituals and physical tasks of his role as a butler exemplifies how power operates on both the ideological and material levels. His repression of personal desires and emotions aligns with Foucault's view that power governs bodies and behaviors, not just ideas. This dual analysis reveals how Stevens' loyalty and professionalism are produced by a complex interplay of ideological and material forces, underscoring the multifaceted nature of power in shaping individual subjectivities.

## Conclusion

In Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*, a profound exploration of subjectification unfolds through the lens of Louis Althusser's post-Marxist criticism. By closely examining key concepts such as false consciousness, ideology, interpellation, repression, and subjectification, the novel's intricate tapestry reveals the pervasive influence of ideological structures on the characters' lives and identities.

Stevens' unwavering dedication to his role as a butler exemplifies the process of subjectification as outlined by Althusser. His identity is deeply entwined with his professional duties and societal expectations, reflecting how individuals internalize and enact norms imposed by ideological structures. Stevens' total identification with his role highlights Althusser's idea that individuals become subjects by internalizing dominant ideologies, which, in Stevens' case, involve an unyielding commitment to service and duty at the expense of personal autonomy and emotional expression. This unwavering dedication showcases how ideological structures mold individual subjectivities to align with the interests of the dominant class, reinforcing existing power dynamics.

Interpellation, another key Althusserian concept, is vividly illustrated through Stevens' character. He is constantly hailed by the societal

and professional norms defining the ideal butler, and he responds by internalizing and performing these attributes, such as loyalty, emotional restraint, and meticulous duty. This process of interpellation constructs Stevens' identity, as he derives his sense of self and purpose entirely from his professional role. The novel demonstrates that Stevens' identity is not inherent but is constructed through ideological apparatuses dictating what it means to be a 'good butler,' thereby highlighting the pervasive influence of ideology on personal identity.

Stevens' loyalty to Lord Darlington further elucidates Althusser's concepts of ideology and false consciousness. His misplaced loyalty exemplifies false consciousness, as Stevens aligns himself with the values and interests of the ruling class, preventing him from critically evaluating his own position and actions. This loyalty highlights how dominant ideologies perpetuate power structures by instilling a sense of duty that overrides personal judgment. Stevens' adherence to Lord Darlington's ideologies, despite their detrimental impact, underscores Althusser's argument that ideology sustains the power of the dominant class by shaping individual consciousness and loyalty.

The novel reveals the implications of subjectification on personal agency and self-awareness, reflecting Althusser's ideas about individuals' relationship to ideological structures. Stevens' subjectification leads to a significant

erosion of his personal agency, as his actions and decisions are dictated by ideological norms rather than his own desires or moral judgments. This lack of agency, compounded by limited self-awareness, shows how deeply his identity and actions are shaped by ideological structures. The novel illustrates that subjectification through ideology obscures individuals' true interests and desires, leading to a life more reflective of societal expectations than personal volition.

Moreover, Stevens' repression of personal emotions and desires aligns closely with Althusser's notion of the subject's relationship to ideology. This repression, dictated by the ideological demands of his profession, stunts his emotional growth and prevents meaningful personal relationships. The novel demonstrates how strict adherence to ideological norms results in a life characterized by regret and unfulfilled potential, underscoring the cost of living under repressive ideological frameworks.

Overall, the findings highlight the intricate interplay between individual agency and ideological forces, providing a richer understanding of the novel's thematic concerns and its portrayal of human experience. By engaging critically with Althusser's theoretical insights, this analysis underscores the nuanced complexities of identity, power, and resistance within Ishiguro's masterful work.

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