

## The Consequences of Unfulfilled Desire in Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*: Lacan Psychoanalysis Study

Maulana Aden Saladin<sup>1</sup>, Zuhurul Anam<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Universitas Negeri Semarang, Indonesia

\*Correspondence: [adensaladin@gmail.com](mailto:adensaladin@gmail.com)

### ABSTRACT

*Desire often produces psychological conflict and identity crisis, especially when an individual's sense of self depends on social ideals and hierarchical authority. Using Lacanian psychoanalytic register theory, this study examines the consequences of the unfulfilled desire of Stevens, the main character in *The Remains of the Day* by Kazuo Ishiguro. The study explores how Stevens' desire is constructed through Imaginary identification with ideal figures such as his father, and structured within the Symbolic order of professionalism, dignity, and loyalty to Lord Darlington. This study analyses key narrative events, dialogues, and character reflections using a qualitative descriptive method and content analysis to reveal how Stevens' identity is formed and sustained by external authority. The findings demonstrate that Stevens' desire is shaped not by personal fulfilment but by external ideals that structure his Symbolic identity and behaviour. Regret then emerges as a consequence of the collapse of the Symbolic framework. Lacanian theory can conceptualize this moment as the gap between Stevens' ideal and his actual life.*

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### 1. Introduction

Greatness has become a major theme in literature for a long time. Within the generation, greatness has different forms regarding the desires of the character in the narratives. Jockers and Mimno (2013) stated that greatness has various shape, such as heroic bravery, moral integrity, intellectual superiority, or social power in society. Greatness itself is shaped through the combination of personal desires, which are guided by their ethical choices (Beesley, 2023). However, the narratives show greatness which do not always end in success or fulfillment. On the contrary, many works question the possibility of achieving greatness itself, revealing its fragility, ambiguity, or even its illusory nature (Foster, 2025; Weda et al., 2022; Sugiyartati et al., 2020). Postmodern literature such as *The Great Gatsby* then became widely introduced greatness as fragile and unstable, where obsession, or desire was shaped by incompleteness rather than fulfillment (Fischer & Mileur, 1992; Weinstein, 1985; Zurbrugg, 1988; Jumriati et al., 2021). In contrast, a lot of literature has shown that greatness is not always fulfilled, meaning that greatness becomes unstable and more problematic due to external expectations and internal desires (Bartnik, 2021; Herold, 1995; Rahman et al., 2019). Failure in the pursuit of greatness then comes as a form of regret, disappointment, or existential crisis (Beesley, 2023). Therefore, literature does not always illustrate greatness as a perfect goal, but it shows the consequences of pursuing an unattainable desire.

In Victorian society, greatness was shaped as a rule of conduct through manners, which defined as a gentleman. Rather than being understood as self-moral, greatness is evaluated through moral and social responsibility. According to Kaufman (2013), greatness is defined as a socially constructed and culturally mediated phenomenon that is shaped by expectations rather than just an innate talent. Victorians believed that the gentleman must have the capability to show gentlemanly manners which emphasize morality and good behavior rather than their social status. Greatness is defined as a socially constructed and culturally mediated phenomenon that is shaped by expectations rather than just an innate talent. Victorians believed that the gentleman must have the capability to show gentlemanly manners which emphasize morality and good behavior rather than their social status. They are required to have a strict code of conduct, which requires them not only to describe how they interact in society, but also how they manage their household (Wang Lan-lan, 2023). However, the lower class in that era was formed by social expectation as the influence of the British upper class impacted not only one's place but also one's emotion (Özbilen, 2025). Within this hierarchy, the butler became essential, preserving the household's standards, taking pride in ensuring everything functioned according to the master's expectations. Butler

took pride in managing their house and maintaining the standard, serving his master as an impact on the dignity and elegance of their master's expectations. This relationship between the master and his butler can be portrayed in the novel *The Remains of the Day* by Kazuo (Ishiguro, 1993).

Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* tells the story of Stevens, a butler, whose life is driven by his desire to be a 'great butler.' His understanding toward his ideal is shaped by external influences such as the Hayes Society, his father, and his master, Lord Darlington. Stevens dedicates his ideal to the point that he suppresses his emotions and justifies his actions as necessary to maintain dignity, even when in crucial moments, like his father's death of Miss Kenton's affection. His dedication to his duty was constructed through his admired figures, which ultimately blinded him to his own emotions. At the end of the novel, his ideal of greatness has collapsed, resulting in regret to emerge for his emotional repression which has been lost.

Human desire is often brought to be a main theme of a story, especially in novels. Maleki Qouzloo and Sadjadi (2021) describe human desire that was captured in *Atonement* by McEwan as the dissatisfaction of their subject after fulfilling their needs. Meehan (2014) found in *The Great Gatsby* that Daisy's desire reflects her pursuit of an ideal love that he can never truly have. While in *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens, he is talking about Pip's desire for Estella, driving him to pursue the wealth and status which shape his life (Zarour Zarzar, 2019). The unfulfilled desire which has become a major theme in some novels was also portrayed in *The Remains of the Day* by Kazuo Ishiguro (1993). In his novel, Ishiguro described how Stevens' inner life—including his desires, choices, and memories—can be shaped from his relationships with other characters (Botirovich, 2025). Furthermore, Ishiguro explores the complexity in the character Stevens with his unfulfilled desire to create a catharsis which is described in his past as the main focus of this story (Süt Güngör, 2023).

Lacan's concept of desire is important to understand the parts that make up desire. In Seminar IV: *The Object Relation*, Lacan explains that desire arises when the child experiences separation from the mother — a moment when the original unity (the imaginary wholeness) is broken and is produced in relation to the Other (society, culture, law, or language), where the object of desire arises as a reminder of what is lost in this relation (Nobus, 2023). Teng (2024) stated that desire, for Lacan, always begins from a sense of incompleteness or absence within the subject. Because desire has a strong relation to something missing, it can never be fulfilled. Once one object of desire is attained, the subject will create their incompleteness immediately. This endless cycle defines that desire is not shaped by a specific object but rather than a sense of lack itself, which becomes the central to the subject's ideal. Desire, therefore, is not about obtaining a real object, but about attempting to fill that absence which can never be filled. Because of this lack, people are driven to imagine the satisfaction that may ease their needs for a while yet never fully satisfy the lack completely (Kirshner, 2005; Mahdori et al., 2025; Junaid et al., 2026).

Therefore, this study will analyze the idea of "greatness" by Stevens, who was influenced by his father and Lord Darlington. To understand Stevens' journey in chasing "greatness," this article will use Lacan's theory of the register as presented in *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book IV*. This study focused on the Imaginary, Symbolic, and the Real, to examine how Stevens' desire is constructed and how emotional regret emerges from the collapse of his symbolic framework. Stevens' perspective that drives him to someone who is described as lacking something which refers to "dignity" will be shown as the focus in this article. This study examines what is the cause of action that builds the desire of the subject and the result as someone who can fulfill their desire.

Moreover, the objective of this study is to describe emotional regret as the effect of unfulfilled desire. How can the Lacan theory help us to understand the first point? From the question, the articles aim to understand the internal conflict of Stevens with psychoanalysis approach by Jacques Lacan.

## **2. Methodology**

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach with a Lacanian psychoanalytic framework to provide a deeper understanding of the psychological tension among the characters in the narrative. According to Huyler and McGill (2019), qualitative is used to explore and understand the meaning individuals or groups assign to human problems. This approach is appropriate to provide a contextual explanation of the character's psychological problems which are represented through the character's dialogues, experiences, emotions, and actions (Candra Susanto et al., 2024; Finkelstein et al., 2024). Furthermore, the qualitative approach is used to understand Stevens' desire and psychological dynamics in the novel by observing through the narrations within the text. Corbin and Strauss (2014) stated that qualitative studies focus on process, context, interpretations, or understandings, which often develop inductive research. This

approach was applied to this study to examine the patterns, themes, and meanings that are portrayed through language textually.

The research uses two types of data: primary data and secondary data. The primary data is taken from the novel *The Remains of the Day* by Kazuo Ishiguro (1993), which is examined textually through its themes, characters, plot, language, and narrative structure. Meanwhile, the secondary data consists of scholarly books, journal articles, and theoretical writings relevant to Lacanian psychoanalysis and literary analysis. The data were collected by reading the novel as the primary data to understand its main story, identify the characters, and collect some significant themes, thoughts, and dialogue that were relevant to the study. The data were analyzed by content analysis as the primary methodical approach to examine the narrative element within the story. According to White and Marsh (2006), content analysis techniques can analyze text or other meaningful data to make dependable conclusions based on the context they are using. Through this method, the researcher identifies patterns, significant sequences, and thematic elements that are relevant to the study. Once the data were collected and organized, the researcher began to analyze using Lacanian psychoanalysis to explore how the concept of desire in the narrative and also shape the psychological impact on the character.

### 3. Results and Discussion

In the novel, Kazuo Ishiguro constructs desire as a pivotal theme embodied in Stevens, the protagonist who dedicates his entire life to becoming a "great butler." He explores how duty reveals a profound desire in order to achieve dignity and self-worth (Özbilen, 2025). As in the novel,

#### Data 1

"What is a 'great' butler? I can recall many hours of enjoyable discussion on this topic around the fire of the servants' hall at the end of the day" (p.23).

It is not the "great butler" that becomes the desire but the fantasy to achieve the desire. The narrative shows that the desire is also to be recognized as a "great butler" in his own generation.

#### Data 2

"Let me make clear, to retract any of my ideas on 'dignity' and its crucial link with 'greatness'" (p.92).

Stevens' behavior was controlled to what he desires and suppressing his personal happiness for the sake of professional duty, which makes him no other self than that of a servant (Fonioková, 2008). His emphasis on dignity suggests that he equates self-worth with emotional restraint, composure, and loyalty to hierarchical authority. He relies on the fictitious Hayes Society in shaping his greatness rather than defining greatness independently as a standard of validation (Kaushik, 2019). In essence, his ideal of greatness was shaped by an external recognition where the value is determined by elite standard not by personal fulfillment.

Kazuo Ishiguro highlights the theme of desire in the narratives as a sense of lack in the character. Desire itself can drive an individual to shape their identity, as O'Shea (2002, p.296) stated "For many, at least since Hegel's *Phenomenology* and possibly since Plato and Aristotle, desire is conceived in substantially negative terms as a 'desire for' something that can be fulfilled; but in fulfillment the desired object is lost, negated and loses its value." Stevens, the protagonist in the novel, construct his behavior depend on his desire, yet in pursuing it, he loses his emotional needs. His identity became fully controlled by his profession, as Fonioková (2008, p.91) stated "Stevens has no other self than that of a servant, whose importance lies merely in serving the employer; he is not expected to make his own decisions and have his own opinions."

His desire to portray his actions toward the people in his life. This concept of desire can be understood through Lacan's three registers—the Imaginary, Symbolic, and the Real—which shape how Stevens' desire for greatness is formed. Within the narratives, his idea of greatness was built within his unconscious mind that formed by his environment.

#### 3.1 The Imaginary Formation of Desire

The Imaginary formation of desire in the narratives is constructed through the core of the great butler. It is the idea of dignity which has a function as an ideal image due to the lack of a character. Stevens' desire originates in the Imaginary identification that depends on an external ideal which he admired. His concept of dignity is rooted in a class-bound hierarchical service (Khosravi, 2024). His idea of dignity then becomes the ideal image in order to attain his desire. This identification highlights the distance between who he is and who he believes he must become.

Stevens' identification with the image of the "great butler" reflects Lacan's mirror logic, in which the subject forms an ideal ego by misrecognizing an external image of coherence, dignity, and mastery as his true self.

### **Data 3**

"If one looks at these persons we agree are 'great' butlers, if one looks are, say, Mr. Marshall or Mr. Lane, it does seem to be the factor which distinguishes them from those butlers who are merely extremely competent is most closely captured by this word 'dignity'" (p.26).

The line suggests that to be a great butler he has to attain what is called "dignity." He makes illusions to make a qualification of a butler which is repeatedly stated in the book, dignity, is the most important one (Süt Güngör, 2023). To define a "great butler", he often uses his imagination to reflect something that makes him different from someone who is considered a "great butler."

Stevens also reflected the image of dignity in his father where he claimed that his father was such a great representation of what is called a "great butler."

### **Data 4**

"I say that my own father could in many ways be considered to rank with such men, and that his career is the one I have always scrutinized for a definition of 'dignity'" (p.27).

By ranking his father among "great" butlers, Stevens reveals a deep identification with him. His father becomes the primary model through which Stevens understands and measures dignity. This indicates that his sense of self is shaped through admiration and internalization of his father's image. Through these influences, his ideal of greatness by imitating dignity. In this sense, dignity becomes a pivotal virtue to shape a butler's duty.

### **Data 5**

"'Dignity' has to do crucially with a butler's ability not to abandon the professional being he inhabits" (p.34).

His ideal of dignity as the refusal to abandon one's professional role reveals the total fusion between identity and occupation. His selfhood becomes inseparable from performance.

The idea of dignity is also strengthened by the Hayes Society, an exclusive organization that recognizes only the highest-ranking butlers.

### **Data 6**

"The Hayes Society claimed to admit butlers of 'only the very first rank'. Much of the power and prestige it went on to gain derived from the fact that unlike other such organizations which have come and gone, it managed to keep its numbers extremely low, thus giving this claim some credibility" (p.25).

From his previous generation, the 'great butler' was defined in the Hayes Society, where the values or the concept of greatness was shaped from what is captured in that society. As Stevens said, 'dignity' is the most important in keeping with the position of butler (p.24). The representation of what is shaping to become a great butler, which is dignity, then later on, will be described by someone who might be suitable for the term dignity that in the novel Stevens agrees with Mr Marshall or Mr Lane. Throughout the story, Kazuo Ishiguro describes his idea that desire can be built through the environment, society, and someone who has the values that represent their idea of their desire.

These findings suggest that Stevens does not develop his idea of greatness independently, but constructs it through the external factors which he admires. The repeated significance of dignity, the presence of his father, and the authority of the Hayes Society reveal a pattern of his identification through comparison. He constructed his own worth based on his ideal figures rather than discovering his own identity. As a result, he struggles to reconcile his ideals with the reality of his life. The narratives highlight the broader theme of psychological conflict within the character where he is struggle for self-identity in especially in society caused him to prioritizes his external perception over personal authenticity (HUANG Zi-jie, 2024).

The representation of greatness is not neutral. In Lacan's theory, in his one of the registers, Imaginary. The Imaginary is connected with images and the identification process. At this stage, ego or self can be formed through

identification with images. It creates feelings like jealousy or competition which shape the fantasies of individuals. (Geng, 2023) stated that in this Imaginary, the concept is filled with images, identifications, and misrecognitions, where individuals attempt for their illusory sense of coherence and unity. The void in Stevens is created because he is compared to others such as Mr Lane, Mr Marshall, and his father. Those identifications sometimes led to misrecognition because the image that they saw is an external representation. The register is also related to Lacan's mirror stage. It was introduced in his Seminar Book IV: The Object Relation. "What is the mirror stage? It is the moment at which the infant recognises his own image, but it is far from being purely and simply the connoting of this one phenomenon in child development" (Nobus, 2023, p.9). Stevens' desire can be seen through his identification with the idealized image of the "great butler" that shaped his father and his peers, causing his interpretation of what he lacks such as dignity, loyalty, and professionalism.

In this sense, the foundation of the desire originates in Imaginary identification rather than authentic self-knowledge. The image of dignity offers a sense of fulfillment to fulfill what he thinks he is lacking, yet this idea depends entirely on external models that are fundamentally separate from Stevens. His attempt to chase his ideal of greatness becomes a tool to align himself with standards that always exceed the reality of his life. In this way, dignity becomes the form of the Imaginary for shaping his desires.

### **3.2 Professionalism as a symbolic action of moral code**

Professionalism serves as Stevens' symbolic law that shaped his identity and actions. It determines what is appropriate to maintain his role as a butler. His actions define his position with a strict order, where loyalty, self-control, and obedience are moral obligations regardless of the choices he himself makes (HUANG Zi-jie, 2024; Pokharel & Dangol, 2025; Zhen, 2021). Professionalism operates as a law that strictly controls his behavior that can be seen in the narrative as a loyalty towards Lord Darlington. He repeatedly suppressed his emotion in order to maintain the standard of his profession (Mary & Fatima, 2024). Eventually, professionalism became the symbolic law that defined his worth which organized and controlled his behavior in order to pursue his desire.

Professionalism emerges as a form of loyalty that shapes his behavior through his action, causing him to repress his self-emotions that operate his symbolic framework. This structure becomes most evident at the moment of his father's illness. Instead of remaining beside him, Steven insists,

#### **Data 7**

"I'm afraid we're extremely busy now, but we can talk again in the morning" (p.79).

Stevens responds to his father's emotional question while being fully aware of his critical condition, choosing to postpone the conversation rather than engage with him as a son. He consciously suppresses his emotion over responsibility in order to uphold professional duty (Muresan, 2024). This indicates that his responsibility is not personal attachment, but also governs his actions. This action is further reinforced when he added

#### **Data 8**

"I only have a moment. The gentlemen are liable to retire to the smoking room at any moment"  
(p.84).

Despite being warned by Miss Kenton that he may later regret not seeing his dying father, Stevens continues to prioritize his service duties. It shows his repeated submission to institutional duty even when alternatives are morally and emotionally available (Robbins, 2001). His action reaches the climax when Miss Kenton offers to close his father's eyes. However, Stevens responds with

#### **Data 9**

"I would be most grateful if you would, Miss Kenton" (p. 86).

These actions showed his unwavering dedication toward his perfect professionalism in order to attain his desire, even though he must repress his own emotions:

#### **Data 10**

"You look as though you're crying" (p. 85).

The dismissal of the Jewish maids also reveals how loyalty to Lord Darlington governs his professional conduct, making him repress not only his emotions but also his morals (Zaimi & Kushta, 2025). It is explained when he had a conversation with Miss Kenton about this matter.

**Data 11**

“Miss Kenton, I have just this moment explained the situation to you fully. His lordship has made his decision and there is nothing for you and I to debate over” (p.118).

He strictly obeyed his duty rather than evaluating the ethical implication of the act. The dismissal was justified as a hierarchical loyalty in which he believed that a butler's role is to execute, not to judge (Khosravi, 2024). Through this moment, professionalism became a symbolic law that controlled his personal choices and suppresses his own moral legitimacy (De Chavez, 2021).

In the narrative, the relationship between Stevens and Miss Kenton further highlights another consequence of maintaining professionalism as a symbolic law. Miss Kenton's proposal announcement becomes an essential moment that creates the dominance of professionalism in Stevens' response.

**Data 12**

“Are you not in the least interested in what took place tonight between my acquaintance and I, Mr Stevens?” (p.174).

Her question directly urged him to respond emotionally to what remains unspoken between them. On the contrary, Stevens redirects the conversation from his own emotions and invokes ongoing political affairs.

**Data 13**

“I do not mean to be rude, Miss Kenton, but I really must return upstairs without further delay. The fact is, events of global significance are taking place in this house at this very moment” (p.174).

Rather than confront the emotional weight of Miss Kenton's question, he retreated into the significant matter.

**Data 14**

“Miss Kenton, you have my warmest congratulations. But I repeat, there are matters of global significance taking place upstairs, and I must return to my post.” (p.175).

This refusal to involve his personal emotions serves wider implications of professionalism in his life. His inability to express his own emotion to Miss Kenton highlights a missed opportunity for his relationships as the impact on his professionalism (Shakir, 2023).

In the novel, Stevens consistently pursues what he defines as “dignity,” which is manifested through acts of loyalty and professionalism. He believes that the standard of an excellent British butler is not only to maintain dignity but also to maintain his emotional restraint (WANG Lan-lan, 2023). Unlike Miss Kenton, whose actions still involved her emotional honesty, Stevens based his choices on a belief in loyalty as an absolute value necessary to realize his desire for greatness. He transformed dignity, service, and loyalty into principles that structure his behavior. Deepa (2023) argues that Stevens avoids any sign of failure which is driven by absolute commitment to perfection. From the Lacanian perspective, Stevens uses “symbolic fiction” to maintain his identity not only by oppression, but also by his actions that marks in dignity and loyalty (De Chavez, 2021). Thus, professionalism does not merely reflect his character; it functions as the symbolic law that organizes his desire and anchors his subjectivity.

Stevens' behavior can be understood within what Lacan describes as the Symbolic. The Symbolic is the framework where language, symbols, and social norms become essential in shaping individuals (Geng, 2023). It defines the limit in human life that shapes the fundamental structure of reality. In Lacanian theories, subjectivity is formed within the Symbolic order based on the language, social norms, and structures. Throughout the story, his dedication to holding perfection not only serves as a great butler but also guides his actions and behavior. The actions are influenced by his strong commitment that a great butler must maintain dignity in every situation. His actions and thoughts reveal how his ideal and belief isolates him from others and hinders him from expressing his own true feelings. As Deepa (2023) argues that Stevens reflects on past events that reveal both his personal and professional misjudgments.

This symbolic structure is rooted in Lord Darlington as its central guarantor. His Lordship functions as the signifier that embodies the meaning of dignity as he mentions serving a "great man" is to participate in greatness. However, when Darlington's reputation collapsed, the symbolic law that sustained Stevens's behavior began to collapse. As Meghaa and Ramaswamy (2020) stated that Stevens was betrayed by finding the fact that his lordship was associated with the Nazis during the World War. The figure who once became the core of his loyalty is no longer a source of moral authority. Stevens begins to question his own worth as the signifiers of his professionalism and dignity have been lost.

#### **Data 15**

"Lord Darlington wasn't a bad man... I trusted in his lordship's wisdom... I can't even say I made my own mistakes. Really—one has to ask oneself—what dignity is there in that?" (p.194).

This moment marks Stevens' recognition of lost agency. While Lord Darlington chose his path—even if wrongly—Stevens surrendered his autonomy to the Symbolic authority of his master. His question about dignity reveals a crisis in the very ideal that was structured within his ideal that structured his identity as the Symbolic which his life had depended on.

### **3.3 Regret as the affective manifestation of the Real**

After devoting his life to serving Lord Darlington and suppressing his feelings for some actions, Stevens confronts the regret left by his choice. In Lacanian theory, the Real refers to that dimension of experience which resists symbolization and cannot be fully integrated into the subject's Imaginary or symbolic framework (Pocius, 2021; Tsolas, 2005). It emerges at moments of rupture, when the structures that organize meaning fail to account for what is felt or encountered (Leeb, 2008). He often faced some acts which were the opposite of his beliefs. But to attain his desire, he must follow what he has found or the key that is represented as the symbol, causing him to repress his emotion and ultimately face regret in the story (Alex & Chris. A., 2019). The consequence is not simply regret, but an encounter with the Real—the realization that the symbolic foundation of his dignity can no longer guarantee his ideal. As Süt Güngör (2023) stated that Stevens' memories expose his hidden disappointments, illustrating how his pursuit of greatness results not in fulfillment, but in the painful recognition of what he has lost.

Throughout the story, Stevens encounters moments in which the Real disrupts his resistance toward his emotion for his professionalism. These moments arise when Stevens begins to suppress his emotions, which creates a psychological tension between his own emotions and his duty to maintain as a great butler.

#### **Data 16**

"Stevens, are you all right?"

"Yes, sir. Perfectly."

"You look as though you're crying." (p.85).

This line suggests that he has to confront events that cannot be encompassed in the language of dignity. In this sense, Stevens not only contradicts his feelings but also seeks his identity. As Fathi Helaly Khalaf (2017) stated that it was a mistaken concept of dignity. Stevens tries to justify his actions by presenting it as the only possible way of dealing with his father's illness as the basis of being a good butler.

Stevens repeatedly has to confront the conflict between his professional and his ethical implications, which marks in the dismissal of the Jewish maid within the narratives. The situation exposes a tension that cannot be reconciled within his symbolic framework of dignity. When Lord Darlington orders their removal, he complies without objection, framing the act based on his idea of professionalism and dignity rather than a moral decision.

#### **Data 17**

"It was a difficult task, but as such, one that demanded to be carried out with dignity" (p.117).

However, it is shown in the narrative that Stevens actually had a concern regarding this matter. As such,

#### **Data 18**

“Now really, Miss Kenton, that is quite incorrect and unfair. The whole matter caused me great concern, great concern indeed. It is hardly the sort of thing I like to see happen in this house” (p. 22).

It implies that Stevens actively carried out an ethically wrong decision while denying personal agency. Action where his actions are forced due to his lord. Stevens' doubt about the dismissal of the maids is implied through his identity crisis and reevaluation of his past actions and (Huang Zi-jie, 2024).

In another sequence, the Real is reflected through his rejection toward Miss Kenton. During the dismissal of Miss Kenton because she was proposed by Mr. Ben, instead of confronting the emotional weight of her announcement, he retreats into the safety of professional detachment. He suppresses his romantic feelings for Miss Kenton by failing to express them (Shakir, 2023). He responds with formal politeness and redirects his attention to his duty.

#### **Data 19**

"I'm very grateful, Miss Kenton. I do hope you have a pleasant evening. Now if you will excuse me." (p.171).

The conflict is not merely ideological as he has to maintain his professionalism but the concrete emotional sacrifice standing in front of him. What stands before him is not a theoretical threat to dignity, but the irreversible loss of an emotional future. It's not about how busy Stevens is but it is about how he repressed those emotions.

#### **Data 20**

"Miss Kenton, you have my warmest congratulations. But I repeat, there are matters of global significance taking place upstairs and I must return to my post." (p.175).

While in the Imaginary and the Symbolic is talking about the actions that are affecting Stevens' relationship to others, in the Real, it reflects his actual emotion that builds besides his reality.

In the novel, regret emerges at the precise moment when the symbolic framework that sustained Stevens' identity collapsed. It leaves behind the Real as a reminder that it can no longer be contained within the language of dignity and professionalism. Stevens begins to realize what he actually confronts, which is not to sustain his personal desire but rather his emotional repression, which leaves him an emotional regret as the cause of his actions. Stevens finally admits his emotional suffering, revealing the return of the Real — the collapse of the fantasy of dignity. However, his immediate recovery of composure shows that the Imaginary and symbolic structures still attempt to contain this emotional truth. This becomes evident when Stevens admits,

#### **Data 21**

“at that moment, my heart was breaking, only to immediately recover his composure with a smile”(p.190).

Although framed as a professional necessity, the journey reveals Stevens' lingering attachment to Miss Kenton. The moment when he might return reflects a fantasy which recovers his past and regaining all the lost emotional possibilities. Eventually, it remarks, his repressed desire continues to operate behind the surface of professionalism.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The findings of the study demonstrate that Stevens' pursuit of greatness in *The Remains of the Day* is rooted in a Lacanian structure of desire shaped in the register concept including Imaginary, Symbolic, and the Real. His identification toward idealized figures such as his father and the Hayes Society forms an Imaginary image of dignity. The Symbolic law emerged as a function to rule his behaviour by serving loyalty to Lord Darlington. His dedication for his desire ultimately caused him to repress his emotional needs, sacrificing his own personal decision in order to maintain his role as a perfect butler. The ground foundation of his desire begins to collapse when the moment Lord Darlington's political reputation collapses. The symbolic foundation as the part of the concept that guaranteed Stevens' dignity turns into a doubt within him. This rupture shows the emptiness behind his dedication and resulting regret to emerge as the

manifestation of the Real. Eventually, his confession of emotional suffering suggest that his pursuit of greatness has resulted in irreparable loss.

The novel shows the unfulfilled desire as the structural crisis within the subject. In Lacanian perspective, regret appears as the consequence of the collapsed from the register concept which caused by symbolic loss that has been guided Stevens' behaviour. The idea of greatness, therefore, may hide deep emotional and existential costs behind the dignity and professionalism.

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