

Erased and Displaced Identities in S. J. Watson's Before I Go to Sleep

S. J. Watson'ın Before I Go to Sleep adlı Romanında Silinmiş ve Yerinden Edilmiş Kimlikler

Yıldırım ÖZSEVGECİ 
(Sorumlu Yazar-Corresponding Author)

Recep Tayyip Erdoğan Üniversitesi, Fen
Edebiyat Fakültesi İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı
Bölümü, Rize, Türkiye
Department of English Language and
Literature, Faculty of Sciences and Letters,
Recep Tayyip Erdogan University, Rize,
Türkiye
yildirim.ozsevgeci@erdogan.edu.tr



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Abstract

Steve J. Watson was born in England in 1971. Watson, who worked as an audiologist in the NHS before starting his writing career, had the opportunity to closely observe the characters' lives, which would be the subject of his works in the hospital where he worked. Watson's 2011 novel *Before I Go to Sleep* encompasses real-life instances from the lives of Henry Gustav Molaison and Clive Wearing, both of whom grappled with long-term memory impairments. Molaison and Wearing's years of illness had a profound effect on Watson. Similarly, the novel's protagonist, Christine, also suffers from anterograde amnesia, known as Molaison and Wearing syndrome, in the literature. Waking up every morning with a new identity, Christine tries to make sense of what is happening around her until she falls asleep again. Amnesia alienates her from everything. Given that similar circumstances exist in real life, Watson aims to show the reader the effect of memory on identity through Christine. Studies on memory always play an essential role in fiction. Many literary texts concentrate on how characters remember their past and how this memory triggers the construction of their identity. In other words, many texts serve as representations of individual memories. While memories form one's identity, amnesia leads to a new identity, life, personality, and darkness. Therefore, for fiction writers, amnesia serves as a tool to underscore the relationship between identity and memory. Based on these facts, this study will focus on Christine, who wakes up every morning as a new person, aiming to explore whether identity can be constructed independently of memory.

Keywords: Amnesia, Memory, Identity, S. J. Watson

Öz

Steve J. Watson 1971 yılında İngiltere'de dünyaya gelir. Yazarlık kariyerine başlamadan önce Britanya Sağlık Bakanlığında odyolog olarak çalışan Watson, eserlerine konu edeceği karakterlerin yaşamlarını çalıştığı hastanede yakından izleme fırsatını yakalar. Watson'ın 2011 tarihli romanı *Before I Go to Sleep*, uzun süreli hafıza bozukluklarıyla boğuşan ünlü hastalar Henry Gustav Molaison ve Clive Wearing'in hayatlarından gerçek kesitler içerir. Molaison ve Wearing'in yıllarca süren hastalık durumu Watson'ı derinden etkiler. Benzer bir şekilde, romanın başkarakteri Christine de Molaison ve Wearing sendromu yaşamaktadır. Her sabah yeni bir kimlikle güne uyanan Christine, tekrar uyuyana kadar etrafında olan bitenleri anlamlandırmaya çalışır. Yaşamış olduğu unutkanlık, onu her şeye yabancılaştırır. Gerçek hayatta da benzer durumların yaşanılmasından yola çıkan Watson, Christine üzerinden okura belleğin kimlik üzerindeki etkisini göstermeyi amaçlar. Bellek üzerine yapılan çalışmalar kurguda her zaman önemli bir rol oynar. Edebi metinlerin çoğu, karakterlerin geçmişlerini nasıl hatırladıklarına ve hatırlamanın kimliklerinin inşasını nasıl başlattığına odaklanır. Başka bir deyişle, birçok metin bireysel anıların temsili olarak hizmet eder. Anılar kişinin kimliğini oluştururken, hafıza kaybı yeni bir kimliğe, yeni bir hayata, kişiliğe ve karanlığa neden olur. Bu nedenle kurgu yazarları için amnezi, kimlik ve hafıza arasındaki ilişkiyi vurgulayan bir araçtır. Bu gerçeklerden hareket eden bu çalışma, her sabah yeni bir insan olarak uyanan Christine'e odaklanacak ve hafıza olmadan kimliğin inşa edilip edilemeyeceği sorusunun cevabını arayacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Amnezi, Bellek, Kimlik, S. J. Watson

Introduction

Since Plato's times, memory, or remembering, has been one of the critical topics in fiction. Thus, any work of literature can be a way of preserving or using memory as narration. Therefore, memory is not only a crucial factor in telling a story, but it has also been a vast area to write about. According to Dieguez and Annoni (2013), "Novels are all about memory, and it is from this human capability that all novels flow" (p. 137). Novels are seen as a way of storing memories or reflecting on them, thereby contributing to the construction and reconstruction of individual and collective memory. These reconstructed memories can be used as the basis for creating fictional works. As argued by Lavenne, Renard, and Tollet (2005), "Literature is powerful as a recollection and reconstruction tool, and it can connect past and present by rescuing memories from being forgotten and bringing them back to life" (p. 1). It is a record that enables the narrator's story to pass from one to another and a way of re-examining past events. Therefore, as Neumann (2010) underlined, fiction, which has been extensively involved in discussing forms of literary memory, has proven to be of great value in exploring memory representation. Because literature, both thematically and formally, is closely interwoven with the thematic complex of memory and identity (p. 333).

In order to understand this complex structure of memory and identity, writers have deepened their research in light of new developments in the human psyche. According to Lethem (2000), the author of *The Vintage Book of Amnesia*, the subject of memory loss or amnesia in fiction has become increasingly popular and nuanced through the twentieth century with the introduction of Freud's psychoanalysis theory and studies in neurology (p. xiv). Since the early twentieth century, studies on the human mind have intensified and the structure of the mind has been better understood. Thanks to new findings, writers were allowed to delve deep down into human psychology and scrutinise the impact of memory on identity. Many writers, such as Julian Barnes, Oliver Sacks, and Sophie Kinsella, use amnesia as a plot device to emphasise identity within this scope, as it offers them ample opportunities to manipulate characters and the motives behind their actions. Besides, the characters' mental states provide readers with an insight into their current selves. Memory and amnesia themes allow writers to explore the psychology of individuals, examine cultural norms, and encourage readers to reflect on what it means to be a person in the context of their own and others' histories. As the understanding of psychology has expanded, there is a tendency to focus more on memory and identity.

Initially, an interest in the human mind prompted authors to scrutinise and write about memory, addressing both memory as a repository of past experiences and memory loss as a portrayal of its repercussions. These themes became the subjects of psychoanalysis. Late Victorian writers pioneered its use in employing psychoanalysis. As stated by Blackwood (2010), Henry James's focus on human psychology in his literary works coincided with the emergence of psychology as a discipline in the 19th century. In other words, "Psychological analysis" emerged in late Victorian novels such as James's. He paid more attention to the psyche and motivations of his characters than to what they did. This period, known as the "laboratory revolution," aimed to uncover the workings of the mind through physiological studies (p. 270). These studies are still popular since memory is a current theme in fiction. Such critics as Ansgar Nünning and Birgit Neumann began intertwining fiction and memory in their discussions, proposing the term "fiction of memory" for this field of study. This term holds a double meaning in terms of fiction. As explained by Neumann (2010), the phrase "refers to literary, non-referential narratives that depict the workings of memory, and to the stories that individuals or cultures tell about their past to answer the question "Who am I?" (p. 334). Such fiction encourages readers to reconsider their identities and to analyse all personal features and experiences constituting their present selves. Through fictional characters, the reader experiences the consequences of a possible memory loss in their own life.

Amnesia is the "loss of memory due usually to brain injury, shock, fatigue, repression, or illness; or a gap in one's memory" (*Amnesia*, 2024). Amnesia is the lack of memory that constitutes identity. Therefore, it allows authors to use it as a plot device to investigate the nature of identity. Many writers, such as Gabriel G. Marquez, Oliver Sacks, Julian Barnes and S. J. Watson, use amnesia to show the role of memory while constructing an identity. Although most of the authors mentioned above are contemporary, it is possible to see examples of amnesia-related works written or told in the old times. In ancient Greek mythology, amnesia was used as a tool to refresh and start a new life with a new identity. Weinrich (2004) explains that in Greek mythology, the myth of Lethe tells a story about the river of forgetfulness, which leads to rebirth in a new body. Once people drink its water, they are freed from their earlier self and their mortal life. According to Haşlakoğlu (2008), Plato also used the term "amnesia" in comparison to the meaning of forgetfulness, and he suggested that amnesia is a necessary step in knowing the truth and yourself. Thus, Plato uses amnesia as not knowing the truth but seeing the reflections of the authentic self. Today, especially in fiction, amnesia refers to a situation in which people do not know about their truths (pp. 206-207).

Following Plato's steps, amnesia has been a standard device for modern writers and used by Homer, W. Shakespeare, C. Dickens, and H. Balzac. Throughout history, memory breakdowns have provided storytellers with many imaginative

possibilities. Some examples include the river Lethe, the lotus fields of the *Odyssey*, the laudanum that induces amnesia in *The Moonstone* (2020), and the issues afflicting the protagonist in *Memento* (1986). Similarly, as in the novel *Before I Go to Sleep*, this study's subject, amnesia, refers to not knowing the individual self. Therefore, it causes a loss of identity. In fiction, characters with amnesia cannot realise themselves as long as they forget their past. As Poole (2008) puts forward, "One of the tasks of memory is to make available to us knowledge that we have acquired in the past" (p. 263).

The loss of such knowledge prevents an individual from constructing an identity. Besides, reliable memory is based on the experiences of the individuals themselves. Amnesiac people need sound evidence or records that enable recalling the memories. The stories told to amnesiac people can be the reflections of reality, which is open to manipulation. Christine, the protagonist, can see just the reflections of her life by listening to others, but she needs the truth to remember herself. In this context, knowing their selves means understanding their own identity. Each person has their reality, so all other resources are just reflections of reality. As in the novel *Before I Go to Sleep*, characters question their identities, beliefs, and potential revelations about their past. While reading, readers also experience a similar self-discovery journey, and they ask questions about their conception of identity. A person's life story or personal narrative is shaped by their memories. Recalling relationships, experiences, and events from memory helps people build a meaningful and cohesive narrative that embodies their identity. Inquiring about their relationships, values, and beliefs is a part of the process that leads to a deeper investigation of identity. It is clear that identity and memory are interconnected: identity is based on memories, and memories influence our feelings, thoughts, and self.

Memory comprises the moments of an individual's life, which are linked together by memories. Similarly, it is argued that physical continuity criteria cannot provide such a connection, which is crucial for identity. The importance of this connection is evident when a drastic loss of memory, such as amnesia, is experienced (Bunuel, 1983, pp. 4-5). In *Les Maladies de la Mémoire* (1881), Ribot argues that amnesia is the best way to understand the relationship between memory and automatic, non-physicalised mental function. The connection between the body and the mind, that is, between physical existence and memory, only becomes apparent in cases such as amnesia, where memory is adversely affected. Although memory is primarily cognitive, memory loss makes it evident that it is also a physical phenomenon. It was only by accident that memory turned out to be a biological phenomenon in psychology (Dames, 2001, p. 177). Associating memory merely with cerebral functions is insufficient since it is also a mental process in the brain, a physical body part, ensuring the ties between mental and physical. As Groes (2016) claims, "memory is a process that is essentially influenced by contextual and cultural factors, including gender, individual trauma, and education, rather than something that just occurs in the brain" (p. 5). Memory is partly physical, but what shapes the memory is past experiences, which are generally abstract concepts. Experiences include every moment in life, varying from the things we learn, see, touch, hear, and do, and they are stored in our minds.

Amnesia refers to losing these memories, facts, information, and experiences. Fiction tends to depict amnesia as forgetting your identity, and it is primarily a long-term memory loss. A very traumatic experience brings about the characters in fiction. Although it is depicted as forgetting everything in fiction, generally, that's not the case in real life. Instead, amnesiac people usually know who they are, but they may have trouble learning new information and forming new memories. However, inquiring about the relationships, values, and beliefs enables authors to investigate identity more deeply. The themes of identity, memory, and self-discovery are explored in both real-life memory loss and fictional amnesia; however, there are significant differences between real-life experiences and the depicted amnesia in fiction. The author can use amnesia in a different and fictional way. Amnesia's effects are frequently exaggerated in fiction for dramatic effect. Plot development may be facilitated by characters encountering extreme difficulties and perils directly related to memory loss. Unlikely, some examples use amnesia as a way of refreshing and starting a new life, such as in *Rebirth When Everyone Forgot* (1976). In this context, this study deals with this issue by exploring the amnesia theme in Steve J. Watson's *Before I Go to Sleep* (2011). Like other contemporary amnesia fiction works, this novel deals with amnesia as memory loss, which causes problems with amnesia. This study attempts to establish the importance of remembering past experiences to build an identity by emphasising the gaps and weaknesses of an individual caused by amnesia.

Erased Identities, The Case of Christine

S. J. Watson, the author of the award-winning novel *Before I Go to Sleep*, was born in Stourbridge, West Midlands. After graduating from the University of Birmingham with a degree in Physics, he worked in several hospitals, specialising in diagnosing and treating pediatric hearing impairments as an audiologist before his enormous success with the publication of *Before I Go to Sleep*, which made him reconsider his career. According to his interview in the *Guardian*, the primary source of inspiration for his writing is his background in medicine. He explains that:

"I was reading about a man called Henry Molaison, who suffered severe amnesia following an operation he underwent when he was 27. He died at the age of 82 and, for all that time, could form no new memories. I was struck

by the image of that old man waking up and looking in the mirror, fully expecting a 27-year-old to be gazing back at him. I realised how vital our memories are to our sense of self, and from that seed, the whole novel began to grow” (Reporter, 2018).

As he emphasises, memories make people who they are, and *Before I Go to Sleep* reveals the importance of memory to one’s self; so by scrutinising memory and forgetfulness, Watson makes the character and the reader conscious about identity, which is the combination of our memories. In one of his interviews, Watson explains the reason he uses amnesia in his novel: “What was happening to this person was less important than what was happening inside her. I was more interested in trying to understand how it would feel to have this memory loss and to not know your own story and to have no idea how you got to where you are, even physically. The more I thought about it the more I realised without your own story you’re not really anything. How do you know what kind of person you are if you don’t know what you’ve done and where you’ve been and what you’ve achieved, and what things you’re proud of or less proud of?” (Warmann, 2014).

Therefore, he takes the memory out of Christine’s life to point out how an individual would be without remembering. Besides losing memories, an individual loses their independence, self-control and even their real families. It is underlined in the novel that having memory makes people independent; without memory, people do not have identity and life, and they have no control over themselves; lastly, without memory, people have no goals and no meaning in life. The story emphasises that remembering and having a memory is gaining independence. As long as you have a memory, you are your controller:

“And, well, you’re gaining independence, I think.”

“Independence?”

“Yes. You don’t rely on Ben as much as you did. Or me.”

That’s it, I think. That is the progress he is talking about. Independence. Perhaps he means I can make it to the shops or a library without a chaperone, though right now I am not even sure that much is true” (Watson, 2011, p. 18).

The protagonist, Christine, suffers from amnesia, and she endeavours to reconstruct her identity by recording a journal of her memories. However, the reader must rely on her journal and other external factors to learn the narrative. As a literary device, amnesia can blur time and memory, thereby expanding the scope of the unreliable narrator. The central theme of the novel *Before I Go to Sleep* is memory and how it relates to identity. The protagonist, Christine, cannot reconcile who she was before the accident and who she is now because of her amnesia, which forces her to redefine who she is all the time. While exploring memory and identity, the story aids individuals in understanding themselves, as Christine does. She begins questioning her sanity as she wonders about her memories and their reasons.

The causes of amnesia can be physical or psychological trauma, drugs or tumours. In fiction, memory loss is often associated with physical or mental trauma. It can be the beginning of coming disasters and give characters a fresh start. In addition, the type of amnesia that is mainly used is retrograde amnesia in fiction. Retrograde amnesia means total memory loss. There are many types of amnesia; however, the novel discussed in this study includes retrograde amnesia and anterograde amnesia, which refers to the inability to form and retain new memories (Cherney, 2018). People with anterograde amnesia suffer from loss of personal identity, which causes problems about self and authentic identity, and it is seen in the novel *Before I Go to Sleep*. As a storytelling device, it is technically anterograde amnesia that permits the creation of new memories but erases the previous ones every night.

Amnesia is also a highly valued plot device used in literature worldwide, and it is a fiction novel of postmodern sensibility. As Melley (2003) suggests:

“Narratives about amnesia seem to reflect the postmodern condition: the fragmentation of the self into parts not available to consciousness or memory; the inability to distinguish between authentic memories and simulations; and the difficulty of finding sound correspondences between past events and narratives that purport to describe those events” (p. 107).

This is what the protagonist, Christine, experiences. She has some moments as records, but they all must be justified. The reader tries to combine the pieces to understand the whole story and experiences the same hesitation until the end. Christine and the reader have to rely on individual memory as a record, but it is not easy to believe in it. As a plot device, amnesia disrupts the story’s linear progression and the lives of its characters. Memory loss’s fractured nature aligns with postmodern trends, challenging established hierarchies. However, it is essential to note that amnesia fiction is not always postmodern. Amnesia is a flexible literary device that can be used outside of postmodern literature in various genres. Furthermore, a piece of art does not automatically become postmodern simply because it employs amnesia; rather, it depends on how the theme is investigated, dissected, or incorporated into the larger story and thematic concerns of the piece.

Within this context, the novel *Before I Go to Sleep* presents postmodern elements such as fragmentation, deconstruction, identity constructed by society and hyper-reality. The story includes fragmented narratives because amnesia disrupts the linear flow of Christine's life and memories. Besides, as in other postmodern works, the novel emphasises that the protagonist, Christine, must rebuild her identity with the help of other people around her since she does not know herself. As the society itself, they have the opportunity to shape her identity. Lastly, Christine's amnesiac situation contributes to the deconstruction of her narration. Also, the novel explores the reconstruction of the realities of Christine's past and her life. As is seen in postmodern stories, amnesia creates the opportunity for unexpected story turns that blur the realities even at the end of the story. Watson succeeds in making this effect in the story because, in the end, the reader questions Christine's happy ending, which can be an invented story for her.

The surprising endings or mysterious events are not the only reasons that attract attention. The question "Why has the interest in amnesia increased?" can be answered because forgetfulness is both a gift and a curse for human beings. Therefore, the writer can create a new identity and life for the character or show the impossibility of a life without memories. Saliba Salman (2019) states that "amnesia has a de-centring drive and can shift emphasis to the social periphery" (p. 2). When someone loses their identity, they must be reshaped and reconstructed by society and other external forces. It is the same for both personal identity and national identity. The novel that is the subject of this study deals with personal identity, and it highlights that amnesia is a weakness because remembering gives people the power to shape and save their identity. As Bartkevicius (2000) claims, since we live in an age of information (p. 222), forgetfulness is a sign of weakness, and it is seen as vulnerability and remembering is to overcome death and grief. However, it is also possible to see amnesia as a gift in other literature, especially when the characters have deep griefs and traumas hidden in their past. According to this point of view, the characters who can overcome amnesia in the end prove themselves, and amnesia contributes to their character development. After regaining their identity, they become aware of what they have and who they are. In this way, they may be grateful for their life.

As cited by Tougaw (2021), "memory and identity are entangled with each other" (p. 3). Watson reveals it in his novel by creating an amnesiac character who has no memories and does not know who she is. Memory is the most crucial factor that constructs the most significant part of the identity. Judgements, decisions, behaviours, and thoughts are all related to identity. As a literary device, amnesia can create tension and transform a story into a quest. The amnesiac character queries, questions, and assesses evidence to regain their sense of self. A person experiences changes because of a lost identity, including the chance to reflect on and evaluate their previous life. Buñuel (1983), a famous filmmaker famous for his films about his patients, claims that: "you have to begin to lose your memory if only in bits and pieces, to realise that memory is what makes our lives. Life without memory is no life at all . . . Our memory is our coherence, our reason, our feeling, even our action. Without it, we are nothing..." (p. 4).

The novel *Before I Go to Sleep* supports his claim, which exemplifies and offers a detailed exploration of elements of identity such as age, gender, physical attributes, personality, beliefs, and profession that remain when memory is lost. A new world is built around the amnesiac people. It tells the story of a woman who loses her identity and tries to rebuild it with the help of a partner, a doctor, and a journal she records daily. However, all of them are constructed by others. Christine, the protagonist, wakes up with no memories every day, and what she records in her journal starts with what the man who claims to be her husband tells her, and she is called by her doctor every day to remind her she's keeping a journal and tells her where she can find it. People with amnesia have to rely on others to construct their identity. In this novel, Christine has two different identities. One is built by the man who claims to be her husband, Ben. Nevertheless, he is the man with whom she cheated on her real husband and then tried to break up. Because of her amnesia, she is not aware of this fact. On the other hand, Dr Nesh wants her to remember everything and gain independence by recording her memories and feelings.

According to the identity her partner tries to construct, Christine is a woman who lives happily with her husband, Ben. He is passionate and caring towards her. Before the car accident, she was working as a secretary, and years after the accident, her son, whom she does not remember now, was killed in the war in Afghanistan. After she lost her memory, her best friend moved to New Zealand, so she has no friends. A lot of evidence and photographs of her past were destroyed in a fire in the house they used to live in. When she asks why she has not seen a doctor, her husband tells her that they have tried everything, but her condition will not improve. Thus, this man is the only person in her life and, therefore, the only source of information about her past. However, according to the second identity she is reconstructing by recording a journal, Christine is an amnesiac who strives to rebuild her identity with the help of the man who claims to be her husband. However, this man is not her husband, but her ex-boyfriend with whom she has cheated on her husband, and this man attacked her and caused amnesia when she wanted to break up. Thanks to Christine's diary, she regains her memory and learns that she is a novelist. She was writing her second novel just before the attack. She also knows she has a son who lives in another city due to his job. As she is told, she is not alone. She has a very close friend who lives in the same town. This friend reveals that the man

she lives with is not her husband, Ben. She has been deceived.

Amnesiac people like Christine are vulnerable. They cannot trust anyone. They must learn to reacquaint themselves with their own identities and follow their inner feeling to gather information from external sources, which seems unreliable. Christine describes how she feels like she is “floating..., completely without anchor, at the mercy of the wind” (Watson, 2011, p. 110) at the novel’s beginning because the backdrop of her life remains a mystery. She is bound only by her husband, Ben, and the four walls of her home are small and confining, but her world is small and confining. Christine is vulnerable and reliant on her husband’s version of events because she lacks a narrative. People without memories, like Christine, are alive, but they do not have any identity. They are not aware of even some simple aspects of identity. They are strangers to their own identity. “But now I feel empty. It’s true, what Ben said. I have no memory. Nothing” (Watson, 2011, p. 12). Memory not only constitutes identity, but it also constitutes all stories in life. “Memory goes through life, and it binds every moment to each other and enables coherency by providing physical continuity. Especially in individual memory loss, it becomes clearer” (Booth, 2008, p. 239). Characters without memory live in meaningless moments. They cannot associate with themselves when their life is told to them. “I handed the photos back to him. I felt like I was looking at another life, not my own” (Watson, 2011, p. 74). Without memory, Christine is lost and condemned to be led by others. She is vulnerable because she does not know the people around her and whether they are telling the truth. She sometimes questions the person attributed to her.” For an awful moment, I thought perhaps they had never discovered my identity. Perhaps everything, an entire history, even my name, was given to me the day I was discovered. Even Adam” (Watson, 2011, p. 106). The reader is asked to reconsider their own identity and their truths. Looking at yourself from a very different and objective point of view is almost impossible; however, in an amnesiac situation, an individual has a chance to observe their life before amnesia. At this point, it is crucial to have sound shreds of evidence or records to trust. However, amnesia is a kind of chain for Christine which prevents her from remembering and asserting her own identity by learning the truths about her past. She is never sure about what is being told to her. Christine is searching for her identity like a detective. She records evidence related to her past and questions every new information, but she is misled:

“I thought of all the reasons I could so that he can control me. Have power over me. So that he can deny me this one thing that might make me feel complete. I realised I didn’t believe any of those were true. I was left only with the mundane fact. “I suppose it’s easier for him. Not to tell me, if I don’t remember” (Watson, 2011, p. 87).

Nevertheless, despite memory’s extraordinary breadth and depth, it is fragile, it can even be manipulated. Eyewitness memory is far more specific and less accurate than we instinctively believe. How can one trust oneself if one cannot think of one’s memories? Memory is also reversible, and what is forgotten is often as revealing as what is remembered. Christine is in this hopeless and desperate situation. Even worse, she might be unable to trust the person she depends on to organise her daily routine. She is no more than a soul who leaves the body and watches the world from somewhere else. Therefore, she says: “I could not believe I had written this. It seemed to be the work of someone whose mind was completely fractured. Exploded. I saw the words again. It was like being DEAD” (Watson, 2011, p. 114). Being alive is not meaningful without memories. As it is often argued, it is the memory that constitutes identity. However, memories can be easily manipulated. As Jonah Lehrer (2010) asserts, even the memories of those who do not experience amnesia can be manipulated. He states, “The mind cares more about crafting a good narrative than staying close to the truth”. Thus, it is not difficult for Ben to create a new person by presenting good stories.

Another critical point that is highlighted in the novel is amnesiac people’s paranoia and anxiety. Not being aware of the reality of their own identity and the life they had before causes paranoia. At the novel’s beginning, Christine and the reader know that she is a married woman who spends her time at home with no responsibilities or duties. Christine says she lives as animals do: “...an animal. Living from moment to moment, day to day, trying to make sense of the world” (Watson, 2011, p. 316). As Christine assembles her facts, readers can relate to her confused and uncertain point of view. The reader experiences the same anxiety and paranoia as the narrator does. When memory can not be linked to present and future life, it is no different from brain death. “It’s not life, it’s just an existence, jumping from one moment to the next with no idea of the past and no plan for the future. It’s how I imagine animals must be.” (Watson, 2011, p. 116). Memory and the future have a complex relationship vital for thought and behaviour. It is a store of information from the past, acquired connections, and experiences - called cognitive memory - that shape our plans and expectations because people can make decisions about the future based on past experiences by recalling them. Ross Poole (2008) argues that memory has a “role of transmitting responsibilities and commitments from the past” (p. 263). He draws attention to a significant facet of memory’s role in human societies. Memory is not only a storehouse of personal experiences but also of cultural norms, traditions, and societal values. Individuals inherit not only a legacy of events through the transmission of shared memories but also a set of obligations and commitments that shape their identities and direct their future actions.

Christine has a deep and realistic feeling that people dealing with amnesia or memory loss frequently feel. In the face of

uncertainty and disorientation, it elicits a sense of urgency, frustration, and a need for agency. “But for how long can I be a visitor in my own life? Passive? I need to take control.” (Watson, 2011, p. 132). A person suffering from amnesia may feel deeply detached and alienated from their own identity and experiences due to losing personal memories. With no clear storyline or sense of continuity, they could feel as if they are only guests or spectators in their own lives. This may cause them to feel helpless and want to take back control of who they are and where they wish to go in the future. It is a fundamental need for humans to have autonomy and self-determination. To regain their self-control, they long for their memories.

Meanwhile, the process of recovery is open to external intervention. Although amnesiacs can overcome amnesia and regain their memories, the data they have cannot be reliable because people are picky about what they remember. Wilson and Ross (2003) claim that “Individuals’ current self-views, beliefs, and goals influence their recollections and appraisals of former selves. In turn, people’s current self-views are influenced by what they remember about their pasts and how they recall earlier selves (p.137). People might ignore some of the details from their past or modify them through deliberate forgetting according to their present desires and thoughts. However, it might cause significant differences between their past and present selves.

Identity is constructed with memory; every detail can be crucial to a real identity. Identity can be defined as a lifeline, and memories are the building blocks of identity, so identity is affected when some of these blocks are missing. The gap can be filled through external sources, which can be unreliable. Therefore, the continuity of the lifeline is enabled thanks to remembering everything. It is underlined that philosophers like John Locke and Paul Ricoeur argue that continuity is imperative for existence to have meaning. In most fiction, the individual searches for a lifetime. This ontological principle depends on sound memories of one’s previous self and a steady sense of one’s future development (Waller, 2016, p. 286). Amnesia breaks this continuity and the ties between the past and future; the individual cannot continue their life as if they were the same person. In amnesia fiction, it is tried to be proven that forgetting the past causes the loss of identity, so the characters with amnesia are always in search of their own identity.

When the interrelatedness between memory and identity is considered, identity is constructed on each memory piece, like the moments when one learns something or the period in which one acquires new information, which helps to build the identity. However, how reliable these memories are is also a matter of discussion. In *Before I Go to Sleep*, the reader discovers that Christine has a different life and person from Ben. Except for her name, almost everything she was told was fake. The reader is led to believe that the reality and honest Christine was revealed at the novel’s end, but what if the truth remains hidden?

Christine’s inability to form lasting memories makes her vulnerable to manipulations, and she must question the honesty of those around her. Christine learns about herself from others and external sources, making it possible to receive unreal information. Once an individual experiences amnesia, they become both vulnerable and sceptical because the memories relayed to them are not deemed anymore. Christine occasionally recalls something abruptly and tries to connect it to what Ben has told her. However, the images in her mind and the stories told her are very different. There is not a coherence of her moments. When she shares these images with Ben, he fabricates a new story to bridge the gaps between her pictures and Ben’s fake stories. Christine feels as if she is watching a movie, and she is watching her own life as an outsider. She feels confused. Neither the protagonist nor the reader is sure about the reality until the novel’s end. However, even at the novel’s end, the truth of their existence remains in question. The reader is convinced to believe in it by being presented with official documents from the police and detective, her ex and husband and the photographs.

Amnesia is a kind of thick curtain that prevents people from remembering and building their identity by learning the truth, and amnesiac people like Christine are never sure about what is told to them. Christine is searching for her own identity like a detective. She records pieces of evidence related to her past. However, she is misled. She investigates and questions every piece of new information. Without memory, people have no goals, plans, or meaning. The author highlights that we are different from animals because we have identities constructed by our memories. As the protagonist, Christine, remembers and regains her memories, she feels like a human being and gains a future. Memory is presented as the foundation for an identity. “But the thing is, you won’t remember that memory tomorrow. That’s the problem. You have no foundation on which to build” (Watson, 2011, p. 92). It is emphasised that memory is vital in maintaining continuity and creating a sense of self and a life story. People use their memories to construct their sense of self, interpret their experiences, and plan for the future. When memories are lost over time, people may find it challenging to maintain a coherent sense of who they are or to use their past experiences as a guide for the present.

Lastly, since Christine has memories only before she goes to sleep, she has one day to build an identity and understand the situation. The novel aims to reveal that identity is a construction that requires a sound foundation of memory. Using amnesia as a tool, the author emphasises how life would be without memories. According to John Locke (1690), we are someone because of our memories (pp. 859-860).

Conclusion

The process of remembering has always played a role in fiction and has always been an attractive subject for writers to explore. From Plato to the present day, studies on memory and identity have always been the centre of attention. In addition, interdisciplinary studies on forgetting and recalling/reminding what has been overlooked are frequently carried out. S. J. Watson, the subject of our study, worked in a health centre for part of his life and had the opportunity to follow the studies on hearing and memory closely. Reflecting on his experiences with actual patients in fiction, Watson repeatedly presented the process of reconstructing memory to the reader through Christine in *Before I Go to Sleep*. Through the process of memory, he shows the reader how present life is dependent on past experiences. Watson uses amnesia, which leaves an individual with no memory, to highlight the relationship between memory and identity. Amnesia in fiction is different from real clinical cases. However, the purpose of literature is not to provide accurate examples or scientific knowledge. Therefore, *Before I Go to Sleep*, the subject of this study uses amnesia to underscore that memory loss causes the loss of identity. It is stated that memory and identity are interrelated, so while memory helps constitute an identity, the self makes the experiences meaningful.

Christine has a crucial problem at this point because she has no memories to give meaning to. This fact becomes apparent when the narrative forces the reader to reconsider what constitutes identity. Throughout the novel, Christine, the main character, continues to live her life asking questions that she can not make sense of. Christine has also lost her connection to space-time and people, as she cannot remember who she is due to her amnesia. However, it is not only amnesiac people who search for an answer to these questions. All readers are expected to be aware of the vital role of memory in building identity. Everyone seeks to understand the world and their experiences in it. It all contributes to our developing a cohesive sense of who we are. Amnesia is an eraser that wipes away all memories and leaves a blank page. To write down their own stories, people need memories, past experiences, and past habits. The novel *Before I Go to Sleep* starts with Christine's blank page, and she tries to add memories to constitute a meaningful life story and her own identity.

In light of the definitions and examples above, it is understood that the individual is no different from a machine in case of memory loss. Forgetting the life lived and not remembering the names causes the individual to lose control, making them dependent on other lives. In other words, the individual who becomes a prisoner of others must accept everything offered to him as their memory is erased every morning. Therefore, without memory, the construction process of identity is interrupted. In order for the individual to be complete, the triad of memory/identity/environment must act together.

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