



## THE RELATION BETWEEN IDENTITY (SELF) AND MEMORY: *THE MEMORY OF WATER* BY SHELAGH STEPHENSON

Sedat BAY<sup>1</sup>

0000-0001-9118-2775

### ABSTRACT

*Individual memory assumes a fundamental part in the improvement of individual identity. Individuals' available points of view about themselves, feelings, and goals affect their recollections and evaluations of past selves. Thus, people's existing points of views about themselves are influenced by what they recall about their own past, and how they evaluate earlier selves and scenes. People's reproduced evaluations of memories, their obvious detachment from past experiences, and the point of view of their recollections have proposals for how the past impacts the present. In this study we will focus on the verification of the reciprocal relation between memory and identity in Shelagh Stephenson's play The Memory of Water (1996) through three sisters who come together for their mother's funeral service in the north of England. The sisters' path toward mourning brings their past into question as memories strive for authenticity and the internal facts of their different lives affecting their current identities will be uncovered.*

**Keywords:** *The Memory of Water*, identity, memory, Shelagh Stephenson, burial ceremony

## SHELAGH STEPHENSON'IN *THE MEMORY OF WATER* OYUNUNDA KİMLİK (BENLİK) VE BELLEK ARASINDAKİ İLİŞKİ

### ÖZ

*Bireysel hafıza, bireysel kimliğin gelişmesinde temel bir role sahiptir. Bireylerin mevcut bakış açıları, hisleri ve hedefleri, geçmiş benliklerini ve hatıralarını ele alış şekillerini etkiler. Bu nedendir ki, insanların mevcut içgörülerini, kendi geçmişleri hakkında neler hatırladıkları ve daha önceki benlik ve hatıralarını nasıl değerlendirdiklerinden etkilenirler. İnsanların geçmiş hatıraları ile ilgili değerlendirmelerinin yeniden inşası, hatıralarının yeniden değerlendirilmesi, bazı geçmiş deneyimlerden açıkça kaçmaya çalışmaları ve hatıralarına bakış açıları, geçmişin şimdiki durum ve kimlikleri nasıl etkilediğine dair bize öngörülerde bulunur. Bu çalışmada, Shelagh Stephenson'un 1996 yılında yazılan oyunu The Memory of Water'da, annelerinin defin işlemleri için İngiltere'nin kuzeyinde Yorkshire'da yıllar sonra bir araya gelen üç kız kardeş aracılığıyla hafıza ve kimlik arasındaki karşılıklı ilişkiyi incelemeye odaklanacağız. Kız kardeşlerin hikâyesinin başlarındaki vurdumduymazlık hallerinden annelerinin yasını tutmaya başlamalarına kadar geçen süreçte, anıların güvenilirlikleri konusunda verdikleri mücadele ile geçmişlerini, anılarını ve mevcut kimliklerini nasıl sorguladıklarını ve bunun mevcut benliklerini nasıl etkilediğini inceleyeceğiz.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** *The Memory of Water*, kimlik, bellek, Shelagh Stephenson, defin işlemleri

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Öğretim Üyesi, Sivas Cumhuriyet Üniversitesi, Edebiyat fakültesi, İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Bölümü, [sedatbayoglu@gmail.com](mailto:sedatbayoglu@gmail.com)

## **INTRODUCTION**

The concept of self-idea is defined as your view of who you are, what sort of individual you are, and your consideration of your capacities, mentalities, and behaviors (Epstein, 1979, s. 73). Lord and Brown (2004) say that “the self is fundamentally a knowledge structure that helps organize, and gives meaning to memory” (p. 1). A change in self-concept may refer to any critical modification in your viewpoints about yourself. Though the change may also incorporate changes in your emotions about others or the world, by and large, it will be investigated in our study how the memories can influence one’s sentiments and thoughts about his/her self-concept.

Our understanding of the self-concept is enhanced by studies in several areas of psychology. After Kihlstrom and Klein (1994), the self has been defined by some psychologists as an overarching knowledge structure that organizes memory and behavior. (Lord & Brown, 2004, p. 14). This structure comprises many trait-like schemes that form collective and self-perceptions in specific circumstances. “It also includes script-like structures that help translate contextual cues into self-consistent goals and behaviors” (Lord & Brown, 2004, p. 14). The self shares a lot of characteristics with other knowledge structures; however, it is also multidimensional, covering a definite content area with sequential and social dimensions (Honest & Yardley, 2005).

The self-system is a collection of knowledge related to the self, the tool we use to make sense of our experiences, as well as the processes that create, preserve, and conserve this knowledge (Epstein, 1973; Higgins, 1996; Marcia, 1980). According to Markus & Wurf (1987), the self-concept has the function of being as a source of autobiographical memories, as a controller of experience, and as an emotional defense and motivational resource. “The notion that each of us has a self-concept, an idea or set of ideas of who we are, and that this conceptualization is relatively constant over time, is intuitively appealing” (Oyserman, 2004, p. 6). Naturally, some part of the self-concept has been examined in all fields of psychology. However, what self-concept really means seems flexible across disciplines and their methodologies, as does the self’s expected and acknowledged permanency versus flexibility. Most significantly, clinical field studies put forward that it is not easy to modify one’s self-concept, whereas experimental academics consistently assert that the self is exceptionally mutable and easily reformed by even negligible experimental manipulations (Markus & Kunda, 1986).

Restriction of oneself in time gives a dynamic progression to our identity and who we are, though social responses frequently give input that aides these dynamic procedures and grounds drifts in an emotional context. The multidimensional idea of self advances simple elaboration of self-significant data, making such data more critical and more valuable for official control of contemplations and activities (Lord & Brown, 2004, p. 14). It is also claimed that the self-concept functions as an informational structure that participates in our personal experiences and as a regulative root to direct the future behavior. Nevertheless, as the mental representations that form the self-concept are perceived as steady transmitters of personal data, totally patterned in our memory, the traditional methods are more appropriate for explaining the aspects like permanency and steadiness than for the dynamics that occur in self and identity (Saskia Kunnen, et al., 2005)

The characteristics of the self, and its connection with memory have long been studied and discussed by philosophers and psychologists. The interdependence of memory and personal identity has rarely been questioned, as a result the mutual influences representing this relation have received much care recently (Bruner, 1994; Kihlstrom J. F., 1997). It is asserted by some social psychologists that stories, memories, personal narratives and autobiographies make our lives meaningful (Holstein, 2000; Rosenwald & Ochberg, 1992; Freeman, 1993). That is why, even Descartes' famous postulation "I think, therefore I am" might be modified as "I remember, therefore I am." (Beike, Lampinen, & Douglas, 2004, p. 4). Possibly for that reason, one of the young English playwrights and actress, Shelagh Stephenson takes the relation between self and memory as the focal point of her play, *The Memory of Water*, which will be examined in this study.

The major representation of autobiographical memory is its connection to the self: Events that are remembered are of personal significance and are the database from which the self is constructed (Conway M. , 2005). Memory for our very own history is of remarkable importance as it is a basic component of our own character, and many scientists working on memory see the association of the self and memory as the most critical capacity of self-portraying memory. Personal learning is proposed to constrain what the self is, has been, and can be later on (Cohen & Conway, 2008). To be in intelligence with current parts of the self, recollections might be modified, twisted, and manufactured; memory and focal parts of the self are speculated as an

intelligent associated framework where convictions and information about the self are affirmed and upheld by particular personal recollections (Conway, 2005). Pasupathi (2003) found that when people are reciting experiences they do so that they regulate their emotional response, mainly when the early experience was not positive.

Some medical academics (Spence, 1982; Adler, 1956 et al.) have claimed that the memories a person chooses to recollect express the individual's life. Furthermore, James (1890) added that historical memories create a feeling that present experience of self is the result of the past. The self as recalled additionally accommodates an expansion of the self into what is to come in the future. (Neisser, 1988). If we don't have historical memories, "there is no sense of where the self is going and no clear ability to plan for the future" (Hirst, 1994). (Oakes & Hyman , 2001). So, it is possible to say that *self* is an unpredictable arrangement of observations, recollections, and information. (Oakes & Hyman , 2001, p. 88). Memory can make the dream of a flitting come back to a lost past; its operations additionally verbalize the unpredictable connection between past, present and future in human cognizance (King, 2000).

In spite of the fact that memory adds to our comprehension of the self, the self additionally assumes a vital part in memory. Some have contended that the self is unique, either on the grounds that it is the focal concentration of personal memory (Greenwald, The totalitarian ego: Fabrication and revision of personal, 1980) or on the grounds that we have guide access to types of learning, for example, contemplations and feelings, about ourselves that are not specifically accessible about others (Hyman Jr. & Neisser, 1992) At any rate, the self-idea is a huge arrangement of learning and data that is prepared in reference to the self, and is preferred recalled over other data (Greenwald & Banaji, 1989; Klein & Kihlstrom, 1986; Kuiper & Rogers, 1979). Therefore, we will investigate how different associations with the self add to the production of false recollections and how recollections may add to one's comprehension of self in *The Memory of Water* by Shelagh Stephenson, whose major theme is the relation between self and memory. We aim at examining if memory can generate the impression of a momentary return to a gone past; its processes also articulate the multifaceted association between past, present and future in human consciousness, as King (2000) asserts, and determine the present situation of the self and identity.

Autobiographical memory is about the self. ... Autobiographical memory is the source of information about our own lives, from which we are likely to make judgments about our own personalities and predictions of our own and, to some extent, others' behavior.

Autobiographical memory, however, also provides a sense of identity and continuity . . . (Rubin, 1986, p. 7)

It is this thought of changing one's self-idea, through the utilization of memory, which is the most vital for our study. The thought here is straightforward that memory enables us to consider ourselves to be an indistinguishable individual in the present from our past, which sounds well-known when we review the basic saying, 'my past made me my identity today'. Regardless of the philosophical saying, this is the means by which almost each one of us encounters in our lives. Memory, at that point, requires "[a] solid conviction of the equivalence of "a man's character after some time" keeping in mind the end goal to educate an individual self, and this personality stretches out "as far back as his memory comes to" (Sutton, 1998, p. 172).

In spite of the lack of a common definition of the self, studies on the self and memory have been done for decades. Our concentration in this study is on the relationship of the self to a specific subtype of memory, differently called personal, individual, or sometimes episodic memory. As recognized from memory for actualities, individual memory will be the memory for the occasions that happen to oneself (Beike, Lampinen, & Douglas, 2004).

### **The Reciprocal Relation between Identity and Memory in *The Memory of Water***

*The Memory of Water* is set in Yorkshire in the middle of the winter with an intense snowstorm outside. The play is the story of three sisters, Catherine, Mary and Teresa, who return to their family home for the funeral of their mother, Vi. The play begins with Mary, the middle sister, in her mother's room lying on the bed and having a conversation with her dead mother's ghost. "Nothing left. And all the life that happened here, drowned, sunk. As if it had never been" says Vi, the mother, but Mary is not very interested in what she says. Mary wants to learn if she remembers where the green tin box with chrysanthemums on it is. This is the first uttered mention of memory in the play. The instant modification of subject is a signpost that Mary may not have been that grateful to her mother and there is/was a distance between them. Just as the famous example the ghost of Hamlet's father, haunting his melancholic son, the phantom or ghost of the mother, whether as metaphor or as hallucination, is a form of traumatic memory or post-traumatic effect, the reason of which will be revealed later in the play.

Though Mary is not very interested in what her mother says, Vi picks up some books from the bedside table and looks through the titles: *Head Injuries and Short-Term Changes in Neural Behaviour ... The Phenomenology of Memory ... Peripheral Signalling of the Brain*. As we will

see later there is a close relation between the subject of the books and the tin box. When Teresa comes in, the ghost of the mother disappears, and Teresa begins to ask some questions about Mary's lover, which reveals that Mary has relationship with a doctor, called Mike, who is married with three children and we also learn that they are waiting for their youngest sister, Catherine. The sisters are curious about why Catherine has not come yet. Here the first sign of the conflicting memories about their childhood arises. Teresa thinks that "Probably just as well she didn't come home. She'd have probably drunk four bottles of cider and been brought home in a police car. And then she'd have been sick all over the television" (p. 6). "All three are self-involved, fighting lonely battles against depression, and figuring out how to mourn. Slowly and warily, they learn to rely on each other" (Travers, 2017). Mary and Teresa begin to discuss the details of this event in the past in a way that reveals that their present self-points of views depend highly on their past memories. Who remembers the past correctly means whose self-point of view is better than that of the other one, which will determine their relation in the continuation of the events and the play:

Mary: She was thirteen when she did that.

Teresa: She was lucky she didn't get electrocuted.

Mary: It wasn't switched on.

Teresa: Yes, it was, I was watching it. It was The high Chaparral.

Mary: No it wasn't. I wish you'd stop remembering things that didn't actually happen.

Teresa: I was there. You weren't. *Mary gives up trying to sleep. Sits up.*

Mary: I was there.

Teresa: That was the other time. The time when she ate the cannabis.

Mary: That was me. I ate hash cookies.

Teresa: It was Catherine.

Mary: It was me.

Teresa: I was there.

Mary: So where was I?

Teresa: Doing your homework probably. Dissecting frogs. Skinning live rabbits. Strangling cats. The usual. (pp. 6-7)

Teresa's last statement about Marry that she might be doing her homework and dissecting frogs etc. as usual shows that in her memories Mary is the only person who is supported in her education life, and has a convenient study environment prepared by her mother only for her. This is the reason why, instead of Teresa, Mary is the doctor at the moment. When Marry says her "You grabbed the spare room pretty sharpish" (p.8), Teresa's answer that she was there first implies that she has the rights of firstborn coming from the bible and British culture, and should have been the one to be supported first. Teresa is noticeably unpleasant about the affection her mother gave to Mary and is upset that her mother didn't respect her as much as Mary:

Teresa: Oh, she never complained. Because your job's important. I mean, doctors are second to God, whereas Frank and I only have a business to run, so obviously we could drop everything at a moment's notice.

The same thing is remembered in a different way by the sisters. While they are discussing about an event related to their father's funeral, for example, Teresa accuses of Mary imagining and distorting the reality because "This is a completely false memory". Mary's reply also shows the same attitude: "All memories are false." (p. 8). When the play is completely read, it is clearly seen that it is half realistic and half non-realistic just like the sisters' self-points of views. Though the sisters live in a world which is realistic, they remember their childhood memories in a distorted way, and enter a non-realistic world of the past. Therefore, their self-points of views are not permanent and stable, and they change as what they remember about their memories changes. Teresa accuses Mary of being not interested in their mother when she was deadly sick though she was a doctor herself, however Mary does not accept this and claims that she has a very sick patient to take care of. For that moment, how Mary prefers her sick patient to her own mother is not clear, however in the course of the time it will be revealed through their memories that she associates the sick patient with her son who was taken from her by her mother, Vi, and given to an unknown family. Since that time, Mary has always been in pursuit of her little baby for whose loss she accuses her mother. The books that Vi shows to Mary at the beginning of the play are also related to that young patient who has lost his memories because of an accident. This indicates that as Wilson and Ross (2003) state, autobiographical memory plays an important role in the construction of personal identity and self-point of view and this is evidence of the reciprocal link between memory and identity and self-point of view.

Hence, sisters' current points of views of themselves, beliefs, and objectives also affect their memoirs and evaluations of former and present selves (p. 137). Consecutively, sisters' existing identities are influenced by what they remember about their personal past, as well as how they remember earlier selves and episodes. Their recreated estimations of recollections, their observed distance from past experiences, and the point of view of their recollections have suggestions for how the past influences the present. Their constructions of themselves through time serve the function of creating a coherent-and largely constructive interpretation of their present selves and circumstances.

Catherine, the youngest sister, makes an exceptional and unforgettable appearance. It is obvious that she is a very ill-mannered and outgoing character. She looks a bit common, and does not seem to have the right mood for someone to attend her mother's funeral in layers of coats and scarves, laden with carrier bags. She is a woman returning back from shopping rather than a daughter who returns to her home for her mother's funeral. The fact that she begins directly to complain about the freezing weather outside the house without saying hello or some other words demonstrating her satisfaction of being with her sisters, or the pain of having lost her mother suggests that perhaps the sisters aren't that close. Catherine is always interested in catching the attention of her sisters and all the other people around her. She persistently feels and expresses it openly that she has always been left out by her family members since her childhood. It is understood from her behaviors that in her self-point of view, she always tries to find a romantic attachment and she changes her lovers regularly as if she were a love addict who tries to make her existence apparent in the family and the society, as she was never able to be in the centre of the focus of attention in her family. This may be a way of saying that she is also loved by someone. As Mary and Teresa are sure that she is broke, they are very surprised to see that Catherine is laden with carries bags. Catherine's reply to her sisters suggests that she is a person with low esteem and she accuses her older sister of being the reason for it:

Oh, for God's sake, broke doesn't mean you can't buy things. I'm trying to cheer myself up, or is that not allowed? The minute I walk in the door I feel it in waves, the two of you waiting to pounce, looking for something to criticize. Christ, it's no wonder I've got a low self-esteem. (p. 14)

Doubtlessly, Catherine might think of her past self as similar to those of her sisters who vary in closeness to their current self. Murray et al. (2000) claim that people may tend to be blind to the mistakes of their families, but evaluate the people who are not very close to them and

strangers more severely. However, Catherine, just like her sisters, is not blind to the mistakes of her sisters, and on the contrary she tends to accuse them of being the reasons of her own situation as a lonely young lady, always referring to their shared memories, which clearly indicates that her present self-point of view is highly dependent on her memories. This shows that she does not feel her sisters very close to her. Possibly that is the reason why she always remembers the unhappy events during which she felt herself left out or outcast. On the one hand, she distorts her memoirs so that they can be suitable to their present identity, she is also sure that the events that she has experienced are the cause of her loneliness on the other.

Mary and Teresa feel the need of reminding Catherine that their mother is dead, however she says that they want her to sit down and cry about it but she cannot do it. As many times she does in the play, Catherine accuses them of doing the same thing to her: “You see, this is what you do to me. This permanent, constant endless belittling (p.15), which makes Catherine a woman who does not have high self-esteem.

The hidden rivalry between Mary, a conventional doctor, and Teresa, who is a homeopath, is apparent almost in every part of the play as a continuation of the events in their childhood. A rivalry seemingly between conventional drugs and the remedies of a homeopath, but a rivalry between their present self-points of views in reality, shows itself in Teresa’s statements and Mary’s replies to them:

Teresa: Recipes. I recite recipes. It’s very soothing. I’ve tried meditation but my mind wanders. I think of all the phone calls I should be making instead of sitting there going ‘om’. Carbonnade of beef seems to work best. (p. 17)

Mary: You are a useless advertisement for the health food industry”

Teresa: Supplements. We do health supplements. Remedies. How many times do I have to tell you? You do this deliberately, you wilfully misinterpret what we do because you think it’s funny or something, and actually I’m getting bored with it. (p. 20).

It is apparent from the conversation that Teresa feels a kind of inferiority complex against her sister, which results from their childhood memories. For her, she is being humiliated by her sister, as she was in the past. Being a homeopath is not her own choice, as her mother did not support her to be a real doctor she was forced to be one to demonstrate that she can also be a kind of medic who can heal people through an alternative method. This is the only way for her to show that if she had been given enough chance in the past, she would be as successful or

even more successful than her sister, Mary. She feels herself more useful than Mary, at least for her mother, as she did everything possible to heal her: “I tried everything. I offered her all sorts of things. I wanted to take her to that herbalist in Whitby. She wouldn’t have any of it.” (p. 22). Teresa, contrary to Mary, feels at least guilty of leaving their mother alone on the day she died in the hospital but she tries to justify her action as most of the people do: “I’m not good at with hospitals, I had to get away. Everyone in her ward looked like they’d already died, everyone was pale grey with a catheter.” (p. 19). However, Mary tends to blame her mother for what happens throughout the play, as she is of the opinion, in her present self-point of view, that if her mother had not taken her new-born baby from her and given him to an unknown family. Her mother's death is also her own fault. With every word and gesture, she gives the impression of taking revenge for what happened in the past and happening at the moment. That is the reason, for Mary, why her mother is just like any patient she sees dying. Accordingly, she says to Teresa that “And I’m just saying people die. You can’t avoid it. Not even you” (p. 23). Teresa accuses both Mary and Catherine of being indifferent to their mother, “Well, you two managed to avoid it pretty comprehensively when it came to mum. Most of the time you weren’t even here”. That is a way of showing that she is more loyal to their family than the others. However, neither Mary nor Catherine feel guilty as they of the opinion that their mother has never deserved it. Catherine even thinks that her mother didn’t like her and her childhood was horrible (p. 23). Once more they have different memories about the same events they experienced together, just like their present self-points of views. It is very clear from especially Catherine’s statements that she believes that the reason of her present unhappiness is her childhood memories:

Catherine: She thought I was menopause.

Mary: Who told you that?

Catherine: She did. She had the cat put down without telling me. She shut me in a cupboard. She said it was an accident but it wasn’t.

Mary: When did she do all this?

Catherine: I never had the right shoes...exploding appendix... She made me stay in the shop after closing time and counting nails.

Mary: When I think of our childhood, we went on bike rides and it was always sunny.

- Teresa: Well, it was for you. You couldn't put a foot wrong.
- Catherine: When I think of it, it was always passing down. And what bike? I never had one. (p. 24)
- Catherine: The only time I went to the beach, it was with you and you left me there. You forgot me. You didn't remember till you got home and Mum said, 'Where is Catherine?'
- Teresa: That was Mary. She was too young, she was being a pain and showing off in Esperanto, so we ran away and left her. With no bus fare and the tide coming in.
- Catherine: It was me!
- Mary: No it wasn't. It was me.
- Catherine: So how come I remember it?
- Mary: Because I told you and you appropriated it because it fits. If it was horrible it must have happened to you. And she didn't have the cat put down, it just died. (p. 24)

Catherine tends to remember everything bad she experienced in her childhood but she does not remember any good experience. It seems sensible to assume that she is motivated to enhance current and recent former self-point of views, because those views and their associated outcomes are caused by her present identity. She believes that she has a brilliant memory to remember everything (p. 25) but for Mary it is not a blessing but a curse:

You would go mad if you remembered everything. What would be the point? Your head would burst. There's an illness actually, a sort of incontinent memory syndrome where you recall everything, absolutely everything, in hideous detail, and it's not a blessing, it's an affliction. There's no light and shade, no difference between the trivial and the vital, no editing system whatsoever. Actually Catherine, maybe you should come in for a few tests. (p. 25)

Almost all of the sisters believe that they were sent into the world badly equipped by their mother. She never tried to be a guide for her children in any field of life. For example, she never spoke to her daughters about sex and entering adolescence, and this is one of the outstanding reasons why Mary had a baby at the age of fourteen. Catherine emphasizes that they are orphans at the moment just as they were in their childhood. Though they physically had mother and father, about whom they never want to speak or remember, they were not different from the orphans who are obliged to cope with the difficulties of life all alone. Moreover, none of them has a child to learn what it is like to be a parent by experience. Though Mary, at the age of

fourteen, once had a child, she has never heard of him since she gave birth to him. That's why she is very obsessed with her amnesiac patient who cannot even remember his own name. The amnesiac patient is just like Mary's own son about whom she knows nothing and with whom she does not have any memory. However, Mary obsessively believes that he, the patient, can remember everything in the course of time. This is the only way for her to maintain her hopes for the future:

Mary: He can remember his own name actually.

Mike: Who?

Mary: That patient. It's coming back in bits. If you show him a bike, he can ride it. He can't remember what it's called that's all. (p. 37)

As it can easily be understood from the title of the play, the major theme of the play is memory and the metaphor of the water is closely related to homeopathic cures that Teresa is interested in as a profession. It depends on the theory that "the remedies are diluted to such a great degree, it is highly unlikely that even a single molecule of the original substance remains" (Lockie, 2006, p. 28), which means that, even if remedies may be based on very toxic substances, they are entirely harmless to use. "In the same way, the spirit of Vi, who turns out to be a very lively ghost indeed, stays in the psyches of her daughters" and highly affects their present self-points of views. What they remember about their past have been so intensely diluted by their memories that they can never agree on a single event related to their own childhood. As Wittman suggests "it's not that they interpret shared experiences differently; they can't even remember which one of them actually had the experience".

*Mary: If you take that phone to the funeral this time –*

*Teresa: Oh, go to sleep.*

*Mary sits up.*

*Mary: I'm surprised Dad didn't burst out of his coffin and punch you.*

*Teresa: I didn't know it was in my bag.*

*Mary: You could have turned it off. You didn't have to speak to them.*

*Teresa: I didn't speak to them.*

*Mary: You did. I heard you. You told them you were in a meeting.*

*Teresa: You're imagining this. This is a completely false memory.*

*Mary: All memories are false.*

*Teresa: Mine aren't.*

...

*Mary: Yours in particular.*

*Teresa: Oh, I see, mine are all false but yours aren't. (p. 8)*

*Mary: Can you feel nostalgia for something that never really existed? I remember growing up here. I remember nightlights and a doll's house. I can see them in my mind's eye. And I'm not sure we had either. I find myself aching, longing for it. This half imagined childhood.*

*Mike: You want to be a child again. Pause*

Mary: I want to go through it again. The light on the landing, the bedtime stories. Even though I know some of the memories aren't real. It's like I've hooked up to some bigger, general picture, and it feels so real I can taste it. *Pause*  
I think I'm pregnant. (p.39)

Teresa, who felt herself obliged to remain at home and cope with the harsh conditions of being with her mother while she was fighting with Alzheimer disease after Mary and Catherine escaped to London, doesn't wait much to get down to the business of picking over old wounds. She accuses of her sisters of both leaving her and their mother. She believes that she is the one who most deserves the affection of her mother, though Mary has taken her role in the family as the most precious one. She always hates the leading role Mary accomplished in her mother's affections, and careful clues are given about a dark secret to be revealed at the play's climax:

Teresa ... If it wasn't for me, nothing would ever get done. She'd be lying on the floor stoned out of her brains, you'd be having it off in our dead mother's bed and I'd be holding the fort – (p. 42-43)

Just like the first act, the second one begins with an interaction between Mary and her mother's ghost. Mary once more asks where the tin box with chrysanthemums on it is. It is very clear that that box with chrysanthemums has a special meaning for her because, according to Hall's *Illustrated Dictionary of Symbols in Eastern and Western Art* (1994) "especially chrysanthemums, express the hope that nine generations will live together in peace" (p. 39) in Chinese culture and "it may symbolize geniality, and a life of ease" (p. 143). That is why she wants to find something that means geniality, and a life of ease for her. It may be her connection with another generation, that is to say, her lost son. Possibly for that reason, the conversation once more centers on the patient Mary is obsessed with and all the books she has about this patient's illness. Though Mary wants her mother let her leave, she does not let her go and begins to give clues about their relationship as a mother and daughter from her self-point of view. In contrast to what Mary remembers, Vi claims that Mary and her sisters never really listened to Vi. Mary, in particular, humiliated her own mother calling her "my comedy mother, my stupid, bigoted, ignorant mother.

It is felt from Vi's expressions that she was also unhappy during her marriage and she longed for remembering the rare days when she felt herself happy.

Vi : I loved this dress. It was the only dress your father ever bought me.

*She begins to dance. It's slightly seductive and sensuous.*

Saturday nights I used to wear this. The men loved me, you know. Oh yes, All the men loved me. And I loved the men. I never cared for the women. I never liked them. Once I got my first bra I couldn't be doing with them anymore. (p. 52)

You lie in the bed with your lovers and you tell stories about me. None of them complimentary. Most of them complaining. None of them true. (p. 53)

The only person who felt herself left out in the family is not Vi or Catherine as we stated before, in some ways all of them are in the same mood. Another common point of them is that they prefer mentioning the father rarely and only when it is necessary because they do not have any happy memory related to him that is worth to remember. Their father, especially for Teresa, was just like a ghost who was not interested in what was going on around him, though Mary forces her to remember that there were also some good memories:

Teresa: Our father, Mike, hardly spoke at all during the forty-eight years he was married to our mother. D'you remember hearing him speak, Mary? D'you recall him ever uttering a word of encouragement, endearment? (p.64)

Teresa: And she wasn't even called Marjorie. D'you understand. [...]  
Our mother's name was Violet and she said, 'Pass the mustard, Marjorie'. I think that just about sums him up.

Mary: This is pure invention –

Teresa: How do you know? You weren't there. As usual. Never there in a crisis, not even your own. It's always me and Mum. [...] All those years she never said a word against him. Dad was always right; it was a perfect marriage. We've no secrets, she used to say. For heaven's sake. Who was she trying to kid? (p.65)

Teresa: She dyed her hair, d'you remember that? Dad didn't even notice. Didn't say a word. I mean, you could hardly miss it, it was a disaster, dogs ran away from her in the street –

Mary: He was being polite. He didn't want to hurt her.

Teresa: Stop putting a gloss on him, he didn't bloody care. We could have had three heads and he'd not have noticed. Our entire bloody lives spent making sure nothing ruffled his feathers. He used to laugh at the word stress. 'Stress,' he'd say, what a lot of rubbish'. He said he didn't know what it was. Of course he bloody didn't. We did it for him. We had the stress for him. (p.65)

Mary: Yeah, well, it was a long time ago, let's just –

Teresa: No, let's not, let's not just pretend it never happened.

Mary: Nothing happened.

Teresa: Bloody hell, how can you not notice that someone's eight months pregnant? (p.66)

When Mary finds the legal documents about her lost child in the tin box that she has been looking for since the beginning of the play, Teresa is forced to reveal the truth about Mary's

son, Patrick. Teresa reveals that Vi, their mother, found a lovely, Catholic family who brought him up in the faith while Mary got on with her true vocation of being the best at everything. After that event, it was forbidden to speak about the child as if he had never been born. They did not even tell anything to Catherine who is always complaining no one tells her anything, which supports Catherine's self-point or view that her family has always made her feel that she is an outcast in the family (p. 67). The mother attempted to erase even the memories about the little child just like the amnesic patient with whom Mary tries to cure. Though her mother did not let Mary have any memories about him, Mary is determined to create her own memories about him and she devotes her life either consciously or unconsciously to find him. Therefore, she tries to cure the amnesic patient and help him to remember his past. It is the way to create a connection with herself and her lost child. However, Teresa reveals that her son died and shatters Mary's dreams about a future with her son. Mary's feelings about her lost son reveal what he means for her, and how this event influenced her identity, self-point of view, and life:

I'm putting my name on a register, so that if he's looking for me, he'll find me. I don't even know what he looks like. I have to make him up. I sit on tubes looking at twenty-five year old boys, and I think, maybe that's him. Ever since he went I've been looking for him, but he's like ether, I can't get hold of him. (p.76)

[...] This will all be gone soon. All this furniture, all this stuff. The room I'll go probably. It will disappear into the sea. And this is all I want to take from the house. This is the only thing I want to salvage. So I can prove he's mine. (p.77)

At the end of the play when they really realize that their mother died and will never be with them again they accomplish to understand each other for the first time in their lives. As they never shared their thoughts and feelings openly with others, they never knew what the others felt. That's why every one of them believed that they were left out, forced to be an outcast in the family. Teresa is the one who clearly expresses her own feelings about the past and reveals the real source of the diversity of their memories:

I never knew how you felt. I never knew how you felt about anything. You thought your feelings were too rarefied to share with me. You cut me out. You looked straight through me. You shared nothing with me, not a joke, not a smile that wasn't patronising, you never let me in, you never let me know you. This stony punishment all these years, wanting me to be better than I am, always your mother, always responsible, always to blame. How could I apologise, when you wouldn't give me the room? (p.87)

## **Conclusion**

The play through the sisters show that we all see the world through the prism of our own experiences, and it questions how exactly this works in our lives. Clearly, each of them has different memories of the same events which unavoidably lead them to dispute about whose memories are true. As the three women come together after years of separation, numerous hidden lies and self-betrays come to the surface, and the sisters' memories - recalled as they are in all their inexactness, almost related to each other, and show that in spite of synchronicities of time and place the people involved in the incidents of the past cannot agree on the facts of a joined experience, on which their present identities depend. In other words, as Conway (2005) states, their identities are highly influenced from a "self-memory system", which has a two-way relation with self, and how a person recollects his/her past is greatly dependent on people's own perception about their identity. Memories change on the basis of modifications in self (Wilson & Ross, 2003).

The play also implies that extraordinary occasions that occur in one's lifetime can create a kind of post-traumatic anxiety response in which a man's life and personality are focused on one particular occasion. For instance, young mothers who lost their child are considered to have endured extraordinary injury which will most probably influence their future lives just as Mary's teenage pregnancy and the loss of her new-born child has been very important in the formation of her identity. Though she pretends to have forgotten her lost child and prefers not to mention it, it is very apparent that she has never forgotten it. That's why she devotes herself to cure a young patient who has been in coma for years. She associates her patient with her child whom she has never had a chance to take on her lap. As she doesn't want to remember her memories with her family and regards her mother as the reason of her child's loss, she creates some so-called reasons for not visiting her mother when she was hopelessly ill.

Mary: I've a very sick patient.

Teresa: You had a very sick mother.

Mary: Don't start, Teresa.

Teresa: Oh, she never complained. Because your job's important. I mean, doctors are second to God, whereas Frank and I only have a business to run, so obviously we could drop everything at a moment's notice.

Mary: It's not my fault.

The memory of this injury keep on haunting and shaping the personalities of mothers (Vi and Mary), demonstrating that their characters are revolved around their recollections, as well as particularly one memory (Abramovich, 2002). The exceptional idea of the memory makes a character that is totally formed around one specific event. The loss of her child is the reason of

a series of communication with her mother's ghost, as a result of which she debates memory and their relationship. Mary was forced to leave her child, Patrick, when she was only fourteen as we learn later in the play. That's why she focuses on an amnesiac coma patient supposing that he is her own son Patrick. To be able to awaken him means for her having a new relation with her own son. Thus, her life revolves around creating a memory of him, which she divests into a coma patient suffering from amnesia, which means she is not only treating the patient but also keeping her hope of finding her own child (imagining that he is Patrick). Moreover, if she can wake him, she can awaken her own son from their estrangement. In fact, Patrick is dead, but Teresa has hidden this news from her sister, as it seems it is the most argumentative matter for the family and its maintenance of family pride. That's why Mary is prone to forget some of her memory, because her memories related to her family and house remind her her lost child.

Mary: You'd go mad if you remembered everything. What would be the point? Your head would burst. There is an illness actually, a sort of incontinent memory syndrome, where you recall everything, absolutely everything, in hideous detail, and it's not a blessing, it's an affliction. (p. 25)

Catherine, who is the youngest of all, is like a child who refuses to be grown up as she was always regarded to be a naughty child. She has never been regarded as a real individual with her inner self, feelings and thoughts, and thus she continues to act like that. As she did not feel the affection of neither her parents nor her sisters in her childhood, she is obsessed with having lots of boyfriends all of whom abandon her. The result is her drug-fuelled insistence on never growing up.

In almost every scene of the play, the three sisters discuss and argue about the memories of their childhood and their mother, though they hardly ever are able to come to an agreement on them. However different their interpretations of their memories are, they are sisters and they can come over the problems only by listening to each other. When they are able to understand each other better, the blurry memories which are full of with unwanted bad events begin to be replaced by the happy moments they shared during their childhood. This is the beginning point of the formation of their real identities depending not on the false memories that they have created to fit in their present identity but on the real memories they now begin to remember.

Catherine: I didn't hate her really.

Mary: I know that. We all know that. She didn't hate you either. *Pause*

Catherine: D'you remember, when Dad was out sometimes, she used to get us up in the middle of the night and give us crisps and ice-cream soda.

Mary: And she'd have a Dubonnet and lemonade. God, I'd forgotten about that.

Teresa She called it a girls' night in.

Catherine We were all sleepy in our pyjamas, and she'd put on about that. (p.93)

The play shows us the two dangers of the unknown; memory loss which also means the loss of identity and death in literary and figurative sense. Each character has their own contradictory recollections of childhood in parallel with their identities and there is an unwilling recognition that memory is often overstated or ruined. The likelihood of losing all memory completely is also distressing as in the case of their mother who is Alzheimer and Mary's amnesic patient. Therefore, Mary asks "who are you if your memories are taken away?" (p. 87).

In a world where the chronological order of the events and the interconnections between them make us real individuals and our life meaningful, Alzheimer's gives the impression of being a modern horror story which can be equal to the fall of men. As Chalmers (2017) states, therefore, Stephenson journeys, with hilarity and identification, into the depressing and massive plains of an unexplored world to dissolve memory and identity. However large and imminent questions it can pose, the play also demonstrates that the sisters can cope with these fears with if they can interpret their memories in a healthy way and accept themselves and their sisters as they are.

In essence, the play forces us to suppose what it would be like to live being deprived of memory, maybe the best way of understanding its importance. Memory, which is an important factor in shaping most of our present identity, is critically related to holding up for comparison of present and past practices; "far from simply repeating an image of one's past, remembering represents a process of reflection upon it" (Whitehead, 2009). It shows that autobiographical or individual memory assumes a critical part in the formation of individual identity (Wilson & Ross, 2003). The individual self represents the most profound thoughts of one's idea of selfhood, which could possibly be spoken to the outside world. Individuals' available self-points of views, feelings, and goals affect their recollections and examinations of past selves. Thusly, individuals' present self-points of views are affected by what they recollect about their own past as well as how they review prior selves and scenes. Individuals' remade assessments of recollections, their apparent separation from past encounters, and the perspective of their memories have suggestions for how the present is affected by the past. The play demonstrates how individuals' developments of themselves through time serve the capacity of making a conscious and generally great perspective of their present selves and conditions. "When one thinks of his or her place in the

world, considers their past, plans for their future, they are in a process of identity formation or personal self-amendment” (LaPadula, 2012).

## References

- Abramovich, D. (2002). Post-Holocaust Identity and Unresolved Tension in Modern-day Israel:Savyon Liebrecht’s Apples from the Desert. *Women in Judaism*, 3(1), 1-13. Retrieved from *Women in Judaism: A multidisciplinary Journal*:  
<http://www.utoronto.ca/wjudaism/journal/spring2002/abramovich.html>
- Adler, A. (1956). *The individual psychology of Alfred Adler*. New York: Basic Books.
- Alea, N., & Bluck, S. (2003). Why are you telling me that? A conceptual model of the social function of autobiographical memory. *Memory*(11(2)), 165-178.
- Baddeley, A. D. (1999). *Essentials of Human Memory*. East Sussex: Psychology Press Ltd.
- BBC. (2005, 05 29). *The Memory of Water by Shelagh Stephenson*. Retrieved from BBC:  
[http://www.bbc.co.uk/oxford/content/articles/2005/09/13/memory\\_of\\_water.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/oxford/content/articles/2005/09/13/memory_of_water.shtml)
- Beike, D. R., Lampinen, J. M., & Douglas, A. (2004). Evolving Conceptions of the Self and Memory. In D. Beike, J. Lampinen, & D. Behrend, *The Self and Memory* (pp. 3-10). New York, Hove: Psychology Press.
- Bruner, J. (1994). The remembering self: Construction and accuracy in the selfnarrative. In U. Neisser, & R. Fivush (Eds.), *The “remembered” self* (pp. 41–54).
- Chalmers, R. (2017, 12 17). *The Memory of Water*. Retrieved from Blueprint:  
<https://blueprintzine.com/2017/12/17/the-memory-of-water/>
- Cohen, G., & Conway, M. (Eds.). (2008). *Memory in the Real World*. New York: Psychology Press.
- Conway, M. (2005). Memory and the self. *Journal of Memory and Language*(53), 594-628.
- Conway, M. A. (1990). *Autobiographical memory: An introduction*. . Milton Keynes: : Open University Press.
- Conway, M. A., & Pleydell-Pearce, C. W. (2000). The construction of autobiographical memories in the self memory system. *Psychological Review* 107 , 261-288.
- Epstein, S. (1973). The self-concept revisited or a theory of a theory. *American Psychologist*, 28, 405-416.
- Ernst, E. (2015, 3 12). There is no scientific case for homeopathy: the debate is over. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/mar/12/no-scientific-case-homeopathy-remedies-pharmacists-placebos>
- Freeman, M. (1993). *Rewriting the Self: History, Memory, Narrative*. London: Routledge.
- Greenwald, A. G. (1980). The Totalitarian Ego: Fabrication and revision of personal. *American Psychologist*(35), 603-618.
- Greenwald, A. G., & Banaji, M. (1989). The self as a memory system: Powerful, but ordinary. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*(57), 41-54.
- Hall, J. (1994). *Illustrated Dictionary of Symbols in Eastern and Western Art*. Colorado: Westview Press.
- Hershoff, A. (1999). *Homeopathic Remedies*. New York: Avery a member of Penguin Putnam Inc.

- Higgins, E. (1996). Shared reality in the self-system: 'The social nature of self-regulation. In W. Stroebe, & M. Hewstone (Eds.), *European review of social psychology* (pp. 1-30).
- Hirst, W. (1994). The remembered self in amnesiacs. In U. Neisser, & R. Fivush (Eds.), *The remembering self: Construction and accuracy in the self-narrative* (pp. 252-277). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Holstein, J. A. (2000). *The Self We Live By: Narrative Identity in a Postmodern World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Honess, T., & Yardley, K. (2005). Perspectives across the lifespan. In T. Honess, & K. Yardley (Eds.), *Self and identity Perspectives across the lifespan* (pp. 1-9). London and New York.
- Hyman Jr., I. E., & Neisser, U. (1992). The role of the self in recollections of a Seminar. *Narrative Inquiry* (27), 81-103.
- James, W. (1890). *Principles of Psychology*. New York: Holt.
- Kihlstrom, J. F. (1997). Consciousness and me-ness. In J. Cohen, & J. Schooler (Eds.), *Scientific approaches to consciousness* (pp. 451-468). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Kihlstrom, J., & Klein, S. (1994). The self as a knowledge structure. In R. Wyer, Jr., & T. Srull (Eds.), *Handbook of social cognition 2nd Edition*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- King, N. (2000). *Memory, Narrative, Identity*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Klein, S., & Kihlstrom, J. (1986). Elaboration, organization, and the self-reference effect in memory. *Journal of Experimental Psychology : General*, (115), 26-38.
- Kuiper, N., & Rogers, T. (1979). Encoding of personal information: Self-other differences. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 37, 499-514.
- LaPadula, B. (2012). Memory and Identity Formation: A Cognitive Construction of the Self in The Wanderer. *Hortulus Volume*, 8(1).
- Lockie, A. (2006). *Encyclopedia of Homeopathy*. London: DK.
- Lord, R. G., & Brown, D. J. (2004). *Leadership Processes and Follower Self-Identity*. London: LAWRENCE ERLBAUM ASSOCIATES PUBLISHERS.
- Marcia, J. (1980). Identity in adolescence. In J. Adelson (Ed.), (Ed.), *Handbook of adolescence psychology*; (pp. 159-187). New York: Wiley.
- Markus, H., & Kunda, Z. (1986). Stability and malleability of the self-concept. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*(51), 858-866.
- Markus, H., & Wurf, E. (1987). The dynamic self-concept. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 38, 299-337.
- Murray, S., Holmes, J., Dolderman, D., & Griffin, D. (2000). What the motivated mind sees: Comparing friends' perspectives to married partners' views of each other. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*(36), 600-620.
- Neisser, U. (1988). Five kinds of self-knowledge. *Philosophical Psychology*(1), 35-59.
- Oakes, M., & Hyman, I. (2001). The Role of the Self in False Memory Creation. *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma*, 87-103.
- Oyserman, D. (2004). Self-concept and Identity. In M. Brewer, & M. Hewstone (Eds.). Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.

- Pasupathi, M. (2003). Emotional regulation during social remembering: Differences between emotional elicited during an event and emotions elicited when talking about it. *Memory*(11), 151-163.
- Pillemer, D. (2003). Directive functions of autobiographical memory: The Guiding power of the specific episode. *Memory*(11(2)), 193–202.
- Rosenwald, G., & Ochberg, R. (Eds.). (1992). *Storied Lives: The Cultural Politics of Self Understanding*. Yale: Yale University Press.
- Rubin, D. C. (Ed.). (1986). *Autobiographical memory*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.
- Saskia Kunnen, E., Harke, A. B., van Halen, C., & van der Meule, M. (2005). A self-organizational approach to identity and emotions: An overview and implications. In H. Bosma, & E. Kunnen (Eds.), *Identity and Emotion: Development through Self-Organization* (pp. 202-230). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sheridan, K. (2017, 12 18). *Tech & Science*. Retrieved from Newsweek: <https://www.newsweek.com/what-homeopathy-fda-may-crack-down-potentially-dangerous-products-751499>
- Spence, D. P. (1982). *Narrative truth and historical truth: Meaning and interpretation in psychoanalysis*. New York: Norton.
- Stephenson, S. (2013). The Memory Of Water. In S. Stephenson, *Plays: 1* (pp. 1-96). London: Bloomsbury.
- Sutton, J. (1998). *Philosophy and Memory Traces*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Travers, A. (2017, 06 23). Review: ‘The Memory of Water’ at Thunder River Theatre. *Post Independent*. Retrieved from <https://www.postindependent.com/news/entertainment/review-the-memory-of-water-at-thunder-river-theatre/>
- Whitehead, A. (2009). *Memory*. New York: Routledge.
- Wilson, A., & Ross, M. (2003). The identity function of autobiographical memory: Time is on our side. *Memory*(11/2), 137-149.
- Wittman, J. (2013, 05 16). *The Memory of Water's plot and problems are never quite real...or original*. Retrieved from Westword: <https://www.westword.com/arts/free-and-cheap-things-to-do-in-denver-august-23-to-26-2018-10692529>