



DISLOCATION OF MEMORY IN UMBERTO ECO'S THE MYSTERIOUS FLAME OF QUEEN LOANA

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ABSTRACT

"Memory by its very nature involves the possibility of dislocating experience" (Casey, 182). The person, whose memory has been dislocated, goes in search of his past. While doing so he/she tries to live their life the second time. Some feel satisfied that they have known what they have forgotten, but some get depressed and overthink trying to make themselves remember what they find out. The former is common while the latter leads the person to great pressure and depression. Umberto Eco portrays this dislocation of memory in his novel *The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana*. A person's identity depends also on the choices he made. The dislocation of the protagonist's memory leads him into going in search of his personal identity. Personal identity can be analyzed through two approaches. One is through psychological continuity and the second is through physical continuity. When he lost his memory he lost only one approach in which he forgot his psychological self, but his physical memory stayed intact. Every work that involved physical activities were not lost. He could do his daily works like brushing, bathing, driving, etc. The things that he read were also stored in his memory. But everything that was based on his emotions was completely erased from his memory. This he tried to regain, but all in vain. He relived his life by trying to regain his memory. But what happened was, he relived his life, but never regained his memory.

KEYWORDS: Memory, Dislocation, Identity, Search.

INTRODUCTION

"Memory by its very nature involves the possibility of dislocating experience" (Casey, 182). The person, whose memory has been dislocated, goes in search of his past. While doing so he/she tries to live their life the second time. Some feel satisfied that they have known what they have forgotten, but some get depressed and overthink trying to make themselves remember what they find out. The former is common while the latter leads the person to great pressure and depression. Umberto Eco portrays this dislocation of memory in his novel *The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana*.

Umberto Eco, an Italian novelist, literary critic, philosopher, semiotician, and professor, is best known for his 1980 novel *Il nome della rosa*. It was translated into English in the name *The Name of the Rose*. *The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana* is one of Eco's famous works. The novel speaks about the sixty year old antique book shopkeeper, who has lost his memory. The reason for the memory



loss remains untold. The weird thing about the person's memory loss is that he remembers everything that he has read, but he remembers nothing of himself or his life. It is a story that has many threads intertwined.

The novel begins with sixty year old Bodoni in a hospital. He wakes up only to find out that he does not remember who he is. He has lost all his memory. He did not remember anything about himself, his past, his family or his life. His wife Paola introduced herself and her daughters and grandchildren to Bodoni. Bodoni did not remember anyone. They returned home. His wife told him about their life. He did not remember anything that his wife said. Paola was a psychologist. She understood his state. She did not want to put him to pressure. She gradually told him about his daily activities, his job, his books, his interests, etc. When Bodoni saw his books, he felt he was used to it. The books did not seem new to him.

We have different types of memory. One is called implicit, and it allows us to do with ease various things we've learned, like brushing our teeth, turning on the radio, or tying a tie. After the tooth brushing experiment, I'm willing to bet that you know how to write, perhaps even how to drive a car. When our implicit memory is assisting us, we're not even conscious of remembering, we act automatically. And then there's something called explicit memory, by which we remember we remember things and know we're remembering them. (Eco, 12)

Paola did not accompany him everywhere; rather she gave him directions and left him on his own. She gave him his space. Gradually Bodoni found out that his memory loss was not something usual. This was because he did not forget everything. He forgot only his memories of the past. He knew nothing about himself, his family or any incidents. But, he could remember his activities and most of all everything that he has read. This he understood when he came past his books. He was scanning them as if he has read it already. He remembered every single thing he has read. This seemed weird to him. Now he was keen on knowing his past. He wanted to know who he was and what sort of life he has lived. Paola suggested Bodoni to visit Solaro, his native. "Space and time obviously constitute the priori conditions of all experiences" (Kant). She knew that Amalia, his childhood neighbor and caretaker of their family farm would take care of Bodoni and meet to his needs. She wanted him to discover his lost self on his own. She was sure that it would be best only if he was left alone in Solaro.

Bodoni went to Solaro in search of his identity. Amalia was waiting for his arrival. His old country house seemed strange to him. Amalia cooked his meals. She helped him get comfortable with his house. She never disturbed him. She came into the house only to give him his food. The first day he didn't explore much. The next day he went around the house and examined its construction. He went into every room. He saw his grandfather's room, his father's room, the attic. He explored every room. He marveled at the things that he saw in his grandfather's room. Next he went into the attic. He wondered at the collection in the attic.

But this explicit memory is twofold. One part tends nowadays to be called semantic memory, or public memory-the one that tells us that swallow is a kind of bird, and that birds fly and have feathers, but also that Napoleon died in...wherever you said. And this type seems to be working fine in your case. Indeed, I might even say too well, since all I have to do is give you a single input and you begin stringing together memories that I would describe as scholastic, or else you fall back on stock phrases. (Eco, 12)

He curiously searched for his past in the attic, the input which was needed to form his memory string. He spent his days in the attic. Even when he left the attic he brought dozens of items with him. He read everything that he found in the attic. He searched for his childhood comics. He found them too. There was an entire collection of newspapers of his grandfather's age. He never left even a single page.

The entire search was made in order to know who he was. He wanted to know how his childhood was. He yearned to know in what situation he was brought up. He wanted to know his nation's history. The books he read seemed familiar to him. Nothing seemed new. When he finally read

all the books he understood that everything told him the same story. He searched through everything. The purpose of his search was not to find the things in the house, but to find himself. He tried to find his lost self in the things he found in his house. After finding many remarkable things in the attic, he found that the comics were missing. He searched everywhere, but he couldn't find even a single comic. He wondered how he could have ever passed his childhood without reading comics. The search for his comics led him into finding a secret room in his house. He asked Amalia about it. After a long hesitation Amalia told him the things that happened in their grandfather's period.

When he entered the room, he found his comics. He also found his school books. He read the stories written by him. The reason behind him writing such stories were unknown to him. He did not want to quickly judge his childhood. He wanted to know the reason that pushed him into writing such stories. He searched for newspapers that dated back to his school days. He simultaneously read his books and newspapers. He finally understood that he lived during the age of fascism. But still he was not able to understand fully about his past.

He was not able to find himself. He asked his childhood friend about his past. He never left any stone unturned. As days passed, he slowly learnt about his life through the books and newspapers he read. He tried to rebuild his past by writing down whatever he came across and what he learnt from others. At times when he did not remember anything, he thought that he was just trying to add to his paper memory. He was able to learn what happened from others, but nothing from his memory. He tried to think, but all in vain. He was not able to regain his memory. Paola thought that it would stress Bodoni. So, she thought it would be better for him to go to his country house. But after a few days she felt it was a bad idea, because he was overloading himself with his books. He tried to find his past through his books. This stressed him too much, for he remembered everything that he had read from those books but nothing other than that.

A person's identity depends also on the choices he made. Bodoni now started to find out what type of choices he made in his life. One such choice was his love Sibila. When he learnt of his love for Sibila from his friend, he tried hard to remember her face. But however he tried, he was not able to. This troubled him very much. He spent his days searching through his books to find out if something could remind him of her face. But nothing could help him remember her face. He tried very hard, but of no use. He tried hard to bring back to his memory the innocent face of his lover. He was hassled.

His search for himself led him into exploring his past, his native's background, his family, his educational background and his first love. No matter how hard he tried, he was not able to bring back her face. He tried to find his identity through her face. His aim of searching for his identity was diverted. But he felt that he could know himself through this diversion. He was confused as how could a person ever forget the face of his first love. But he never stopped worrying himself about his first love until he landed in a hospital due to stress. When he regained his consciousness in the hospital, he felt that the face of his love would be like every beautiful thing that he sees.

The dislocation of Bodoni's memory leads him into going in search of his personal identity. Personal identity can be analyzed through two approaches. One is through psychological continuity and the second is through physical continuity. When he lost his memory he lost only one approach in which he forgot his psychological self, but his physical memory stayed intact. Every work that involved physical activities were not lost. He could do his daily works like brushing, bathing, driving, etc. The things that he read were also stored in his memory. But everything that was based on his emotions was completely erased from his memory. This he tried to regain, but all in vain. He relived his life by trying to regain his memory. But what happened was, he relived his life, but never regained his memory. He tried hard to regain his memory or rather his identity by reliving his life. In the end he was satisfied with what he relived. He accepted the identity which he attained or gained through reliving his past.

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