

The Conflict between Past and Future: A Study of Rose Tremain's
The Road Home and *The Colour*

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One's memories or imaginations constitute his or her present life. In simple terms, the present is made up of the reaction to one's memories or imaginations. This research paper proves how the conflict between the past and the future constitutes one's present life by analyzing the major characters in *The Road Home* and in *The Colour*. Lev from *The Road*

Home and Joseph from *The Colour* are seeking asylum in the past in order to escape the painful present. However, Lev manages to escape from the past and climb the ladder of future. Finally, he becomes a successful entrepreneur in the present. But, Joseph lives in the past. He couldn't escape from the clutches of it till the end. He not only lives in the past but also plans to amend it in the future. Consequently, his present life is full of regrets and miseries.

Keywords: Memories, Regrets, Miseries, Successful Entrepreneur

Re-visiting the past and re-living the past are the two major psychological problems almost all fictitious characters suffer from. Though it is argued that novelists use this technique of shuttling between present, past and future to beat boredom, it actually shows the emotional evolution of an individual character. Rose Tremain's characters are also not an exemption to this. Some of his characters re-visit their past, whereas some of them re-live their past. It is imperative to know why they re-visit or re-live their past. Karen Ann Kennedy lists out the reasons that they (characters) prefer to live in the past because either it is familiar or it gives them comfort and happiness or both. She further attributes the absence of a plan for the future to this psychological problem. Aletheia Luna has mixed feelings about this problem. Though she terms reflecting on the past is quite normal, she is well aware of the fact that re-living the past consumes one's life. This is what happens in Joseph Blackstone's (*The Colour*) life. This sabotages and undermines Joseph's relationship with his loving wife, Harriet. However, Luna suggests that one can escape from the impact the past has on one's life by embracing the present. Lev from *The Road Home* revisits the past very often. But, embracing a future plan he escapes from the grips of it. "Stop even viewing yourself in those (old patterns -past) terms. Start living (present) out of your imagination (future), not your memory (past)" (117). Robin Sharma in his *Family Wisdom* advocates the idea of discarding the Past and embracing the Future for a peaceful and happy Present. In this backdrop, this research article attempts to

analyse the characters, Lev (*The Road Home*) and Joseph Blackstone (*The Colour*), by Rose Tremain and find if they could redeem themselves from their re-living or re-visiting their past.

The Road Home depicts Lev's transition from his obsession with the past to his vision of the future. It is evident as Lev smokes cigarettes at the beginning of the story but he discards his cigarette at the end. In Rose Tremain's perspective cigarettes are old memories since her protagonist thinks of "... certain significant cigarettes of the past" (6). Things like flowers and birds bring his past life to his view. The death of his wife, Marina, follows him like a shadow. In fact, his journey to England in search of a job is a self-imposed exile or an escape from his disturbing past.

In *The Road Home*, the chapter titled "Flooding Backwards" informs the readers that how much Lev is engrossed in the past. In other words, it reinforces the fact that how Lev lets his past leads his present. Lydia, his friend, gives him *Hamlet* as a Christmas gift knowing him that he is "... still haunted by his father, by his old life at the mill, by Marina. And now haunted by yet other things: by the kitchen at GK Ashe, by the black trees outside the windows of Sophia's flat, by the flare of happiness that had lit up a pathway and then gone out ... (237)." Here, Rose Tremain believes that Lev is preoccupied with his past like Hamlet.

Lev knows that he is sick of his addiction to his past. The bag he carries throughout his journey is a metaphor of his reminiscing on the life he lived in his native village with his loved ones. He could not leave the bag behind. If he tries to put it down, the vodka bottles – memories - would disturb him by clanking. In an attempt to free himself from the grip of the 'black thoughts,' (Past) he "... wants to be carried away on some dark side of sleep to become invisible even to himself (202)." He tries to empty his mind but again past scenes appear on it. When Vitas, Lev's colleague, talks about his future, "I want to be *something* (251)." Lev realises that he hasn't imagined what he wants to become in his life. Vitas' words work like a catalyst. This is the point of time where Lev starts thinking about his future. He hasn't known the fact that

one can tide over the floods of memories by having a future plan. He resolves "...to make, to find a future for himself and his family (258-259)," whenever he feels optimistic.

The upcoming dam construction in Auror, Lev's native in France, is a blessing in disguise for two reasons: it somehow erases his past associations with the village and forces him to look forward to the future because the dam would submerge the village. At this juncture, Lydia comes to his rescue helping him to see the future. She suggests that he should move the authorities to get a flat allotted for his family in Baryn which is going to become a city with new businesses, parks, shops and cafes. His Great Idea is born now: to start a restaurant in Baryn to give quality and delicious food to the people. He even gives it a name: *Marina Restaurant*.

Lev works very hard and reduces his expenses for generating a lump sum of money in order to make his future happen. He approaches the Central Office of Planning for financial support and seeks help from Lydia, his friend and well-wisher. But, everything is in vain. Despite futile attempts, he continues to raise fund for his dream project saying the future "... pitches you (me) down roads you'd (I'd) never normally take (301)." Eventually, battling all odds, he manages to open a restaurant. He attributes his success to the future saying, "Dreams are what's got me by (348)."

When the labourers are about to bolt the silver letters, *Marina*, to the wall, Lev changes his mind and asks them not to do so. Rudi, Lev's friend, is confused because he knows Lev's plan to name the restaurant *Marina* ever since the conception of the Great Idea. Therefore, he accuses Lev of betraying *Marina*, the brand name. But, Lev says, "I'm trying not to betray my future (359)," and he further adds that "I need to move forward, not back." Through his words, it is crystal clear that towards the end of the novel Lev doesn't even want any residue of the past even in the name of the restaurant. That is why he changes the name, *Marina*, because it

will pull him back to the past gain. Thus, he emerges to be a successful person at the present beating the past and looking forward into the future.

Likewise, Joseph Blackstone from *The Colour* suffers from the past associations back in England. Owing to the pre-marital sex with Joseph, Rebecca - a young girl belonging to the same village – got pregnant and forced him to marry her. Joseph being allergic to love and children plotted to abort her child bribing Dillane, the local veterinary doctor. But, in that attempt, Rebecca died of infection. This makes Joseph guilty of her death. To escape from the guilt of a crime, he goes to New Zealand with his family: Lilian, his mother and Harriet, his wife. He promises the two of them a prosperous life saying, “We will not cling to familiar ways. We will imagine ourselves reborn over there. On the acres I am buying, everything will begin afresh. (16).” Joseph tries to fill his days with proactive thoughts and transfer them to his wife too but he plunges into the pit of the past as days progress. It is evident in the words of the author:

Joseph Blackstone longed to do something that would please his mother. Something definitive. Something which would undo all that he'd done wrongly or inadequately in the past. He thought that if he could achieve this, then he would rest. He didn't know precisely what he meant by rest. (55)

This is where Lev is different from Joseph. Lev is aware of the fact that he suffers from the tormenting past. Lydia and others redeem him from his past. But, Joseph wants something in the present to mend his past to free himself from the guilt consciousness. He wants to dig gold and to become rich at once. Using the money, he thinks of helping Rebecca's family and thus getting rid of the guilt, “And then I will be free from guilt. Then I will have made amends. Then I will have done enough (126).”

He is crying now not only for the crime he committed in the past but also for the love, Rebecca, he lost. But it is too late. Rebecca is no more. Harriet is here in her place at present.

Joseph fails to see this. He has only regrets and he re-lives the past. As a result, he loses her love too over a period of time. Finally, Joseph is seen as a victim of his own dwelling in the past losing all his loved ones and seeking asylum from a toy house.

Lev lets Lydia redeem him from the grip of the past. But, Joseph doesn't allow anyone to come near him emotionally. Harriet could have rescued him from his regrets and miseries if only Joseph trusted her. But, he doesn't do so. Perhaps, his regrets may give him comfort and happiness.

When the novel begins, Lev's addiction to the past fills his present. As it progresses towards the end, Lev imagines and strives hard to become an entrepreneur in the future, Therefore, his future full of plans constitute his present. On the other hand, Joseph, in *The Colour*, lets his memories rule his present. His present is no longer pleasant as his mother and wife suffer a lot from his obsession with the past. Thus, both Lev and Joseph live throughout the novel by tackling the push and pull between the past and the future.

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