CHAPTER III
MEMORY, NARRATIVE, IDENTITY
This chapter shall attempt to concentrate upon the interconnection of memory, narrative and identity and how these concepts enable Ishiguro’s protagonists to reorder their past. In his discourse Ishiguro vividly portrays how memory and narrative are the windows through which individuals are able to understand and are understood by others. He also explicitly denotes that the narrative is absolutely dependent on the memory of the narrator. It is made of memories, it discloses memories, it creates memories, and it brings back memories. His works shows that without the ability to remember past experiences, there is no life story to be created. His narrators use memories to relate the present to their past, to understand the world around them, and to create an interpretation of both themselves and others that utilizes their experience and knowledge. Herbert Hirsch in *Genocide and the Politics of Memory* writes:

> As an individual reconstructs his or her biography through memory, that biography becomes the basis for identity.\(^1\)

Indeed, he asserts:

> The connection between memory and identity is dialectical because memory both shapes the content of what is communicated by the socialization process and is formed by that process. Ultimately, the self does not develop in a vacuum.\(^2\)

Similarly, Ishiguro’s works exude that consistency of consciousness and a sense of continuity between the actions and events of the past, and the experience of the present are integral to a sense of personal identity. It is commonly accepted that identity, or a sense of self, is constructed by and through narrative: the stories that one tells about oneself and relates it to other about one’s lives. However, it is not only the content of memories, experiences and stories which
construct a sense of identity. The concept of identity which is constructed in narratives is also
dependent upon assumptions about the function and process of memory and the kind of access it
gives to the past. In essence, memory is the fundamental force behind identity formation and
self-understanding. Without memories, Ishiguro’s character would not know how they came to
be, what they like or dislike, or why they think and feel a certain way in response to a certain
situation. It is with the help of their memories of specific life events that they have cohesive
understanding of their life course. Their identity is essentially created out of personal memories
as well as their narratives. Memory is at the core of constructivism, the active construction of
reality by individual through the use of mental activity and the central protagonists in Ishiguro’s
novels actively construct their identity from memories and narratives. However, identity is not as
transparent or unproblematic as it is often thought. Stuart Hall explains:

Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, …
we should think instead, of identity as a ‘production’, which is never
complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside,
representation.

Jerome Bruner’s work is concerned with how individuals narrate or tell their ‘self-
stories’. A self-confessed constructivist, Bruner believes that ‘world making’ is the principle
function of the mind and that the self is a construction, a result of action and symbolization. He
writes:

Think of Self as a text about how one is situated with respect to others and
towards the world – a canonical text about powers and skills and
dispositions that change as one’s situation changes from young to old,
from one kind of setting to another. The interpretation of this text *in situ*
by an individual *is* his sense of self in that situation.\(^5\)

The idea that the “self is perpetually rewritten story”\(^6\) is shared by Kazuo Ishiguro. The characters in his novels find themselves in a position where they seek to overcome their loss and try to establish a coherent identity by exploring the self. They desperately seek a stem by which to anchor themselves. For instance, Etsuko’s account in *A Pale View of Hills* can be viewed as the result of her desperate struggle to establish for herself meaningful reasons and causes for her current position. She is driven by a need “to bring a certain distinctness”\(^7\) to her existence, to order the events of her life and to infuse them with significance. As she recalls her past, she strives to structure and to organize it through her memory and narrative, in order to identify patterns and consistencies by which to grant her life a sense of identity. In *An Artist of the Floating World*, Ono’s memory and narration are motivated by the need to establish for himself a sense of continuing significance, a coherent identity. As he embarks upon his narrative and memory, Ono finds himself standing upon:

> The little wooden bridge still referred to … as ‘the Bridge of Hesitation’.\(^8\)

Stevens, in *The Remains of the Day*, purely a faithful butler is threatened by the prospect that, like Ishiguro’s earlier narrators, he has lived without significance or lasting impact. As he embarks on his journey across England, Stevens feel as though he is “speeding off … into wilderness” and he finds himself precariously “perched on the side of a hill”, peering through the “thick foliage” that impedes his vision hoping to obtain clearer view.\(^9\) For Stevens, as for Etsuko and Ono, this clarity of vision comes as he stand on a high mountain ledge, looking out over miles of the surrounding countryside. In undertaking this journey, Stevens retraces the path of his
past with his memory and attempt to reorder his past with the identity he strived to achieve – the identity of a ‘great butler’. In *When We Were Orphans* and *Never Let Me Go*, Christopher Banks and Kathy H. narrate their childhood memories in order to understand their sense of alienation in their present condition which further leads them to identity crisis. In narrating their memories, they are attempting to establish their own identity and to come to terms with their present life.

In *The Past is a Foreign Country*, Lowenthal emphasizes that remembering the past is crucial for the sense of identity that:

> to know what we were confirms that we are. Self-continuity depends wholly on memory; recalling past experiences links us with our earlier selves, however different we may since have become.\(^\text{10}\)

In this way, the ability to recall and identify with the past gives existence meaning, purpose and value. Ishiguro’s narrators construct their identities from the knowledge that they acquire about their past and this allows them to understand their present existence because as Lowenthal opines:

> Those who bring more of their past into their present thereby both confirm their own identity and enrich the present with the past’s amplified residues.\(^\text{11}\)

For Ishiguro’s narrators, their narration, the stories that they tell about themselves contribute to their construction of the reality of the world they inhabit. This is because, as Stephen Marcus in “Freud and Dora: Story, History, Case-History” states that human life is ideally:
A connected and coherent story, with all the details in explanatory order and with everything … accounted for, in its proper causal or other sequence.\textsuperscript{12}

Ishiguro’s discourses raises key issues about the function of memory and the ways in which it is reconstructed in narrative and implicated in notions of self-identity – an identity which is rehearsed again and again in a narrative which attempts to recover the self who existed ‘before’. The experience of Ishiguro’s narrator gives an acute example of the fact that much human experience or action takes place under the mark of ‘what wasn’t known then’\textsuperscript{13}: what is remembered are events that took place in a kind of innocence. This model is suggested by Freud’s reference to the ‘retranscription’ of memories and the structural principle of \textit{Nachtraglichkeit}. \textit{Nachtraglichkeit} is a word repeatedly used by Freud but never developed by him into a consistent theory. It has been translated by Jean Laplanche as ‘afterwardness’. This concept makes it clear that because memory operates as it does in the present, it must unavoidably include the awareness of ‘what wasn’t known then’. As Lowenthal states:

We interpret the ongoing present while having to live through it, whereas we stand outside the past and view its finished operation, including its now known consequences for whatever was then the future.\textsuperscript{14}

\textit{Nachtraglichkeit} has subsequently been developed by Andrew Benjamin and Peter Nicholls into a tool for the analysis of narrative and its relation to the past. Nicholls suggests that:

To remember is … not simply to restore a forgotten link or moment of experience, nor is it unproblematically to ‘reposses’ or re-enact what has been lost.\textsuperscript{15}
Therefore the concept of Nachtraglichkeit questions the belief that the past can be recovered as it was and unproblematically reunites the past and the present selves. Freud was, of course for the most part interested in memories of trauma (real or fantasies) which interrupt the ‘normal’ functioning of memory and generate hysterical or other pathological indicators, and the models of archaeological excavation and of Nachtraglichkeit were both developed to deal with the occurrence of repressed or traumatic memory. Much work on memory has also focused on trauma as “producing a history of the modern subject as a history of implication. This subject is recognized by its inexplicable ties to what cannot be experienced or subjectivised fully”.16 Freud also investigated the ordinary or non-pathological processes of screen-memory, fantasy, forgetting and remembering in ways which recognize the complex unconscious processes by which an individual remember or forget, and which problematise the idea of any uncomplicated chronological relation connecting the past and present in human experience. Freud wrote to Wilhelm Fliess:

I am working on the assumption that our psychic mechanism has come into being by a process of stratification: the material present in the form of memory traces being subjected from time to time to a rearrangement in accordance with fresh circumstances – to a retranscription. Thus what is essentially new about my theory is the thesis that memory is present not once but several times over, that it is laid down to various kinds of indications.17

Laplanche and Pontalis suggest that this description can be integrated into the process of Nachtraglichkeit. If the ‘fresh circumstances’ according to which memories are ‘retranscribed’ are taken to be the actual new circumstances of the life of the subject, as well as those
circumstances in which the proceedings of the past are remembered (as in Ishiguro’s fiction), this develops into a useful model for memory, and one which is close to the configuration and effect of narrative itself. It also implies that the creation of the self is a conditional and unremitting process, rather than the ‘recovery’ of an ‘original’ identity. Laplanche and Pontalis explain it thus:

Experiences, impressions and memory-traces may be revised at a later date to fit in with fresh circumstances or to fit in with a new stage of development. They may in that event be endowed not only with the new meaning but also with psychical effectiveness … It is not lived experience in general which undergoes a deferred revision but, specifically, whatever it has been impossible in the first instance to incorporate fully into a meaningful context. The traumatic event is the epitome of all such unassimilated experience.\(^\text{18}\)

Nicola King also asserts:

The paradoxical ‘knowing’ and ‘not knowing’ is the position of any autobiographical narrator, who, in the present moment of narration, possesses the knowledge that she did not have ‘then’ in the moment of experience.\(^\text{19}\)

Similarly, Ishiguro also acknowledged that individuals often lacked a perspective to see beyond their environment and to stand outside the actual values of their time. In discussing his second novel, *An Artist of the Floating World*, Ishiguro opines:
The book is largely about the inability of normal human beings to see beyond their immediate surroundings, and because of this, one is at the mercy of what this world immediately around one proclaims itself to be.\textsuperscript{20}

Due to the lack of perspective to see beyond his environment, Ono, a painter who rose to fame during Japan’s heights of military nationalism in the 1930s, has to reorder his past in order to come to terms with that period, or as he puts it: “with the mistakes one has made in the course of one’s life”.\textsuperscript{21} Ishiguro explains that he wanted to construct a character who was really no longer a part of the present world in which he found himself. Ono has made a decision to support national imperialism when it was already gaining ground and reveals that he is blind to the perspective in which the younger generation now regards him. As he represents the events of his past, however, Ono is forced to embellish the details of his actions and utterances in order to prove that one rests on an unwavering adherence to honorable principles. Overlooking the inaccuracies and hypocrisies that result from his doing so, Ono, in the first section of the narrative works to confirm that an examination of his past will reveal only that which is admirable. But as the narrative progresses, it is revealed that his actions severely challenges the notion that Ono’s career deserves vindication and instead indicates that it was purely “a negative influence, an influence now best erased and forgotten”\textsuperscript{22}. Subsequently, Ono replaces the absolute worthiness of his past deeds depicted in his narration with an absolute acceptance of their deplorability. He suddenly announces that he is prepared freely to admit he made mistakes that much of what he did was ultimately harmful to the Japanese nation and that his was part of an influence that resulted in untold suffering for Japanese people.\textsuperscript{23} Unable to ignore that the world now condemned his past deeds, Ono suddenly finds it to his advantage to admit to having committed great wrongs. Ono, now therefore centered on an active acceptance of responsibility
of his past deeds, an acknowledgement that his decisions were ill-founded, but with the insistence that, although he had since been proven wrong, at the time, he acted in good faith and believed in all sincerity that he was achieving good for his countrymen.\textsuperscript{24} The narrator strives to structure and present this new reading of his past as noble, while asserting that there is certainly a satisfaction and dignity to be gained in coming to terms with the mistakes that one had made in the course of one’s life particularly when such mistakes were made in the best of faith.\textsuperscript{25} He denotes:

I am not too proud to see that I was a man of some influence who used that influence towards a disastrous end.\textsuperscript{26}

If the events of his life and particularly his participation in the imperialist movement have been merely contingent rather than deliberate and determined, Ono might have unthinkingly participated in a disastrous, destructive campaign. Through his narrative, Ono has striven to establish that he in fact possesses a distinguished, lasting and well defined identity. In reordering and newly composing his past, Ono has hoped to extract from the dark corridors, from the blurred sensations, the merging lantern – lit images and echoing sounds, a sense of identity and clarity, concrete evidence that he has achieved something of real value and distinction in his life.\textsuperscript{27}

However, the scattered unconnected events of Ono’s past never were linked together in a coherent web of significance, or bound within a dark outline. The identity that Ono constructs for himself within his narrative, the identity in which his past has made a significant mark that will not fade, are like his paintings, insular divorced from that very outside world on which he hopes to have had an impact, and which he claims to portray. Ishiguro observes that Ono’s story is
about ‘the need to follow leaders and the need to exercise power over subordinates, as a sort of motor by which society operates’, and that the novel “might be look at it not as a Japanese phenomenon but as a human phenomenon”.28 Denial of a painful version of one’s past amounts to the kind of effacement that philosopher Walter Benjamin describes as an inherently dangerous one for evolving societies: for one “to articulate the past historically” does not mean to recognize it the “way it really was” and that “for every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns the past threatens to disappear irretreivably”.29 Ono’s erasure of the stains of his past leave indelible traces however, and his narrative portrays that the reconstruction of his inglorious past has helped in understanding the events of his life. As Maurice Blanchot states:

In order either to confess or to engage in self analysis, or in order to expose oneself…to the gaze of all, is perhaps to seek to survive, but through a perpetual suicide.30

At the end of his narrative, Ono is able to express a “genuine gladness” with regard to the disappearance of his world and the rebuilding of his city.31 His memory and narratives enable him to reorder the events of his life into a meaningful one and helps him in accepting his life and his identity with all its flaws and failures.

Uniformity of consciousness and an awareness of connection between the actions and events of the past, and the experience of the present, are fundamental to a sense of individuality. Self continuity or a sense of identity is composed by and through narrative and memory, the stories that an individual tell about himself to others about his lives. As Daniel Dennett states:
We are almost constantly engaged in presenting ourselves to others, and to ourselves, and hence representing ourselves – in language and gesture, external and internal … Our human environment contains not just food and shelter, enemies to fight or flee, and conspecifics with whom to mate, but words, words, words. These words are potent elements of our environment that we readily incorporate, ingesting and extruding them, weaving them like spider webs into self protective strings of narrative. Indeed … when we let in these words, these meme-vehicles, they tend to take over, creating us out of the raw materials they find in our brains.\textsuperscript{32}

Ishiguro also develops his broad concerns for the way in which people seek truth in their lives, but who then find multiple ways of dismantling access to it, because of the painfulness of truth itself. Provocatively through the concealment of pain, the narrators also reveal their fear of revelation and knowledge of their lives; memory is both expiation and condemnation for those who begin a narrative act of leading to self-awareness. \textit{The Remains of the Day} projects the memory of Stevens who tries to reorder the narrative of his past. His memory becomes an elegy for a gracious way of life that is no more, and the narrative of a human life which is unweaving under one’s eye. Deborah Gurth states that a memory is a complete dynamic; it resurrects the past imaginatively in order to construct its meaning.\textsuperscript{33} This is how the novel presents itself at first, as a testimony to a stately way of life on the wave and an attempt on Stevens’ part to present his achievements as butler to Lord Darlington. As Mark Freeman astutely opines that human beings continuously need to be able to re-evaluate past experiences in the context of the present, so that they then can figure and refigure themselves and their world anew in reverse.\textsuperscript{34}
Stevens, in exploring his own past, is trying to justify and progressively undermines the basis as well as the purpose of his life.

When the prologue opens in July 1956, Darlington Hall has recently been sold out of the hands of the Darlington family after two centuries, and after 35 years of service to Lord Darlington, Stevens finds himself in the employ of the American Mr Farraday, who told Stevens to undertake an expedition across England. Stevens nonetheless asserts that, although he has never ventured beyond the walls that enclose his life, he has in fact encountered the best of England and even the best of the world, which, he argues, has infiltrated the structure that divorces him from the world, rendering his own transcendence of his confines unnecessary. He is thus gravely apprehensive with regard to his journey. On the morning of his setting out, he delays his departure so long, wandering around the house many times over, checking one last time that all is in order. He is aware that, once he leaves, Darlington Hall will stand empty for perhaps the first time this century “an odd feeling” that he uses to explain his reluctance to leave. As he drives away from the house, however, and the “surroundings grow unrecognizable”, Stevens’ hesitancy swells to a sense of “alarm” stemming from the knowledge that he has “gone beyond all previous boundaries”. In leaving Darlington Hall behind, Stevens has, in effect, step outside the bounds of his own identity. The identity that Stevens has painstakingly constructed for himself stand empty for the first time in his career, ready to be examined from a frighteningly unfamiliar, outside perspective; his journey across England will be a journey as well into his own identity and examination of his past. In returning to his memory and in creating his narrative, Stevens attempt to understand his life, as:

Narrative, like interpretation itself, is an unsurpassable feature of what we now think of as human understanding.
At one level, Stevens’ present journey to the West Country may be read as an attempt to rectify failure to connect meaningfully with Miss Kenton, who seems now to tell him something about himself as she is describing her own life: “I have no idea how I shall usefully fill the remainder of my life …” and that the “rest of my life stretches out as an emptiness before me”, he could well be identifying a condition of his own existence. This prospect seems to bear itself out at the end of the novel when he realizes or perhaps has felt all along that he had misinterpreted her desires to return to Darlington Hall and that, indeed, she has found ways both to understand and to accept the somewhat unsatisfying terms of her own life. Jonathan Culler observes that such self-rectifying occurs:

By subjecting language to a dislocation which fragments the ordinary signs of our world…and challenges the limits we set to the self as a device or order and allows us, painfully or joyfully, to accept to an expansion of self.39

If Stevens is both above and within the narration he describes, he is also limited to a particular set of experiences from which he can draw; by “dislocating” the meaning of selected past events, he is able to discover – with great pain or joy – further possibilities of their meaning.40 How Stevens “expands” himself – either by enlarging his awareness or by reasserting the validity of his narrow vision – becomes an interesting focus of his narration because the vision is also very contradictory. Ishiguro comments on his deliberate attempt to reveal Stevens’ false expansion of self, and the author frames it in terms of Stevens’ unknowing relationship to the metaphor he creates:
When Stevens says that [the greatness of Britain paradoxically comes from ‘the lack of obvious drama or spectacle that sets the beauty of our land apart’] he is also saying something about himself. He thinks beauty and greatness lie in being able to this kind of cold, frozen, butler who isn’t demonstrative and who hides emotion in much the way he’s saying that the Britain landscape does with its surface clam: the ability to actually keep down turmoil and emotion. He thinks this is what gives both butlers and the British landscape beauty and dignity. And, of course, that viewpoint is the one that actually crumbles during the course of Stevens’ journey.⁴¹

At another level of the narrative, then, Stevens’ physical journey represents actual departure from the estate that has kept him focused and confined not only to his sense of duty, but also to a possible mental and emotional “expansion of self”. Most people conduct daily business with an attention to past, present, and future events, for these temporal dimensions connect one’s sense of identity through times of changes and development. However, Stevens’ mental journey to the past and his anticipation of the immediate, more physical future show that Stevens may be suppressing the past with greater awareness than he lets on. If he had hoped to dissociate himself from past affairs, those suppressed events now return with a vengeance to his consciousness. Even allowing for a failed memory, Stevens cannot quite conceal the fact that he continues to be torn by choices he made in the past. Yet, as Stevens moves closer to and appears surprised by revelation, he devalues such benefit of hindsight, dismissing the fact that when “one begins to search one’s past for such ‘turning points’, one is apt to start seeing them everywhere”.⁴² Part confession, part discovery, and part disavowal about himself in the various
contexts, Stevens’ story manifests his ardent desire to explain matters from his uniquely estranged perspective in order to establish a coherent identity. A majority of Stevens’ narrative, therefore, emerges as explanation or interpretation. As the novel progresses, a more discernible tone emerges, and it becomes possible to read his story as a defense against ideals which even he now considers outmoded and in error. He is attempting to rework the lies that founded his life, but his efforts grow more transparent and his failure to produce an acceptable version of matters catches up with him. Miss Kenton assures Stevens that her life with a husband, a daughter, and a prospect of a grandchild “does not stretch out emptily before her”. For Stevens, on the other hand, the future holds nothing to which he can look forward; he can hope only for “work, work and more work” to fill the emptiness. When the artifice is thus torn from Stevens’ account by Miss Kenton, revealing the emptiness of both his life and his narrative, the butler does not “respond immediately, for it takes a moment or two to fully digest” the truth. The narrator, similarly, takes a moment to compose himself, to structure a reply that will restore his dignity.

Stevens finally admits that he “has tried, but it’s no use”. He has “given what he had to give”, and yet his life proves to have been lasting significance or meaning; the efforts he has made throughout his life, and the efforts he has made throughout his narrative, to construct a satisfying identity have failed. Ultimately, however, Stevens refuses to surrender his illusions and works to reinforce the fortress of his narrative and the structure it provides his reexamined past, to recover by the end of his excursion the jewel he has been seeking. During the pause in his narration, Stevens manages once again to suppress his personal being. The narrator now flatly relates that, at the moment of his conversation with Miss Kenton, “his heart was breaking”. Caught between the emptiness of his past and the emptiness of his future, Stevens is compelled to grasp after a new structure that will finally allow him to settle upon a sense of validation for
the one and a sense of hope for the other. Finally Stevens asserts that there is no “point in worrying oneself too much about what one could or could not have done to control the course one’s life took.” With the help of his memory and narrative, Stevens “cease looking back so much” at the end and concentrate instead on “what remains of [his] day”.

The narrative reconstruction (which is done through memory) of life history provides the opportunity for a rereading of those events which, as described by John Forrester “would have been recognized as a purpose and would have determined the action, had it been anticipated. Analysis [including self analysis] seeks those intentions which would have been determinate of the good fortune, or misfortune, of the subject had they been recognized as such.” For example, the autobiographical narratives of Ishiguro’s fiction recreate the events of a life under the mark of ‘what wasn’t known then’ accentuating events which are now, with retrospection, seen to be important. Paul Ricoeur argues that the reconstruction of narrative – in itself the ‘retroactive realignment of the past’ – in the act of reading disrupts the common sense notion of time:

As soon as a story is well known, to follow the story is not so much to enclose its surprises or discoveries within our recognition of the meaning attached to the story, as to apprehend the episodes which are themselves well known as leading to this end. Finally, the repetition of the story, governed as a whole by its way of ending, constitutes an alternative to the representation of time as flowing from the past towards the future, following the well-known metaphor of the ‘arrow of time’. It is as though recollection inverted the so-called ‘natural’ order of time. In reading the ending in the beginning and the beginning in the ending, we also learn to
read time itself backwards, as the recapitulation of the initial conditions of a course of action in its terminal consequences.\(^{51}\)

Ishiguro’s novels also make this process of retroaction explicit. For example, in *A Pale View of Hills*, Etsuko construct her personal story using two distinct temporal orders, what Genette terms prolepsis (anticipation) and analepsis (flash-back).\(^{52}\) Against the backdrop of Nagasaki’s reconstruction in the late forties, Etsuko in England in the early eighties returns to two past – her own during the reconstruction and an earlier past remembered by others in this same period – in order to clarify the meaning of two futures: the “present” when she undertakes the narrative task and time beyond. When Etsuko narrate the tragic tale of her daughter’s suicide, the ‘madness’ of Keiko’s act is subtly linked to the memory of her own self. In one brief scene with her father-in-law, Etsuko refers to herself as once being ‘a mad girl’ and asks Ogata-San, “What was I like in those days, Father? Was I like a mad person?”\(^{53}\) Ogata’s response, “We were all shocked, all of us who were left”,\(^ {54}\) alludes to the historical moment which would have produced Etsuko’s ‘madness’ in a way that not only validates Etsuko’s memory of herself but which also attributes a similar pain to others who remain. Ogata-San’s words are both consoling and disrupting and his assessment establishes a relationship between Etsuko’s past and present. Etsuko’s own admission of madness also attests to an understanding of self that requires another person to either validate or challenge; she seeks a lucid witness and Ogata-San’s assessment propels Etsuko toward this understanding. His perspective, like those of other principal character in her past, serves to either mirror or deflect what she herself attempts to recollect. Etsuko reconstruct her identity from the mirrors of the past and from her interactions with other people, although what is reflected back to her may or may not coincide with her eventual understanding of the past. This marks what Maurice Blanchot calls a principle of incompleteness in telling:
A human being, insufficient as it is, does not attempt to associate itself with another being to make up a substance of integrity. The awareness of the insufficiency arises from the fact that it puts itself in question, which question needs the other or another to be enacted. Left on its own, a being closes itself, falls asleep and calms down. A being is either alone or knows itself to be alone only when it is not.55

Etsuko’s self-absorbed memory alone is insufficient to convey the fullness of any event and she seems to understand intuitively this incompleteness when she searches for remembrance of the relationship she has had with others. The memory of other people in this period allows her to locate and place into perspective, the different pieces of the past. While the personal story serves as the platform for the telling of other stories, it also reconsiders the past from new vantage points, thus reestablishing Etsuko’s interpretation of events each time a new piece is added to memory. In *A Pale View of Hills* the various gaps and unavoidable silences produced by Etsuko’s memories are noted by Ishiguro, who declares that, more than a coherent account of one woman’s past, the novel is the “emotional story of how Etsuko came to leave Japan, although she doesn’t tell you the actual facts”.56 The author adds:

> But I’m not interested in the solid facts. The focus of the book is elsewhere, in the emotional upheaval.57

While Ishiguro admits that Etsuko’s memories are at times too clear and too authoritative to pass off as those of someone suffering from delusions, he nevertheless wanted to cast his narrator as one who still had not resolved some important tensions about her life. In an interesting inversion of an observation that novels “have beginnings, ends, and potentiality, even if the world has
not”, Ishiguro shows how Etsuko’s story must necessarily remain open – ended in order to produce its haunting effect. Ishiguro explains that Sachiko’s character serves as Etsuko’s double self in order to show how people move through loss and death. Importantly, Ishiguro does not suggest that the relationship between Etsuko and Sachiko is an imaginary or supernatural one; rather, he expects the text to be more confusing though not daunted by the apparent similarities. Remembering Sachiko is one way that Etsuko tries to console herself about Keiko’s death and on the other to establish her identity.

Throughout his oeuvre, Ishiguro argue that identity is created from “incessantly readjusted memories”. In forging links of continuity, between who the characters are and who they think they are, memory operates most frequently by means of threads of narrative. His works shows that life itself is a creative construction, as there is a point at which an individuals’ life and the stories that s/he tells about it begin to merge. It is therefore in this arena that Ishiguro’s view is in compliance with Brunner and Dennett who views identity as something which is constructed. To Brunner:

The self is not an entity that one can simply remember, but is, rather, a complex mental edifice that one constructs by the use of a variety of mental processes, one of which must surely be remembering.

Dennett’s works contain a similar construction metaphor; however, he turns to nature to explain the construction of the stories which then constitute aspects of identity:

The strangest and most wonderful constructions in the whole animal world are the amazing, intricate constructions made by the primate, Homo Sapiens. Each normal individual of this species makes a self. Out of its
brain it spins a web of words and deeds, and like the other creatures, it doesn’t have to know what it’s doing, it just does it. This web protects it, just like the snail’s shell, and provides it a livelihood, just like the spider’s web and advances its prospects for sex, just like the bowerbird’s bower. Unlike a spider, an individual human doesn’t just *exude* its web; more like a beaver, it works hard to gather the materials out of which it builds its protective fortress … This ‘web of discourses’ … is as much a biological product as any of the other constructions to be found in the animal world. Stripped of it, an individual human being is as incomplete as a bird without its feathers, a turtle without its shell.  

These passages highlight the fact that human beings have an instinctive impulse to convey their feelings and experiences through remembering and storytelling. Narrative emphasizes:

The active, self-shaping quality of human thought, the power of stories to create and refashion personal identity.  

Similarly, Ishiguro’s narrators also narrate their life in order to make sense of their identity and in order to express their beliefs, desires and hope in an attempt to explain themselves and to understand others. As Antze and Lambek observes:

There is a dialectical relationship between experience and narrative, between the narrating self and the narrated self. As humans, we draw our experience to shape narratives about our lives, but equally, our identity and character are shaped by our narratives. People emerge from and as the
products of their stories about themselves as much as their stories emerge from their lives.\textsuperscript{64}

Through acts of memory, Ishiguro’s narrators strive to render their lives in meaningful terms and in this way, narrative and memory help create a sense of their identity. However, these narratives must have a sense of order. Foucault suggests that: “continuous history is the indispensable correlative of the founding function of the subject”\textsuperscript{65} and the capacity to tell a coherent narrative of life based on the memories of it, seems synonymous with the concept of identity. It is in this way that the self becomes a perpetually rewritten story. According to Bruner, what is remembered from the past is necessary to keep the story suitably coherent. What new circumstances make the continuation of coherency difficult, an individual undergoes turning points that clarify or ‘debug’ the narrative in an effort to achieve clearer meaning.\textsuperscript{66} The protagonists of Ishiguro’s novels (especially Christopher Banks of \textit{When We Were Orphans}) do not have the continuous histories that are required to create consistent identities, so he must rely on the memories or histories of others to then piece together coherent stories of his own lives. As Lowenthal notes:

> ‘Memory’ includes second-hand accounts of the past – that is, history; ‘history’ relies on eyewitness and other recollections – that is memory. We treat other people’s memories like history, as empirically testable, as we sometimes do our own autobiographical accounts.\textsuperscript{67}

Ishiguro delineated a character in \textit{When We Were Orphans} whose life is disrupted due to the disappearance of his parents. The novel opens when Banks is already a detective and he return to his past with his memory in order to understand the basis of his adult isolation. In
returning to his past he also has to depend on other people’s memory to find out what really happened to his parents. Banks recollection also illustrate that his father disappears because he leaves the house in the morning and never comes back. He is told that his father was kidnapped and that the detectives are looking for him, but of the four people (his father, mother, Uncle Philip and Akira) who figure as main characters in his life, his father has been represented as the least important, and on the whole the loss seems manageable:

I remember contemplating the notion that I need not mind so much since Uncle Philip could always take my father’s place. Admittedly, this was an idea I found in the end curiously unconvincing, but my point is that Uncle Philip was a special person for me.\textsuperscript{68}

However, in the present narration, Uncle Philip plays a highly ambivalent role – while the past self adores him, the present self finds the memory of Uncle Philip extremely painful and seeks to avoid it. The reason for this is revealed at the end of part two: Uncle Philip is implicated in the disappearance of Banks’ mother. He invites Banks to join on an outing to the Chinese part of town, and suddenly their relationship changes:

He gave an odd laugh. ‘You know your way around here very well’.

I nodded and waited, the feeling rising from the pit of my stomach that something of great horror was about to unfold … I believe he saw in my face that the game was up. A terrible confusion passed across his features, then he said, barely audible in the din: ‘Good boy’ …
Then he added: ‘I didn’t want you hurt. You understand that? I didn’t want you hurt’.

With that he spun around and vanished into the crowd.  

Banks runs back to his parents’ house as quickly as he can – only to find that his mother has also disappeared. This is the point where his childhood memories break off. The nightmarish quality of this episode, in which Banks is rendered completely helpless, is heightened by the fact that the mystery of his parents’ fate and of Uncle Philip’s role in it stays unsolved into Banks’ adulthood. The catastrophe which changed his life is thus in itself already a blank space which is hard to integrate into a life narrative because its meaning cannot be fixed – or which, conversely, can potentially spark a host of different meanings. What makes the whole situation even worse is that the very person Banks has loved and trusted more than his own father has betrayed him. It is through his Uncle Philip’s recollection that the cause of his parent’s disappearance is revealed.

In *When We Were Orphans*, memory is again used as a tool to find the identity of Christopher Banks and the profound effect of memory in the way it shapes one’s life is explored. Barry Lewis observes:

Banks begins as a variant of Etsuko, Ono and Stevens, a mariner of memory, traveling for clues in his consciousness to help explain who he is.  

Banks returns to his memories of childhood in order to understand the basis of his adult isolation. In doing so, he discovers that his life is far from the normal or conventional aspects. ‘Odd’ though his respective circumstances turn out to be, it is his reactions to the new knowledge that form his narratives. In telling his stories and in recollecting the past, he confront – as do all of
Ishiguro’s protagonists – discomfiting truths about his life. Unlike the early novels in which such confrontations also required that the first-person narrators evade the implications of new knowledge, the epiphanies encountered by Banks shock his recipients into a quiet yet painful and wrenching acceptance of his irrevocable fates. Indeed, the novel’s protagonist accumulates the very foundations of his pleasant but fictional memories of childhood. When Uncle Philip reveals the tortuous details of his mother’s captivity to the opium warlord, Wangku, Banks realizes that while he had solidified the contiguous disappearance of his parents into one event of their joint kidnapping in his mind all these years, he now gleams the tremendous sacrifice made by his mother and the more mundane and selfish choice made by his father to leave his family for a mistress. In fact, though his parents disappeared in the same period in his memory, he now learns that completely different motives and circumstances caused the absence of each. The ending of When We Were Orphans express less the protagonist’s “futile spirit” characteristic of Ishiguro’s earlier novels than a mature bereavement and a push to move through an insufferable situation. As in all of Ishiguro’s novels, the characters’ trauma is brought to light steadily, as if the reader were encountering its revelation and implication along with the narrators.

Ishiguro commented on his sense that “one of the sad things about people’s lives is that they are rather short”. He indicates that a painful realization accompanies maturity when individuals accept that it is difficult, if not impossible, to alter radically the fate shaped for them by multiple people and forces. The individual is dealt cards – for good or ill – which founds an entire existence. Ishiguro adds that some small consolation is possible if insight can be gleaned and artfully manipulated should the cards prove less than favourable:
It’s that kind of poignancy, that sort of balance between feeling defeated but nevertheless trying to find reason to feel some kind of qualified optimism that interest me. That’s always the note I like to end on.\(^74\)

Just as Ishiguro casts the characters of his early novels in actual historical situations that largely constituted the course of their lives, he has the protagonists of *When We Were Orphans* and *Never Let Me Go* confront a life which is indelibly charted for them. In these two novels, it can be considered that Banks and Kathy might have taken the alternative courses to re-shape their fates. If Banks had known that his life had been funded by his mother’s sordid sacrifices and not his aunt’s inheritance, would he have conducted his life differently? If Kathy had known that she and her friends at Hailsham existed for the exclusive purpose of sustaining a system of providing medical organs for the world outside, might they have sought a different way to live out their brief existences?

While these queries are as provocative as wondering whether Etsuko might have saved her daughter Keiko from suicide years after the two left Japan for England, or whether Stevens might have settled happily into domestic bliss with Miss Kenton had not duty to Lord Darlington beckoned him, they are finally unanswerable. This also clearly shows how Ishiguro portrays characters who reflect their life under the mark of ‘what wasn’t known then’ and because of this he focuses upon how his characters acknowledge key turning points, or moments when a different decision might have been made to secure a better outcome. As he has consistently noted about the focus of his work over the years, Ishiguro is interested in developing the emotional story of his characters. Ishiguro astutely remarks about their hindsight, that generally; humans…
are not equipped with any vast insight into the world around us. We have a tendency to go with the herd and not be able to see beyond our little patch, and so it is often our fate that we’re at the mercy of larger forces that we can’t understand. We just do our little thing and hope it works out.\textsuperscript{75}

This philosophical remark about owning up to the inevitability of life, made at the end of his book promotion for \textit{When We Were Orphans}, anticipates the themes that structure \textit{Never Let Me Go}. In his works, Ishiguro explores the degree to which people create identity through memory and narrative, and to what extent accumulated knowledge of the same contents yield them a course for change or revision, whether of physical reality or of emotional adjustment. Importantly, as in his previous works, Ishiguro has his protagonists end their narratives on the brink of a perilous threshold while signifying the end of their lives. It is this ‘last note’ – an often very sad peal – that reveals Ishiguro’s assessments about human psychology and behavior.

In \textit{Never Let Me Go}, Kathy’s “letting go” of the past comes at the end of the novel in the form of a fantastic wish. In order to find some semblance of freedom from future hurt, she holds onto ephemeral but devastating truths about life itself. She returns to Norfolk (the place where for her and her friends all lost things are found) only a couple of weeks after the death – or ‘completion’ – of her beloved Tommy D. and while at the threshold of an open field:

> I was thinking about the rubbish, the flapping plastic in the branches, the shore-line of odd stuff caught along the fencing, and I half-closed my eyes and imagined this was the spot where everything I’d ever lost since my childhood had washed up, and I was not standing here in front of it, and if I waited long enough, a tiny figure would appear on the horizon across the
field, and gradually get larger until I’d see it was Tommy, and he’d wave, maybe even call.76

The long list of connectives in Kathy’s last passage suggests her need to hold onto her desire to see Tommy one last time, but the sentence ends on the uncertain ‘maybe’ and concludes the novel with Kathy’s understanding of life’s eventualities and finalities. In holding on to her memory, Kathy is able to accept and understand her present situation. As Mark Freeman notes:

Memory, therefore, which often has to do not merely with recounting the past but making sense of it – from ‘above’ as it were – is an interpretative act the end of which is an enlarged understanding of the self.77

Everything that Kathy had learned while as a student at fabled Hailsham comes to pass in this last moment of her book. Her troubled youthful friendships with Ruth and Tommy had opened the gates of memories of their coming of age at the school. These remembrances, tinged with complex and suppressed emotions, constitute the bulk of Kathy’s story. But, now that she has lost both of her friends, a painful autonomy emerges as well. Old rivalries are laid to rest, as fuller confrontation with each of their destinies is unraveled by Kathy, including a sickening truth about the ways that all their lives had been scientifically engineered and socially manipulated by their guardians. There is no possible comfortable retreat into the past, for everything about their lives had been bound to a future that ascertains their inevitable demise. Their guardians had shielded them from knowing the horror of their fates. Kathy knows that at the end of another eight months she will face the same end as her friends. After serving as a carer for a period much longer than carers are typically granted, Kathy herself will become a donor
until her own completion. Though Kathy who must move through an imminent end, her memory and narrative enables her to understand her identity and because of this she remains strong.

Ishiguro admits that all his character had the capacity to accept their fate and identity. As he himself observed in an interview with Spiegel:

> The butler in *The Remains of the Day* can’t see where he fits into the whole thing -- the history of England and Nazi Germany. He just accepts, and tries to rescue some little pride or dignity. With *Never Let Me Go* I knew from the start that I didn’t want to write a story about an enslaved, exploited class that would then rebel. My subject matter wasn’t going to be the triumph of the human spirit. I was interested in the human capacity to accept what must seem like a limited and cruel fate.\(^{78}\)

Ishiguro adeptly portrays the turmoil of his characters’ situations in elegantly evocative discourse; their memory and narratives depict the difficulty they have in owning up to a view of their actions and decisions. Jean Paul Sartre remarked in his autobiography:

> A man is always a teller of stories surrounded by his own stories and those of other people, he sees everything that happens to him in terms of these stories and he tries to live his life as if he were recounting it.\(^{79}\)

To a certain degree, when remembering, Ishiguro’s narrators make their past rather than simply retrieve it. In making their past, they are also making their present and future identity. Kim Worthington in *Self as Narrative: Subjectivity and Community in Contemporary Fiction* states:
through both self conscious and sub-conscious acts of remembering … [which] impact on the present and offer new configuration for the future … through the transformative power that inheres in constructive self-narration.\textsuperscript{80}

As a consequence, the public world portrays Etsuko as a lonely widow, Ono as a war criminal, Stevens as a butler of Lord Darlington who is a Nazi collaborator, Banks as an orphan and Kathy as a clone who will soon begin donating her organs until she dies. These labels make them reorder their past through the transformative power of constructive self-narration. Thus, the relationship between memory and identity is the ongoing central dilemma in Kazuo Ishiguro’s novels. The butler Stevens in \textit{Remains of the Day} continues to be troubled by the same as he realizes that his self-esteem is based upon his service for a perceived Nazi sympathizer. In \textit{An Artist of the Floating World}, the self-deluding artist Masuji Ono must come to terms with the fact that his youthful support of imperialism has left him alienated amongst the rubble of post-war Japan. In his study for the \textit{Contemporary World Writers} series, Barry Lewis identifies this as a preoccupation with how the “individual sustains a sense of self in the light of changing historical circumstances”, and particularly how memory “might be used as a tool to keep your dignity.”\textsuperscript{81} This last assertion is brought sharply into focus in Ishiguro’s sixth novel \textit{Never Let Me Go}, which for all its pathos and understatement remains at its core a celebration of how memory functions to secure and locate the individual’s sense of identity. All of Ishiguro’s protagonists narrate their stories when they are old. They somehow know that something went wrong in the event of their lives and needs to be re-examined. So, in order to come to terms with who they really are, they indulge in self exploration which reveals the ugly truth about their lives. In the process of self exploration, they tried hard to conceal the truth by suppressing their memories
and by using a language of self deception but which no longer helps them at the end of each novel in order to reveal the facts of life. As Brian W. Shaffer notes, Ishiguro’s protagonists employ one or more psychological defense mechanisms – in particular, repression – to keep certain unwelcome memories or intolerable desires at bay. Even though each character finds it hard to accept their flaws and failures, they no longer had the capabilities to escape from their cruel fate. Ishiguro’s protagonists reveal that identities are by no means fixed and through memory and narratives, an individual consciously or sub-consciously narrate the past, present and future ‘identities’ into existence.
NOTES


2 Ibid.


11 Ibid. 198.

13 As elucidated by King, Nicola. *Memory, Narrative and Identity: Remembering the Self*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 2000. 22. King emphasizes that much human experience or actions takes place under the mark of ‘what wasn’t known then’: what one remember are events which took place in a kind of innocence.


22 Ibid. 123.

23 Ibid.


25 Ibid. 124-25.

26 Ibid. 192.

27 Ibid. 204.


43 Ibid. 236.

45Ibid. 239.

46Ibid. 243.

47Ibid. 173.

48Ibid. 239.

49Ibid. 244.


54Ibid.


57 Ibid.


Ibid. 145-46.


Ibid.


Ibid.

Ibid.


