CHAPTER I

SITUATING KAZUO ISHIGURO WITHIN THE REALMS OF MEMORY AND IDENTITY
Kazuo Ishiguro has been considered to be one of the leading literary figures amongst writers of the 1980s. He took his first steps toward a literary career in 1979 when he entered the Creative Writing Programme at the University of East Anglia. His teachers at East Anglia included the novelist and critic, Malcolm Bradbury and the fabulist, Angela Carter. In 1982, he won the Winifred Holtby award for the best expression of a sense of place, for his debut novel *A Pale View of Hills*. In 1983, he was included in the seminal Granta Best of Young British Writers’ list alongside Martin Amis, Ian Mc Ewan, Salman Rushdie, Julian Barnes, Graham Swift, Rose Tremain, Jeanette Winterson and Pat Barker. When Ishiguro was nominated by the Granta Magazine, he was only twenty seven years old and at thirty four, his place in the literary firmament was already secure. In 1986, his second novel, *An Artist of the Floating World*, received the Whitbread Book of the Year and in 1989, his third novel, *The Remains of the Day* was awarded the Booker Prize for Fiction, and was subsequently made into an award- winning film. His next novel *The Unconsoled* (1995) was awarded the Cheltenham Prize. Kazuo Ishiguro’s fifth novel, *When We Were Orphans* (2000) was shortlisted for both the Whitbread Novel Award and the Booker Prize for Fiction. *Never Let Me Go* (2005) was again shortlisted for Man Booker Prize for Fiction. His latest work, a story cycle entitled *Nocturnes: 5 Stories of Music and Nightfall* was published in 2009. In addition to novels he has also written two original screenplays for Channel 4 Television, *A Profile of Arthur J.Mason* (broadcast in 1984), *The Gourmet* (broadcast in 1986), and *The Saddest Music in the World*. In 1981, three of Ishiguro’s stories – “A Strange and Sometimes Sadness”, “Waiting for J”, and “Getting Poisoned” – appeared in *Introduction 7: Stories by New Writers*, a Faber and Faber series which was designed to bring young authors before a wider reading public. Ishiguro was showered with a number of prizes. In 1995 alone he received Italy’s Premio Scanno, the Cheltenham Prize, and an O.B.E
(The Order of British Empire) for services to literature and he is a Fellow of Royal Society of Literature. He has been awarded honorary doctorates by the Universities of Kent (1990) and East Anglia (1995) and in 1998 he received the French decoration Chavelier de l’Ordre des Arts Lettres. His work has been translated into twenty seven foreign languages. He presently lives in London with his wife and daughter.

This thesis attempts to examine aspects related to memory and identity, and its thematic centrality in Kazuo Ishiguro’s texts with special references to the manner in which memory initiates the construction of identity in five of his texts namely i) A Pale View Of Hills (1982), ii) An Artist Of The Floating World (1986), iii) The Remains Of The Day (1988), iv) When We Were Orphans (2000), and v) Never Let Me Go (2005). The study also attempts to denote aspect such as ‘unreliability’ in the narratives of the first-person narrators’ protagonists. While attempting to establish their identity, the central characters of Ishiguro’s novels had to narrate their past with the help of their fragile memories. They attempt to formulate their own identity in reflecting their past. However, in narrating their past, their memory is often in tension with history. These themes are specific and inherently located within the narratives and theories of memory and identity as denoted in the five texts that are central to the same. Subsequently, this chapter shall focus upon the introductory components of memory and identity and its representation in literature and will attempt to situate Kazuo Ishiguro within the realms of memory and identity.

The term ‘memory’ has been defined by a number of psychologists, philosophers and thinkers. Amongst them, Tim Woods and Peter Middleton denote:

Memory is a means of overcoming the limitations of the human condition as it is understood in contemporary culture, by making the past appear
once again in the present, despite its temporal, and possibly spatial, distance.\(^2\)

Memory can create the illusion of a momentary return to a lost past and its operations also articulate the complex relationship between past, present and future in human consciousness. The important role memory plays in establishing the sense of identity can hardly be exaggerated. According to Dorothee Birke:

In order to answer the age-old question ‘who am I?’ we more often than not look to our past and fashion a narrative for our lives. By comparing our present selves with the selves we remember, we experience ourselves as being in time – an experience which is crucial for our sense of self.\(^3\)

Memory not only serve as building blocks for identity, but also play an important role in the interaction with others since details of the past are employed in order to validate images that are conveyed. Recognizing the crucial role of memories for the social relationships, Gergen describes memory as a “form of social skill”\(^4\) and memory according to Assman is a “backbone of identity”.\(^5\) In a postmodern era, in which it is perceived as especially hard to attain a satisfactory sense of personal identity, Nunner and Inkler states that autobiographical memory constitutes a stabilizing factor in what has come to be seen as a state of perpetual crisis of identity.\(^6\)

A study of memory is truly an interdisciplinary endeavour which has been conducted in a wide range of disciplines, encouraging collaboration across the boundaries of different subjects. According to Nunning et al.:
The genealogy of discourse on memory reveals, however, that philosophy, historiography and literature have more in common with neuropsychology than one may be inclined to think.\textsuperscript{7}

Over time, thinkers have tried to discriminate among the many meanings of the concept of memory, Warnock distinguishes between “habit memory” and “conscious memory”. ‘Habit memory’ refers to “skills, responses or modes of behaviour that are learned by human beings, non-human animals and even machines,” while ‘conscious memory’ consists of “recalling or recollecting past experience”.\textsuperscript{8} Therefore conscious memory becomes one of the defining factors which distinguish human from non-human. The characteristic quality of human nature and the seeming undefinability have caused the concept of memory to be a popular topic among philosophers, thinkers and writers of all times. Already in antiquity since the publication of Francis A.Yates’ \textit{The Art of Memory}, the concept of memory has never escaped the attention of thinkers and philosophers. However, since the 1990s, there has been a renewed interest in memory, even as it has branched out to other concepts like trauma, Holocaust testimonies, False Memory Syndrome, collective and cultural memory. Nicola King in \textit{Memory, Narrative, Identity} observes:

\begin{quote}
The late twentieth century has also seen an increased focus on questions of memory as the generations which experienced the atrocities of the two world wars die out, and as new or revived national movements base their demands on memories of oppression or trauma … the recent insistence on the role of memory also mark a renewed desire to secure a sense of self in the wake of postmodern theories of the decentered human subject.\textsuperscript{9}
\end{quote}
Subsequently, in the novels of Kazuo Ishiguro, ‘the desire to secure a sense of identity’ with memory has been explored. In order to grasp the significance of the kind of memory that this study is concerned with, namely, autobiographical memory, it is important to specify its components and properties that make it so significant in the formation of the sense of identity. According to Susan Engel:

Autobiographical memory is on the one hand a deeply personal, subjective, and vivid construction of the past, a construction that reveals, creates, and communicates a personal identity. But we constantly use these memories in public transaction. To that extent we expect reliability, accuracy and objectivity. What and how we remember has consequences for our own lives and the lives of those included in our memories.\(^\text{10}\)

In the novels selected for study, Ishiguro utilizes autobiographical/individual memory where his characters construct the past and it is denoted as a basis for identity and in relation to this, Dorothee Birke states that nothing could be more personal and more unique than one’s own memories.\(^\text{11}\) On the other hand, the important part played by memory in social transaction which not only draws attention to the one-sidedness of autobiographical memory as purely individual matter is also reflected by Ishiguro. However, this also poses the question of reliability and accuracy in the narration of the character. The cognitive psychologist, Endel Tulving introduces a very influential, albeit controversial, model for differentiating between various kinds of autobiographical memory – ‘semantic’, ‘procedural’ and ‘episodic memory’.\(^\text{12}\) ‘Procedural memory’ refers to “the learning of motor and cognitive skills”,\(^\text{13}\) ‘semantic memory’ is a kind of “mental thesaurus” which comprises “a person’s general knowledge about the world and
encompasses a wide range of information, including facts, concepts, and vocabulary”. The memory system which is most relevant in terms of this study and also in literature is that of ‘episodic memory’ which is about “specific events that occurred at a particular time and place”. In contrast to procedural or semantic memory, episodic memory includes the phenomenon of “autonoetic awareness”, which Wheeler reflects:

Its contents are infused with the idiosyncratic perspectives, emotions and thoughts of the person doing the remembering. It necessarily involves the feeling that the present recollection is a reexperience of something that has happened before.

In this way, autobiographical memory provides a different ways of processing and making sense of past experiences. Ferrara states:

From being the main actor of a more or less coherent life story the individual derives a sense of continuity in time which … is part of any conception of the authenticity or fulfillment of an identity.

This is where autobiographical memory and personal identity meet: by assembling memories to form a narrative, an individual can relate about himself/herself as well as to others in terms of who s/he really is. In this connection, Mark Freeman also opines:

The very act of making sense of ourselves and others is only possible in and through the fabric of narrative itself.
Similarly in the novels of Kazuo Ishiguro, narrative and memory allows forging meaningful links between past events and present life, to define the present selves in relation to the past selves and to assert development. In this way, narrative helps to structure memory and becomes an integral aspect of autobiographical memory, as Bruner notes:

We organize our experience and our memory of human happenings mainly in the form of narrative – stories, excuses, myths, reasons for doing and not doing and so on.\(^\text{19}\)

Literature has manifold ways of taking up and transforming ideas and problems that are part of contemporary culture. In particular, literary works offer genuine contribution to the understanding of the mechanisms of memory’s role in identity formation. They grant insights into the processes that are hard to observe that is, the workings of the human mind. As Finke has denoted, literature provide a laboratory for the imagination in which concepts and assumptions about memory and identity can be staged, tested or taken to extreme.\(^\text{20}\) Thus, the interconnection between memory and identity plays a significant role in literature. For instance, novels such as Pat Barker’s \textit{Regeneration}, Margaret Atwood’s \textit{Cat’s Eye} and most notably Toni Morrison’s \textit{Beloved} amongst others, organize their narratives in terms of the demand of memory which is compelled to unravel the psychological effects of traumatic past that lies beyond the temporal horizon of the narrative itself, in a place and time that resist representation.\(^\text{21}\) These novels and many other current works of historical literature show a concern with the relation of the past to the present, regarding where the past is and how it persists in the lives of human beings, and how it can be experienced or resisted. In an essay entitled “The Literary Representation of Memory”, Birgit Neumann opines:
Memory and the processes of remembering have always been an important, indeed a dominant, topic in literature. Numerous texts portray how individuals and groups remember their past and how they construct identities on the basis of the recollected memories. They are concerned with the mnemonic presence of the past in the present, and they illuminate the manifold functions that memories fulfill for the constitution of identity. Such texts highlight that our memories are highly selective, and that the rendering of memories potentially tells us more about the rememberer’s present – his or her desire and denial, than about the actual past events.⁴²

Kazuo Ishiguro is one of the many novelists that amply utilize memory as the focal point in his novels. One of the reasons that Ishiguro employs memory in his novels is to recreate Japan which had become a land of speculation for him. He states:

I wished to recreate this Japan – put together all these memories, and all these imaginary ideas I had about this landscape called Japan. I wanted to make it safe, preserve it in book, before it faded away from my memory altogether.⁴³

Kazuo Ishiguro was born in Nagasaki, Japan, on November 8, 1954. In 1960, the five-year-old Ishiguro moved with his family to Britain, where his father, an oceanographer, began a one-year research project funded by the British government. What was originally intended to be a temporary visit gradually became a permanent one. While maintaining ownership of the family
home in Nagasaki, the Ishiguros have remained in Britain. Ishiguro has disclosed in an interview that leaving his home in Japan was a wrench for him as a child. He narrates:

As a small child, I was taken away from people I knew, like my grandparents and my friends. And I was led to expect that I would return to Japan. But the family kept extending the stay. All the way through my childhood, I couldn’t forget Japan, because I had to prepare myself for returning to it.24

However, the family never returned, and for many years, Ishiguro delayed visiting his grandparents’ house in Nagasaki, in case it disturbed his inward vision of home. He expressed in 1987:

The house as I remember it is a rather grand and beautiful thing, and if I went back the reality would be rather shabby and horrible, and in a way that is how I feel about the whole area of my life. It’s very powerful to me while it remains a land of speculation, imagination and memory.25

Through memory, Ishiguro searches deep in his mind for the flavours and colours that he was surrounded by, in an attempt to draw those facets into his writings. Significantly, his first two novels, *A Pale View of Hills* and *An Artist of the Floating World* are set in Japan. However, despite this distinctive background, Ishiguro chooses not to write directly about himself. He finds it more productive to deal with characters who are unlike him.26 Distancing forces him to look at his subjects from the outside. It helps him to avoid the temptation to deal with material that is personally interesting, but artistically irrelevant. Nevertheless, this careful excision of himself
from his fictions has not prevented critics like Barry Lewis amongst others from reading them almost exclusively in terms of his Japanese origins.\textsuperscript{27} When Ishiguro first became a public figure he suffered greatly from stereotyping by critics and reviewers, who could not resist ‘compulsory analogies to Sumo wrestling, geisha girls and Toyotas’ and nicknamed him the ‘Shogun of Sydenham’.\textsuperscript{28} This worked to Ishiguro’s advantage to some extent, as it gives him a distinct marketable image, especially in a literary climate of the 1980s where there was an active search for non-native English writers. But the limitations soon become apparent:

These stereotypes are all right as part of a publicity game. Where it starts to get irritating is when people read your work in a certain sort of way: it seems my Japanese novels are so exotic and remote that I could have written bizarre Marquezian or Kafkaesque stuff and people would still have taken it as straight realism. I’ve always struggled with this literal-minded tendency in British audiences.\textsuperscript{29}

The struggle and concern with identity has been inherent so much that in the mid-1980s, when Ishiguro’s writing career was ascending, the British Council’s short leaflets introducing British authors had under a photograph of Ishiguro a quote from him:

I consider myself an international writer.\textsuperscript{30}

Over the years, this self-declaration has been reiterated by reviewers and academic critics of his novels, and while nobody has fully defined what it means exactly to be an ‘international writer’, the term is a convenient one that addresses both Ishiguro’s obvious Japanese ancestry and the kind of broad themes with universal appeal that is found in his fiction. Salman Rushdie celebrates the latter aspect of Ishiguro’s identity when he notes that Ishiguro employs a ‘brilliant
subversion of the fictional modes’ in his discussion of large themes such as ‘death, change, pain and evil’. 31

While defining the umbrella term ‘international writer’ a connection between Rushdie and Ishiguro has not been an arbitrary one. In 1981 Rushdie was awarded the Booker Prize for *Midnight’s Children*, an inventive and sprawling novel about India’s independence from Great Britain. Ishiguro observes that there are very significant differences between his and Rushdie’s career as crucial for his own developing one:

Rushdie had previously been a completely unknown writer. That was a really symbolic moment and then everyone was suddenly looking for other Rushdies. It so happened that around this time I brought out *A Pale View of Hills*. Usually first novels disappear, as you know, without a trace. Yet I received a lot of attention, got lots of coverage, and did a lot of interviews. I know why this was. It was because I had this Japanese face and this Japanese name and it was what being covered at that time. 32

Eight years later, in 1989, when Ishiguro won the Booker for his third novel *The Remains of the Day*, he observed that, while the kind of early attention bestowed on him followed from readers’ perception of him as an ‘exotic’ writer along the lines of their perceptions of writers like Rushdie as well, he believed that he subsequently fought against the very labels that earned him such positive publicity. If early reviewers admired Japanese attributes of the young writer, they also pegged Ishiguro as a ‘foreign’ writer who ‘just happened’ to write in the English language. Having lived in Britain since the age of five and having spoken and written in the English language since then, such perceptions were obviously annoying to Ishiguro. Mike Petry opines:
In fact, despite his un-English sounding name, Ishiguro is no doubt a truly “English writer” – someone who is deeply rooted in the English language and culture.33

At times, he appeared exasperated especially when in terms of the situation and place of his first two novels, *A Pale View of Hills* and *An Artist of the Floating World*. These incidents coincided with his Japanese ancestry, but he also concluded that he is writing works of fiction and not historical texts, and at the same time, he is not attempting to capitalize on his ‘exotic’ status:

In many ways I felt I was using [Japanese and world] history as a piece of orchestration to bring out my themes. I’m not sure that I ever distorted anything major, but my first priority was not to portray history accurately. Japan and militarism, now these are big, important questions, and it always made me uneasy that my books were being used as a sort of historical text.34

Ishiguro has consistently felt the need to explain his fictional inventions especially in order to respond to academic perspectives that are advanced by scholars like Bruce King amongst others, who attempt to solidify the concept of what constitutes an ‘international writer’. Ishiguro wants the term to denote his literary goals and not his ethnicity alone and this would be prevalent to the perspective of identity. King focuses on ethnicity when he identifies Shiva Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, Buchi Emecheta, Timothy Mo, and Ishiguro as the key figures of ‘the new internationalism’, and distinguishes such writers from commonwealth, third world, and other ethnic categories. According to King, they ‘write about their native lands or the immigrant experience from within the mainstream of British literature’.35 In Ishiguro’s case, however,
writing about his native land (Japan) is an act of invention, and he is not speaking from the perspective of an immigrant in either of the first two novels. For his part, Ishiguro, the writer with Japanese origins, is not writing about his own immigrant experiences in Great Britain, rather he focus upon the emotional turmoil of his protagonist’s personal situation against the orchestrated background of nuclear devastation, so that he can appeal to a wide audience. Ishiguro does not regard his novels as academic exercises; neither does he wish to write without “communicating a vision”. The main focus of his writing is to rework or to undermine certain ideals or mythologies structuring individuals, communities, or their nations, mainly in an effort to regard the impact of such visions on people’s actual lives. Ishiguro is not out to baffle, intellectualize, trivialize, or otherwise appropriate real human pain and happiness for its own sake, but he seeks to find new ways of expressing these in a discourse of fiction.

In noticing that Ishiguro is of Japanese ancestry, it may be relevant to approach his fiction in terms of cultural paradigms, and at the same time, it cannot be escaped from the attention that he is a writer who writes sensibly and insightfully about grand human concerns. Ishiguro believes that within the realm of memory and identity, he will be able to denote aspects related to human concerns and the subtle indication of hope and human endurance appear in all of his novels. Having worked as a social worker in Glasgow and London in the 1980s, Ishiguro probably shaped his understanding of human awareness and suffering, and these are elements that are present in all of his novels. In dealing with these issues, Ishiguro deploys memory as a dynamic phenomenon which is characterized by its adaptability to present needs and circumstances. Ishiguro tends to centre his novels on characters that have relevant bearing upon the psychological and emotional relationship with the past. The issue of memory arises as the protagonists try to find a sense of closure with their past. This concurs with Maurice Blanchot’s
theory according to which “narrators recall and relate past experiences to divest themselves of memories and their past”.\textsuperscript{38} Ishiguro’s narrators have made choices in their past and so they have to face the consequences in the present. Barry Lewis marked:

The novels are all engaged with memory and memory, by its very nature, is uncertain, quivering, subject to erasures and displacement.\textsuperscript{39}

Kazuo Ishiguro concerns himself with memories and their problematic function in the process of forming one’s identity. His narratives centre upon memories and their potential to digress and distort, to forget and to silence the past and above all to haunt the present. The protagonists of his fiction seek to overcome loss by making sense of the past through acts of remembrances. Paul Connerton notes that experience shapes the present. According to him, an individual’s identity is constructed through past events and the remembering of those past events.\textsuperscript{40} Subsequently, Kazuo Ishiguro’s treatment of memory is in tune with this.

Tim Woods and Peter Middleton, who concern themselves with the workings of textuality and memory in literary texts denote that:

The past is now widely believed to depend upon memory, personal and social, traumatic and repressed, involuntary and planned.\textsuperscript{41}

Memory, both individual and social plays a large part in a cultural context and thus the framing axioms of literary historicism are commonly represented by the texts themselves as forms of memory.\textsuperscript{42} Memory thus becomes the mediator between the present and the past. It is now widely believed that memory is the foundation of personal identity, and that anything that damages it will threaten the self.\textsuperscript{43} Daniel L. Schacter observes:
Extensively rehearsed and elaborated memories come to form the core of our life stories - narratives of self that help us define and understand our identity and our place in the world.\textsuperscript{44}

The above elements have been predominant markers that remain central to the primary texts by Kazuo Ishiguro. For instance, in \textit{A Pale View of Hills}, the chief protagonist, Etsuko uses her memory to overcome loss and to define her identity. She narrates her past in order to come to terms with her own identity. The reason for this is that her elder daughter, Keiko had committed suicide by hanging herself in her rented room in Manchester. Etsuko finds herself alone and neglected, and her account in the novel can be viewed as the result of her desperate struggle to establish (for herself) an impression of structure and agency in her past and hence to identify for herself meaningful reasons and causes for her current position and to reassure herself that she “was not responsible for Keiko’s death”.\textsuperscript{45} As she recalls her past, she strives to structure and to organize it, in order to identify patterns and consistencies by which to grant her history a sense of agency and design. Therefore, Etsuko has to explore the painful past, in order to decipher the making and remaking sense of who and what she is. Ono in \textit{An Artist of the Floating World} feared that his involvement in the Nationalist movement might hamper the marriage negotiation of his daughter. In order to justify to the readers that his actions were done with the heart of innocence, Ono reflects upon his past with the aid of his fragile memory. He knows that he had lived without purpose or lasting impact, and finds himself stripped of all agency and control. In the emptiness of his waning life, he desperately sought relief from the desolation that he faced, and therefore he returns to his past (working to extract from it proof of his own significance) and hence to deny the unendurable emptiness and powerlessness of his life. \textit{The Remains of the Day} similarly portrays the suppressed emotion of Stevens who denied human warmth and ‘bantering’
in pursuing dignity. But his concept of ‘dignity’ makes him a loner and he felt the need to reconsider the same. In *When We Were Orphans* and *Never Let Me Go*, Ishiguro depicted memory in terms of nostalgia where the protagonists, Banks and Kathy hold on to their childhood memories in order to continue living. They both returned to their childhood memories in order to understand the basis of their adult isolation. They struggle to hold onto a peace that is evoked by a necessary nostalgia, but they simultaneously realize the horror of their discoveries.

In an interview, Ishiguro explains his permanent interest for memory in its various approaches:

> I like memory, at various levels. At a purely technical level, I like it as a method of telling a story – it gives me plenty of freedom … And I just like the texture of memory as well. I like that the scenes are necessarily foggy around the edges, because they’re open to manipulation and they’re open to self deception and embroidery. And they’re often tinged with nostalgia, some kind of strong emotion. I like all these layers that come with a scene. Thematically, I have been interested in memory itself.\(^{46}\)

In his novels, Kazuo Ishiguro depicted memory as a means of establishing identity. At the same time, the aspect of memory with all its foggy texture in terms of suppression, distortion, and unreliability is also explored. Memory is a very useful and interesting device when writing a story. It is difficult to even imagine a story without any memories, but making full use of the characteristics of memory can certainly enhance the quality of a story. In all of Ishiguro’s novels, memory plays a very important role. In various interviews, Ishiguro has named three reasons for why he likes to work with memory: the technical advantages, the texture and the thematically interesting nature. Memory is not only useful as a way of keeping the attention of the reader and
varying the storyline, but also as a means of controlling the mood of the novel. If the story is told completely chronologically, it is likely that the different parts of the story are marked by the predominant mood of that period. Memory offers more control than chronology. In an interview Ishiguro remarked:

I don’t have to follow the plotline. And so I can work much more like I guess a visual artist would do, if they place one image next to another. Just because the artistic order tells them to rather than it’s the way a still life should be set out. I can control the novel and the moods very, very clearly that way.\textsuperscript{47}

In all of his novels, Ishiguro foregrounds the role and processes of memory. Shaffer characterize memory’s role as:

Ishiguro’s novels are psychological mystery-voyages into the protagonist’s problematic or compromised past.\textsuperscript{48}

But in portraying these voyages, Ishiguro also demonstrates memory’s:

Strategems, its selectivity, its obsessional quality, its refinements, its expedience and use.\textsuperscript{49}

Ishiguro in his novels foregrounds memory through the method of narration and the narrators’ admission of uncertainty in the veracity of their recall. By using first person narratives, the events of the novels are told in retrospect – sometimes from the distance of only hours, sometimes from a great many years. Additionally, the structuring of the narrators’ account in
notebook /diary format, established in part by the detailed dates and places provided at the beginning of every chapter, is continuously overrun by their memories. Reich opines:

Despite the superficial fixing of time in his work, the narrative frequently spins wildly through different eras. The date Ishiguro likes to fix are merely the dates of recall.\(^{50}\)

Ishiguro’s focus in fact appears to be the struggle that memory imposes upon the individual and the insistence of the past in a character’s present. As Sutcliffe notes:

His[Ishiguro] narrators, all of whom have suffered a deep psychological rupture in their lives, are often fighting a long-standing battle to relate their past to a present with which it does not seem to fit.\(^{51}\)

The protagonists in the novels all strive to overcome some type of loss. This loss is in myriad hues; whether this is the loss of a child, family members and loved ones in *A Pale View of Hills* and *When We Were Orphans*, the loss of dignity in *The Remains of the Day* and the loss of something ineffable in *Never Let Me Go*. Ishiguro intermingles one’s personal past in terms especially on how people try to cope with their past, as well as society’s collective memory. In *The Contemporary British Novel*, Frederic M.Holmes observes that Ishiguro’s first three novels (*A Pale View of Hills, An Artist of the Floating World* and *The Remains of the Day*) have been:

[C]elebrated for their historically grounded realism, achieved through the limpid, masterfully controlled prose styles of their first-person narrators, all of whom depend upon memory as they look back over their troubled lives and times.\(^{52}\)
The same could have been said for *When We Were Orphans* and *Never Let Me Go*. Speaking in the period after turbulent historical times, the first person narrators set private experiences into a public realm. The characters seek to induct the reader, in terms of a witness into their stories. They make an admission that their seemingly ordinary tales will be insufficient, given the limitations of memory but, in establishing the fact of forgetfulness and the gaps in retelling, they also critique world events from their uniquely estranged perspectives. In his novels, Ishiguro’s narrators join two realms – personal experience and historical event – to produce an unusual narrative tension. In recounting private experiences, the narrators establish the context of those individual moments against history; the narrators’ consciousness of historical circumstances prompts their reassessment of the private past, but their determination to maintain the primacy of self is tied to producing a false disclosure. Significantly, they each express doubts about the veracity and clarity of memory. In *A Pale View of Hills*, Etsuko is able to forget the premonition of death which she connects with that period. Remembering the pain of the past, she is able to forget, momentarily, the horror of her daughter’s demise. However, as Etsuko reconstructs the past, she also reveals her reluctance to either fully remember or reveal the incident of her past. Like Etsuko, Stevens in *The Remains of the Day* also critically assesses the function of his memory with the idea that “when with the benefit of hindsight one begins to search one’s past for … ‘turning points’, one is apt to start seeing them everywhere,” and he implies that such an articulation of consciousness may reveal truth’s elusiveness. Similarly, the narrator Masuji Ono of *An Artist of the Floating World* punctuates his story with remarks that any reconstructed narrative may be flawed representation: “This may not have been the precise words I used that afternoon”.

His narrative, in this continued fabrication, becomes a self-acknowledged tale comprised as much from forgetfulness as remembrance. And Etsuko herself observed how
memory “can be an unreliable thing” as she struggles for correspondence in recalling what she might have felt or experienced in the tumultuous period with what actual memory produces. In *When We Were Orphans* also, Banks dwells on his memories and things that were thought to be forgotten, and which were carefully dredged up. The novel depicted that Banks is cautiously recounting his life-story in terms of his fragile memory in order to identify who he really is and in *Never Let Me Go*, Kathy begins to identify small but peculiar turning points that might have instigated awareness of their conditions as her memories are reworked in the present circumstances. For each protagonist, remembering offers a catharsis through which they can solve their past and subsequently find peace in the present. James Procter pointed out that:

> All of Ishiguro’s novels to date, narration is, at least partly, a therapeutic process. The novels are not attempts to render the past convincingly, but rather to pursue how individuals interpret and construct that past.\(^5\)

In the novels of Kazuo Ishiguro, memory is used as an important tool for forming a sense of identity. The way memories work is geared towards producing coherence between past and present experience in the novels. While the past experiences have shaped the self-concepts of the present, present self – concepts have an influence on the reconstruction of the past in the process of remembering. The structuring of the past as a narrative thus allows the characters to incorporate various fragments and aspects of their lives into one continuous pattern. The characters attempt to locate their own identity with the aid of their memory and they also want to develop a common thread among the disconnected contingent events of their lives in order to provide a lasting sense of purpose and significance, which subsequently mark what Homi K.Bhabha calls a putting together of the dismembered past:
Remembering is never a quiet act of introspection or retrospection. It is a painful re-membering, a putting together of the dismembered past to make sense of the trauma of the present.\textsuperscript{57}

Subsequently, the novels of Kazuo Ishiguro inherently portray the working of memory. Ishiguro depicted memory in terms of a simple narrative strategy to develop the remembrances of protagonists reflecting upon and finding a meaning for their personal lives. In the novels of Ishiguro as well as in real life, memory is an act of reflection and recall. The characters in the novels of Ishiguro finds that memory often functions as a filter through which individuals are able to recall episodes in a manner which they find more in tune with how they would have like it to be. Subsequently, the novels are written in the first person narrative style and the narrators often exhibit human failings. Ishiguro’s technique is to allow these characters to reveal their flaws implicitly during the narratives. The characters of Ishiguro’s novels find themselves in a world of failing structures. They are floating and powerless creations, who are unable to rely upon the sliding ground of social custom or the crumbling material world to provide for them a sense of foundation and stability. \textit{A Pale View of Hills, An Artist of the Floating World} and \textit{The Remains of the Day} are set in the period following World War – II when nations struggled for supremacy and the world’s power structures were significantly readjusted. The narrators of the first two novels – Etsuko of \textit{A Pale View of Hills} and Ono of \textit{An Artist of the Floating World} are Japanese and have experienced the sudden and violent stripping of their country’s self-conception as powerful. The war has severely damaged the nation’s landscape, both literally and metaphorically. Bombs had demolished cities and families had been torn apart just as societal customs and traditions were undermined, and replaced by Western values and ideologies.
In his first two novels (*A Pale View of Hills* and *An Artist of the Floating World*), characters attempt to rebuild their lives following one of the century’s worst calamities upon their society, the bombing of Nagasaki and Hiroshima. Ishiguro uses the historical situations in order to explore the emotions of his characters. In manifesting self-dignity and to situate their own identities, Ishiguro’s characters turn inward for courage to speak about their lives, even decades later when they are facing an important turning point in their own lives. In *The Remains of the Day*, Stevens’ position as butler compels an economy of speaking as well. To voice one’s emotions at all times would appear out of character for these narrators, for silence is as much an aspect of their stories as the words that they eventually utter. People ‘manage reality by their constructions’ writes postmodern critic Ihab Hassan, and silence as one form of such a construction which ‘fills the extreme states of mind – void, madness, outrage, ecstasy, mystic trance – when ordinary discourse ceases to carry the burden of meaning’. Such gaps, such silences filling the void in the narrators’ stories, signal an important strategy that is crucial to Ishiguro’s development of characters. Ishiguro employ gaps to unveil his characters’ pain of suffering. His concern with how his characters read into and then interpret their life stories reflect those aspects that are shared by philosophers in terms of the theory on memory, and thus establish the interconnection between memory and identity:

The past is a memory of time and space conditioned by the mechanisms of identity formation and the expression of trauma to whose vicissitudes memory is subject.

Memory plays a vital role in human beings and there is scarcely a human activity that is not affected by memory. For Ishiguro, memory seems to be the source of knowledge which helps in making sense of the continuity of the self, of the relation between mind and body, and of the
experience of time. In his novels, conscious memory in the individual is inherently tied to the present; it is a construction that is formulated in the present which then looks back upon the past. It is an impetus within an individual’s present position that draws them back, that provokes memory. Through either a purposeful, willful recollection of the past based on a need to know, or through an unconscious yearning for stimulus, memory is evoked in the mind of an individual that is firmly rooted in the present. For instance in *An Artist of the Floating World*, Ono reflects his past with his memory, and his past can be compared to his teacher Mori-san’s villa:

> So cluttered with every sort of object [it] is impossible to cross it without hopping from space to space.⁶⁰

It is packed with: “stacks of old canvasses tied together with rope, broken of old easels, all manner of pots and jars with brushes or sticks protruding” – the debris of his aborted career – and in the light of his conscience, the objects’ “exaggerated shadows [create] an eerie effect, as though they constitute some grotesque miniature cemetery”.⁶¹ Therefore as Heather Homes in “Meditations on Memory” opines:

> The essence of memory is twofold; there is the present idea, and the relation of this idea to the past.⁶²

Ono seeks to reorder these jumbled details of his past to restructure them in the form of a satisfying pattern constituting significance and achievements. Just as Sugimura, in building his garden, wandered around the city identifying and transplanting the shrubs and trees he liked, Ono, in structuring his identity, chooses from among his store of memories those that appeal to him, reframing and repositioning them, and he hopes “with admirable skill” to create a
“splendidly harmonious” result, a composition with a “cultural, rambling feeling … with barely a hint of artificial design”.  

In *How Societies Remember*, Paul Connerton states:

> There is difficulty extracting our past from our present: not simply because present factors tend to influence – some might want to say distort – our recollections of the past, but also because past factors tend to influence, or distort, our experience of the present.

In his novels, Ishiguro reflected that the present, as well as being responsible for the remembrance of an occurrence, affects the manner and practice in which the past is regarded. An episode in the characters’ memory is related to events that came before it and the one which have occurred since. In relation to this Heather Homes expresses:

> The effect of the present on memory is qualified by what is known about the functionality of the brain; memories come to the individual encoded by neural networks in the brain whose connections have already been shaped by previous experiences in the world. Therefore the past can never be looked back upon in any passive manner; it is modified and filtered through the present consciousness and functionality of the mind.

Similarly, W. Walter Menninger denotes that memory “can rarely be depended upon to faithfully recall past events, especially those in which the subject directly participated”. Subsequently, in the novels of Ishiguro, distortion in the case of individual memory is usually linked to the manner in which subjects currently view themselves. Individuals have other emotional qualifiers
which often alter their ability to look back at past events without the intrusion of their present consciousness. Just as Heather Home opines that emotive characteristics such as pride, vanity, shame and fear may all come into play when memory is evoked, in response to these characteristics the characters of Ishiguro’s novels have the ability to alter past situations before they reach the forefront of their consciousness. This ability to alter memory is usually performed unconsciously and is therefore not equivalent to lying or purposely obscuring the truth. However, in an effort directed towards self-preservation and self-perception, consciousness often mediate what they recall. Subsequently, after the publication of his second novel, An Artist of the Floating World, Ishiguro said that he was exploring how his first-person narrators used “the language of self-deception and self-protection” to convey their life stories. On the surface, Ishiguro’s protagonists appear as “self-conscious narrators” who are distinctly aware of themselves as writers of their own stories, as they are observing or remembering their lives, they also comment selectively on how they are “writing, thinking, speaking, or reflecting” that life. The narrator’s dual roles of reading significance into and then documenting the details of that life are linked to a particular kind of self-deception that interested Ishiguro. He sympathizes with how the deception signifies a character who is being guarded against emotional injury or harm; accordingly, the ethical dilemmas forcing the characters into forms of simultaneous deception and protection could be identified.

How Ishiguro’s characters come to a realization of the forces of their lives and how they rewrite their life stories to suit their narrative are as important to Ishiguro as the manner in which his readers apprehend their own interpretative process while reading his novels. Ishiguro’s characters emerge in relatively simplistic situations but are revealed to be carrying with them complicated states of being. Through Ishiguro’s evocative narrative style, the richness of their
crisis can be examined and have, as a result, an important didactic function for understanding human emotions. Theories of memory may prove helpful in such instances of interpretation, since its paradigm fits with Ishiguro’s portrayals of the psyches of his characters responding to historical and personal forces of their lives. According to Nicola King:

All narrative accounts of life stories, whether they be the ongoing stories which we tell ourselves and each other as part of the construction of identity, or the more shaped and literary narratives of autobiography or first-person fictions, are made possible by memory. They also reconstruct memory according to uncertain assumptions about the way it functions and the kind of access it gives to the past.\(^7^0\)

Subsequently, there are moments when the characters’ memories in the novels returns to the past, ostensibly unchanged by the passing of time, such memories tend to be suffused with a sense of loss, the nostalgia out of which they may be at least in part created. For instance in *A Pale View of Hills* Etsuko longed for a time when she did not know what was going to happen next – or conversely, to relive the past with the foreknowledge she then lacked. But memory can only be reconstructed in time, and time as Carolyn Steedman puts it, “catches together what we know and what we do not yet know”.\(^7^1\)

The concept that memory plays a significant role in personal identity has been examined rewardingly by contemporary philosophers. Such debates often refer back to John Locke’s attempt in defining ‘memory’ in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. In this book, he famously identified the self with memory. He denotes that one’s identity is completely determined by his or her memory and someone who does not remember anything of his or her
past had in fact no identity and no sense of self. Locke was an empiricist who derived knowledge and made conclusions based on experiences and sensations. To him, somebody without the ability to record memories could have no sense of self. Subsequently, in the novels of Ishiguro, characters’ memories play a pivotal role in determining their identity. Through memory, they attempt to find the ‘truth’ about their life and eventually come to realize who they really are. Ishiguro develops his broad concerns for the way people seek truth in their lives, but who then find multiple ways of dismantling access to it, because of the painfulness of truth itself. In relation to this Wong deduces:

What is most familiar to them is also most alien; perhaps a language of fiction can capture the two senses of finding ways to express an ambivalent emotional state.

Provocatively, through a concealment of pain, the narrators of Ishiguro’s novels also reveal their fear of revelation and knowledge of their lives. David Hume in *A Treatise of Human Nature* argues that the ideas of memory are more stronger and more lively than those of imagination, but that the relationship between the two is dubious since memories can lose their vividness and can be thus mistaken for fictions of the mind, or imaginations can grow so strong and convincing that it can be seen as true memories. Ishiguro’s novels also reflects the rifts between the unspoken assumptions about memories and the manner in which the characters reflect the ‘past’ on the one hand, and the more complex ways in which memory in fact works on the other.

The German philosopher Georg William Friedrich Hegel introduced some new terms into the discussion of memory. Hegel makes the distinction between memory and recollections as did Aristotle, and the one between memory and imagination, as did Hume. According to Friedrich
Nietzsche, the past and present, or memory and forgetting, are closely related and both are needed in equal measure to secure the health of an individual. He observes:

 Either the classical past could be used to justify and reinforce the present culture by suggesting an identity and continuity between past and present, or the past could be used to criticize the present by stressing the difference and distance between them.⁷⁶

Bergson makes a distinction between two different kinds of memory – habit and conscious memory where his pure/conscious memory refers “to the survival of personal memories in the unconscious.”⁷⁷ Bergson influenced Marcel Proust, who in turn has been extremely influential on Kazuo Ishiguro’s work, as he expresses in an interview:

 I realized that as a novelist, you did not necessarily have to tell a story by going from one solid, well-built scene to the next. You could actually mimic the way memory runs through someone’s mind. You can have a fragment of a scene dovetailed into a scene that takes place thirty years later …

 The whole atmosphere and mood searching through that foggy world of memory to find out who you are, what your history is – fascinates me. That’s an example of something I read at a time when I was searching as a writer, and I found it. I’m not a big Proust fan … I have to say, though, that he’s had a profound influence on me.⁷⁸

Subsequently, in his novels, Ishiguro employs the strategy of using memory and hindsight. In A Pale View of Hills and An Artist of the Floating World, both protagonists –
Etsuko and Masuji Ono seemed careful about not overburdening their listeners with superfluous details; as their pasts emerge more vividly, despite their own achronological approach, it is clearer that careful reflection on the narrators’ parts is a guise for purposeful deflection of injurious details. Seen first as offering simple stories on the surface, the narrators also reveal how deeply their self-estrangement runs. Reed Way Dasenbrock notes that readers “actually interpret, encounter anomalies, sentences that don’t seem to agree with what is hold true because of the narrator’s clever uses of language”. A reader’s realization of such an aesthetic effect arises directly from Ishiguro’s literary method: in order to create an emotional atmosphere where honesty and dishonesty of self-revelation might be discerned, Ishiguro combines narrative technique with a concern for human psychology, both for his characters who read and write their tales and for his actual readers. In narrating their past, the protagonists reveal a kind of self-interpretation in terms of limit case of the more general process of interpretation which was already spoken and may thus serve as a testing ground of sorts to determine its value and validity. As such, Mark Freeman observes:

They are our pasts, our histories, and are in that sense inseparable from who is doing the interpreting, namely ourselves: subject and object are one. We are thus interpreting precisely that which, in some sense we ourselves have fashioned through our own reflective imagination.

After publication of The Remains of the Day, Ishiguro again emphasized the necessity of his narrator’s “suppression of emotion” and how the language of the novel depicts that the main character Stevens is “actually hiding from what is perhaps the scariest arena in life, which is the emotional arena”. By privileging this elusive arena of human experience as a theme and motive for the novel, Ishiguro highlights the techniques that people use either to uncover or
further to suppress their emotions, particularly in the manner which such emotions are prompted by memory. Importantly, the novels all have relatively clear time frames of past and present, but as the narrators delve into their memories, these two frames becomes complicated, and at times, distorted by emotions. As such, Heather Home denotes:

The past cannot be changed for it has indeed occurred: the individuals view of the past, however, can be manipulated; it is flexible within a certain framework…When a memory is evoked it is not merely being replayed in our mind’s eye, it is in fact being reinterpreted and reconstructed.  

Subsequently, the novels of Kazuo Ishiguro are narrated by protagonists who have something to hide, from themselves (no less than from their readers), yet who reconstruct their past failures and misplaced loyalties nostaligically, even elegiacally. Unsurprisingly, these first-person protagonists make for “unreliable” narrators – narrators, (in Wayne Booth’s influential term) who fail to speak for or act in accordance with the norms of the work, and who therefore are to be construed ironically in one way or another. In this connection, what Ishiguro says of his first novel is germane to all of them:

The whole narrative strategy of the book was about how someone ends up talking about things they cannot face directly through other people’s stories. I was trying to explore… how people use the language of self-deception and self-protection.
In another interview, Ishiguro puts this even more boldly:

The language I use [in my novels] tends to be the sort that actually suppresses meaning and tries to hide away meaning […] .

In a study of first-person narrators in fiction, David Goldknopf writes that first person narrator tend either to “hand us immediately into the narrative situation” through a “direct appeal for our attention” or “to intervene between us and the narrative situation, forcing us always to evaluate the latter through them, making the operation of their minds the true subject matter of the story”. Ishiguro’s protagonist – narrators selected for study namely, Etsuko, Ono, Stevens, Banks, and Kathy engage in both strategies simultaneously, insisting that their readers second-guess their perceptions, and thus read between the lines of their narratives. Put another way, all of Ishiguro’s narrators claim to be offering their readers accurate reconstructions of their past when in fact they “attempt to conceal the overbearing shame associated with this past”. In this sense, “the truth is revealed to us through the words of narrators who themselves largely fail to see it”.

The selective narration presented in the novels each reveal significant aspects of the particular character’s crisis; each narrator is in effect writing his or her own story along an emotional course to be tracked by a reader or listener who will bear witness to the tales. In order to make sense of who they are, they explore their own histories. Mark Freeman notes:

We survey and explore our own histories, toward the end of making and remaking sense of who and what we are.

Subsequently, to identify who they really are, Ishiguro’s narrators examined their past lives, and returned to their past. However, Ishiguro notes that he likes to follow his protagonists “thoughts
around as they try to trip themselves up or hide from themselves”. In narrating their past, the protagonists thus suppress their feelings in order to protect themselves from painful experiences and to maintain their dignity as well. Similarly, they are individuals who repress wishes because they cannot face or even admit – wishes that, in Freud’s phrase, prove to be “incompatible” with their “ethical and aesthetic standards”. Ishiguro comments of his protagonists - as characters who:

Know what they have to avoid and that determines the route they take through memory, and through the past. There’s no coincidence that they’re worrying because they sense there isn’t something quite right there. But of course memory is this terribly treacherous terrain, the very ambiguities of memory go to feed self-deception.

Each of the novel’s narrators find themselves alone, distanced from mentors, friends and family members. For example, in A Pale View of Hills, Etsuko, a mother of two daughters lives alone in England. One daughter is dead, and the other has moved away and by maintaining a strict privacy and distance, Etsuko is forbidden to play the role of mother in her life. Like Etsuko, Stevens in The Remains of the Day requires a sense of identity in order to achieve something in his life. As Mr Farraday notes, the butler has spent his life “locked up in this big house helping out” without the opportunity even “to see around this beautiful country”.

His life is also marked by insularity and isolation, and he remains in the pantry, in which he shuts himself up, seeking “privacy and solitude” in a dark, damp, windowless cell. Subsequently, the characters in the novels desperately seek relief from the desolation that they face, each therefore return to their past, working to extract from it a sense of proof of their own significance in order to deny the unendurable emptiness and powerlessness of their life. Cynthia F.Wong observes:
The return to the past is prompted by an intense and personal emotion in the present moment of narration; each foretells in the opening of the respective texts of a futile, but necessary effort to reconfigure the events owing to subsequent emotion which the reader will identify as their shame about the past. Each return to a past which might atone for the present. Even a failed memory might allow each to re-examine significance in the new context and to account for the solitude of that past. In Ishiguro’s novels, the characters do not undertake a revision of the past in the usual sense of simply re-seeing the events again. Rather, the narrators reposition themselves in the new contexts and assess their roles in contributing to both private and historical events. Thus, in narrating the past, the protagonists of Ishiguro’s novels attempt to identify their existence with the aid of their memory. In doing so, they attempt to validate their life and try to give themselves a respectable identity either in their family or society. They are also displaced people and their displacement simultaneously results in a crisis of identity. In narrating their past, they suppress their feelings and instead of narrating about their lives directly, they indulge in the stories of their friends or family members. This notion is eventually revealed as the narrative progresses. Nevertheless, the painful past cannot be remade and thus in creating their narrative and constructing their account, they hope to relocate their identity. Lewis Burke Frumkes cites:

The maze of human memory – the ways in which we accommodate and alter it, deceive and deliver ourselves with it – is the territory that Kazuo Ishiguro has made his own.
Therefore in Ishiguro’s novels, memory functions as a means of constructing narratives and identity, while also depicting the nature of memory which is characterized by its unreliability. Ishiguro expresses:

I’m interested in memory because it’s a filter through which we see our lives, and because it’s foggy and obscure, the opportunities for self-deception are there. In the end, as a writer, I’m more interested in what people tell themselves happened rather than what actually happened.\footnote{97}

His works exude an increasing interest in the narrative structuring of memory as a way of making sense of the past. Memory is of paramount importance in building up the identity of his characters, and at the same time, it is also highly ambivalent: at times, it can be used to control the narratives, but often it proves to be beyond the control of the present self.
NOTES


6Ibid.


8Quoted from Rossington, Michael and Anne Whitehead (eds). *Theories of Memory: A Reader*. USA: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2007. Print. 3.


14. Ibid.


20Ibid.


24Ibid.


27Ibid.

29 Ibid.


42 Ibid. 1.

43 Ibid. 92.


49 Ibid.


69 Ibid.


94 Ibid.
