CHAPTER II
MEMORY AND UNRELIABLE NARRATION
This chapter shall concentrate upon the dynamics of memory in Ishiguro’s discourse especially in terms of distortion and its selectivity, which is related to partial forgetting or biased elaboration of past experiences. In his novels Kazuo Ishiguro makes use of the literary device of the unreliable first person narration. Wayne Booth was the first scholar to explicitly define the concept of the unreliable narrator in *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, explaining that:

> I have called a narrator reliable when he speaks for or acts in accordance with the norms of the work (which is to say, the implied author’s norms), unreliable when he is not.¹

Similarly in Ishiguro’s fiction, the tension between the narrators’ conscious version, the past they narrate, and the manner in which they convey their narration without intending or even realizing it makes them appear as unreliable narrators. Seymour Chatman in *Story and Discourse* states:

> In ‘unreliable narration’ the narrator’s account is at odds with the implied reader’s surmises about the story’s real intentions. The story undermines the discourse. We conclude, by ‘reading out’ between the lines, that the events and existents could not have been ‘like that’ and so we hold the narrator suspect. Unreliable narration is thus an ironic form … The implied reader senses a discrepancy between a reasonable reconstruction of the story and the account given by the narrator. Two sets of norms conflict, and the covert set, once recognized, must win. The implied author has established a secret communication with the implied reader.²

The narrative strategy that Ishiguro applies in his discourse creates a sense of communication between the author and the reader. The narration of Ishiguro’s novels examine
the motivations for unreliability and the way these motives affect the ways in which the implied author speaks to the reader (silently) over and alongside of the voice of his unreliable narrators. Indications of unreliability are, as will be indicated in the chapter, located both in the structural elements controlled by the implied author and in the arena in which Ishiguro expects the reader to interact with the text. The most obvious indication of the preoccupations that colour the narratives is found in the narrative discourse. In addition, Ishiguro makes use of structural elements: the conflicts between scenic presentation and his narrators’ commentary indicate their unreliable or problematic judgements, and the order of the narration suggests something of the psychological preoccupations that influence the interpretations of their life. Ishiguro’s novels, by both facilitating and frustrating the process of figuring out “what really happened” not only refocuses the reader’s attention on the narrators’ mental processes, but deconstructs the notion of truth, and consequently questions both “reliable” and “unreliable” narration and the distinctions that are made between them. Applying this method has resulted in what David Lodge refers to as “appearance and reality” between what the narrators narrates and what actually happens. In an interview with Gregory Mason, Kazuo Ishiguro explained his interest in his first-person narrators:

Things like memory, how one uses memory for one’s own purposes, one’s own ends, those things interest me ... deeply. And so, for the time being, I’m going to stick with the first person, and develop the whole business about following somebody’s thoughts around, as they try to trip themselves up or to hide from themselves.
Therefore in Ishiguro’s fiction, the subjectivity and selectivity of memory is explored through the device of unreliable narration. The complex time structure of his novels contributes to the staging of memory as a non-linear and highly subjective phenomenon rather than a process involving conscious and orderly chronological reminiscence. Ishiguro projects memory in terms of a journey into the past, which is a self reflexive project. The first person narrative situation may surely not be the one most “truthful” with regards to “facts”, but in terms of transmitting a story, it may well be the most natural as it gives the most credit to an individual voice. Of all possible narrative perspectives, it certainly resembles face-to-face verbal exchange most closely. Furthermore, the effect of familiarization between implied author and implied reader can be reached most easily by choosing a first-person narrator – and an unreliable first person narrator only strengthens the ties between author and reader, for a kind of “behind-the-narrator’s back-communication” between the two is often the outcome. Riggan writes about the “natural functions of the eye-witness point of view”:

The very fact that we have before us, either literally or figuratively, an identifiable narrator telling us the story directly, possibly even metaphorically grabbing us on the arm, gesturing to us, or addressing us individually or collectively from time to time, imparts a tangible reality to the narrative situation and a substantial veracity to the account we are reading or ‘hearing’. And … unless obvious errors of fact, outlandishly absurd occurrences, or physical impossibilities enter unexplained into the narrative, our natural tendency is to grant our speaker the full credibility possible within the limitations of human memory and capability.
In his novels, Ishiguro has developed characters who rewrite their past with the help of their memory in order to heal the wounds, and to replace what has been lost and to subsequently recreate a sense of identity. Narrating the past has a freeing and healing effect on the narrators, but it simultaneously underscores the unspeakability, as well as the absolute unrepresentability of the real event. Ishiguro notes:

I’m trying to capture the texture of memory. I need to keep reminding people that the flashbacks aren’t just a clinical, technical means of conveying things that happened in the past. This is somebody turning over certain memories, in the light of his current emotional condition. I like blurred edges around these events, so you’re not quite certain if they really happened and you’re not quite certain to what extent the narrator is deliberately colouring them.8

Ishiguro examines how memory can be distorted so as to conceal the fact that one has lived a failed life. Memory distortion is focused by Freud and he has argued that the visual image that is brought to mind when recollecting past experiences are not pictures of reality; rather, they are distortions or screens in order to avoid facing what really happened.9 Freud’s central idea which depicts that conscious recollections are inevitably distorted by a person’s wishes, desires, and unconscious conflicts have become one of the predominant theme within Ishiguro’s fiction. Subsequently, in his novels, Ishiguro created characters who are so adept at disguising themselves. In this kind of narrative, the narrators’ version of the story gets into conflict with another version, which is not narrated directly but the reader however discovers it with the help of “implicit additional information”.10 In other words, the narrators’ version becomes suspicious because of “the narrator’s unintentional self-incrimination”,11 which according to Bruno
Zerweck constitutes a necessary part of unreliable narrator. The tension between the narrators’ conscious version, the story they want to tell, and the one s/he conveys without intending or even realizing it gives the device of the unreliable narrator its meaning and value because it allows the reader to discover the plot in an interesting way. The reader, however, does not always find out what “really” happens in the fictive world, in many cases, no single correct version exists.\textsuperscript{12}

Unreliable narrators are mostly autodiegetic, which holds true for Ishiguro’s narrators in his novels. Ishiguro’s narrators constitutes a good example of a narrator who engages in long monologues about themselves, becomes as if obsessed by themselves and their stories and whose narration amounts to a highly ego-centric account of events. Ansgar Nunning considers such preoccupation with the topic of oneself one of the possible symptoms of the narrator’s unreliability.\textsuperscript{13} This self-centered kind of narrators actually provides a picture of themselves. For instance, in \textit{An Artist of the Floating World}, Ono admits that it is difficult to remain objective when one’s own features are concerned:

\begin{quote}
I cannot recall any colleague who could paint a self – portrait with absolute honesty; however accurately one may fill in the surface details of one’s mirror reflection, the personality represented rarely comes near the truth as others would see it.\textsuperscript{14}
\end{quote}

The reason for the inaccuracy of self-portrait is the personal involvement in such a report that the subject wants to hide the disgraceful facts and emphasize the positive traits. However, the biased depiction of oneself and by one’s narrative often happens without the awareness of the narrator. As Etsuko in \textit{A Pale View Of Hills} makes a comment about the limits of human capacity to
reproduce events, Stevens in *The Remains of the Day* warns about the deceptiveness of memory too:

> It is possible this is a case of hindsight colouring my memory.\(^{15}\)

These and many other similar metanarrative remarks illustrate the psychologically interesting fact that Ishiguro’s unreliable narrators do not intend to lie; they deceive themselves as well as the reader. In Amit Marcus’ words, these narrators are:

> Self-deceivers who are unaware of the strategies they employ to convince themselves of the veracity of lie, and therefore their state of mind is not a consequence of an intentional act of deception, as opposed to the mind of the other - deceivers.\(^{16}\)

Thus, in exploring the dynamics of memory Ishiguro created narrators who become unreliable as they remember selectively, which sorts out memories and erases those that do not fit into the desirable pictures of themselves. Suppressing certain memories thus helps his narrators evade such parts of the narrative that would give rise to unpleasant feelings, such as regret, shame and guilt. In this way, the unreliable memory deforms the narrators’ sense of reality and it is this twisted version which they present in the narration. Zuzana states:

> Most of us have experienced the same play of one’s memory: we tell a story, convinced that it is true, and then becomes unsure of its veracity when confronted with different version of it or when we realize that it contradicts our other memories. The majority of people have therefore
been ‘unreliable narrators’ in their lives. The quality of unreliability thus makes the narrator a realistic image of a human being.\(^\text{17}\)

Ishiguro’s notion that memories are the reconstructions of past events merged with Sir Frederic Bartlett’s theory which argued that the experience of remembering is shaped as much by the rememberer’s “attitude” – expectations and general knowledge regarding what should have happened and what could have happened – as by the content of specific past events.\(^\text{18}\) Similarly in *An Artist of the Floating World*, Masuji Ono connects the unconnected events of his life through the fabric of his narrative. As Mikhail Bakhtin state that whenever there is any “serious and probing” attempt at self understanding – whenever, that is, one seeks to rewrite the self.\(^\text{19}\) Ono states:

> It is perhaps a sign of my advances years that I have taken to wandering into rooms for no purpose…Retirement places more time on your hands … you are able to drift through the day at your own pace … I must be absent-minded to be wandering aimlessly into – of all places – the reception room.\(^\text{20}\)

This roaming through the house wandering aimlessly has parallel in Ono’s manner of narration. He is drifting through various stories without obvious intent, digressing from one topic to another in no apparent order. Ono’s account of the events, present or recent, at the time of narration is often interrupted by his return to the past. Digressions in narrative as expressed by Fludernik, labels “exegetical deflection”, which involves the narrator’s providing:

> excessive information about marginal issues and insufficient treatment of what the reader constructs as crucial topics.\(^\text{21}\)
Similarly, in the novel, Ono withholds some facts and feelings concerning the negative aspects of his past, while he often digresses to stories which present his past in a favourable light.

Ono’s narration undermines authority as he “struggles both to reveal and to veil meaning,”\textsuperscript{22} manifested particularly by his perpetual deviation and drifting from not yet concluded topics. This signals to the reader that the narrator’s account of the narrated events and of their implications is probably distorted. Gaby Allrath argues that digressions in unreliable narration also draw attention to the narrators’ passion for themselves: the narration centers upon them and their own experience and views. Thus even when they speak about the other characters, they really give information about themselves, often in the form of projecting their own characteristics or states of mind.\textsuperscript{23} Self-projection is an important feature of Ono’s narrative: his frequent asides about other people, seemingly unrelated to the main topic, gain their meaning as demonstrations of Ono’s own actions, feelings, opinions and self-assessment. Ono’s projection of his life thus appears as his attempt to create a positive picture of himself.

In \textit{An Artist of the Floating World}, Ishiguro concedes that the structure of every memory is assembled on demand. T. Collins Logan in \textit{Memory:Self} states:

\begin{quote}
Memories are like dreams – manufactured things, a fabrication from incomplete perceptions, illusory impressions of the past filtered through, an evolving understanding in the present.\textsuperscript{24}
\end{quote}

Ono’s account also deals with his own self where his narration revolves around his own person and his narrative as a whole amounts to a kind of self-portrait. His frequent digressions and omitting part of the story facilitate distortion and his avoidance in narrating certain pieces of
information. For example, he recounts the incident where he reports his former pupil Kuroda with regard to his “unpatriotic activities” to the authorities, knowing the harsh consequences of his action, he defends himself:

‘I had no idea’, I said, ‘something like this would happen’.25

Yet, as Cynthia F. Wong notices, Ono shows no remorse for what happened to Kuroda which is further demonstrated by his lack of compassion when narrating Kuroda’s shabbiness on a different occasion.26 Moreover, Ono’s act of betrayal is only portrayed indirectly – through his direct speech to one of the officers where he refuses to remain in the dangerous area of these memories for a long time:

But this is all of limited relevance here.27

Ono’s attitude to Kuroda can be seen as a good example of the narrator’s treatment of his mistakes. He talks more around them than about them and by carefully selecting the memories to be recalled, he manages to escape his sense of guilt and remorse, and simultaneously fails to really acknowledge his mistakes to himself. Moreover, he actually praises his ability to make decisions, to go against the stream, notwithstanding the consequences that these decisions brought about. Ono speaks highly of the likes of him who had big plans and attempted to do something exceptional, even though their efforts turn out wrong. As such, Ono tries to justify his behavior in the pre war period and in order to be able to accomplish this self justification, his memory constructs a version of his past that present him as a man doing the best under the given circumstances. The consistency of this version would be jeopardized if Ono really acknowledged his mistakes to himself.28 Yet, the same wish for self-justification forces him to recall some
events that hint at his wrongdoings. Both the need to tell and the necessity to avoid some parts of the truth lead to the digressions and indirectness in the account. Thus, he runs to and from certain recollections in an attempt to render an acceptable identity of himself and his past. Moreover, Ono wants to find some compensation for his present insignificance while succeeding the loss of his former position. He does so by looking back to his past and reminiscing about his achievements such as receiving the Shigeta Foundation Award that had resulted in “a moment or two of real satisfaction”.

Again, he has to repress the knowledge of the consequences of such achievements so that regrets do not mar the pleasure that these memories yield. In this way, he feeds his ‘conceits’ about whose distorting effect on the self-portrait.

Thus, Ono surveyed the scene of his life, the path that he had travelled and finds that it is marked by a series of unconnected accidental events, determined by whim, convenience, chance and social pressure. Faced with the prospect of his own transience and growing insignificance, Ono finds that the identity he holds for himself is no longer valid and therefore looks back over his life and seeks to transcend this sense of contingency in order to locate a source of permanence. Ono admits that his account is not historically accurate, but that particular scenes have (with repeated telling) taken on a life of their own, that they have been amended to represent what he wishes to depict as his attitude in order to resolve each point in his life. He states that his memory may falter, like one engaged in a pleasant conversation, Ono moves from anecdotes to anecdote as present events inspire his memory. However, in the middle of recounting an anecdote, he would break off saying:

But I am digressing. I was trying to recall here [instead] details of Setsuko’s stay with us last month.
At other times, after recounting of a particularly revealing episode, Ono stops short and admits:

Of course, this is all a matter of many years ago now and I cannot vouch that those were my exact words that morning.\footnote{31}

However much Ono struggles to present as many sides to a story as possible, it should be remembered that Ishiguro’s motive in the language of his novels:

Tends to be the sort that actually suppresses meaning and tries to hide away meaning rather than chase after something just beyond the reach of words.\footnote{32}

Ishiguro explains that Ono’s consciousness stemmed from his interest in creating a character who is mapping his own “mental landscape” and who in that process, is able to show that he “lacked a perspective to see beyond his own environment and to stand outside the actual values of his time”.\footnote{33} The condition of Ono suits the philosophical observation made by Blanchot:

No one likes to recognize himself as a stranger in the mirror where what he sees is not his own double but someone whom he would have liked to have been.\footnote{34}

Ono represents his past with the aim of proving that he always possessed the unquestionably admirable ability to think and judge for himself, even it meant going against the sway of those around him. This quality has injected into his account a number of reworked speeches to serve as foreshadowers, as manifestations of that quality, which, he seeks to establish.
Consequently, Ono’s manner of narration, his digressions to different topics, and his indirect way of conveying a message hints at his narratorial unreliability. At the same time, this quality of Ono as a narrator originates in his wish for self-justification as well as establishing a well defined identity, provoked by his present situation, especially his being considered a traitor. More specifically, his desire to plunge into his past and to vindicate his own life is led by his fear of the repercussions of his past on his daughter’s happiness and by his nostalgia for the pre-war years in which he was held in high esteem. Thus, Ono reconstructs his past with the aid of his memory in order to create a positive picture of himself and to render himself an ‘acceptable’ identity.

Throughout his oeuvre, Ishiguro deploys that memory, or that which is remembered, is never static, or somehow capable of being thought of apart from the subject who is remembering. This act places or defines the identity of a subject’s position in the present. Identities that draw upon memories are never any more fixed than the fluidity of the subject that is in the process of remembering. In A Pale View of Hills, there are a number of times Etsuko narrates that her account of the past may not be vivid and accurate, like:

It is possible that my memory of these events will have grown hazy with time, that things did not happen in quite the way they come back to me today.

She at first narrates that her memory of the events must have grown hazy with time but she later indicates that the distortion may be more active, and even deliberate. She notes:
Memory I realize, can be an unreliable thing; heavily coloured by circumstances in which one remembers, and no doubt this applies to certain of the recollections I have gathered.\textsuperscript{37}

In these instances, Etsuko observes the limitations of her memory, and she recalls distinctly an “eerie spell”\textsuperscript{38} or “a premonition”\textsuperscript{39} that surrounds the remembrances of those events. At other times, she hints at supernatural possibilities or refers to events or people in both past and present whose significance she leaves unexplained. The calm tone that she has used throughout the novel shows that Etsuko may be suppressing or hiding from the painful facts of the period that she is recollecting. Her narrative only appears lucidly constructed, despite her own misgivings about flawed memory, but it is riddled with evasions of more painful truths about her life and her daughter’s death. Apparitions haunt her memories and suggest an unsettled atmosphere. The gaps in her narration indicate that her memory is distorted in order to mend her understanding of how events have evolved in order to construct her identity.

The novel opens with Etsuko, a middle aged Japanese woman and the first person narrator, receiving a visit by her second daughter Niki at her country house in Southern England. Etsuko does not want to be reminded of the past. She notes, “I – perhaps out of some selfish desire not to be reminded of the past…”\textsuperscript{40} The reason for this is that her elder daughter has committed suicide by hanging herself in her rented room in Manchester. The death of Keiko is at the same time the cause for Niki’s (her younger daughter) five days spring visit. This visit functions as the frame story for Etsuko’s memories and is set in the early 1980s. Even though she did not want to discuss about the death of Keiko and admits that: “Such things are long in the past now and [she] have no wish to ponder them yet again”, \textsuperscript{41} but at the same time the death of Keiko “was never far away, hovering over [them] whenever [they] talked”.\textsuperscript{42} Even though
Etsuko denies the fact that her story is about her suppressed feelings on the death of her daughter as well as a sense of personal failure, however, it is obvious that she narrates her story in order to overcome her painful past. Brian W. Shaffer notes that:

Etsuko’s “real” story is told exclusively by indirection…these circumstances are precisely what her narrative, at least indirectly, is all about.43

The most interesting thing about the narrative situation of *A Pale View of Hills* is the fact that Etsuko is by no means always conscious of what she is saying or implying, and about what words she uses to communicate her stories. In fact, many of the connotations and implications of her narrative are more often than not invisible to her. The reader is meant to recognize this gap, and the major of it is that Etsuko’s own narrative reveals her unreliability. Tiny lapses in her wordings, slips of the tongue, periphrases and litotes – with these figures of speech, Ishiguro portrays his protagonist and her fundamental psychological and emotional problems through her own narrative. Riggan explains the nature of first person narration as:

First-person narration is, then, always at least potentially unreliable, in that the narrator, with these human limitations of perception and memory and assessment, may easily have missed, forgotten, or misconstrued certain incidents, words, or motives. … Much of what s/he [the I-narrator] tells us also gives us an idea of what he himself is like and has ‘a certain characterizing significance over and above its data value, by virtue of the fact that he is telling it to us.’ His narrative cannot be accepted purely in
absolute terms of true or false, probable or improbable, reliable or unreliable, convincing or unconvincing.\textsuperscript{44}

The climax of the novel also comes in the form of slips of the tongue. It happens when what was until then nothing more than a good guess on the side of the reader is seconded by the narrator herself. Etsuko has indeed talked about herself when she declared she was talking about Sachiko. At the end of the Inasa-episode, when the frightened Mariko does not want to leave for America, Etsuko says: “If you don’t like it over there, we [not “your mother and you” or something similar] can always come back”.\textsuperscript{45} And only a few pages later she again reveals her true subject, when she says, “Keiko [when it should be Mariko] was happy that day”.\textsuperscript{46}

Reflecting her life, Etsuko realizes that her role as a mother has not granted her a permanent identity or importance. She had abandoned her first husband and her second husband is now dead. For most of the novel (the sections that takes place in Nagasaki), Etsuko is pregnant, and is thus, neither childless, nor a mother. In the portion of the text set in England, although she has had two daughters, Etsuko lives alone and thus is, effectively childless. One daughter is dead and the other has moved away and by maintaining a strict discipline, has forbidden Etsuko to play the role of mother in her life. Keiko’s death has presented for Etsuko a complex and painful challenge. She maintains that the death of Keiko and the question of her responsibility are long in the past now and thus she has no reason to dwell on such matter,\textsuperscript{47} but at the same time, she is simultaneously overwhelmed by the need to wrestle with the matter. She asserts:

My motives for leaving Japan were justifiable and I know I always kept Keiko’s interest very much at heart. There is nothing to be gained in going over such matters again.\textsuperscript{48}
In spite of her reluctance to face reality, Etsuko feels that she needs to wrestle with the painful past in order to come to term with her own identity, which is only possible in and through the fabric of narrative itself. Subsequently, Etsuko in her narrative filters her memory through the characters of Sachiko and Mariko, with whom she blurs her own identity and that of Keiko respectively. She distances herself from her historical past and rewrites an account of her life. Cynthia F. Wong notes that, as the narrative evolves and as the details become paradoxically more clear and murky, the reader discovers that Etsuko remembers the “friendship of no more than a matter of some several weeks one summer many years ago” in order to explain to herself what happened to Keiko. The details of Sachiko’s life seem to mirror and to foreshadow aspects of Etsuko’s own life and her return to this period initially seems to help her mourn for Keiko. Although it is not sure of the extent to which Sachiko and Etsuko overlap (the extent to which Sachiko’s story is in fact Etsuko’s own), it is however clear that the character of Sachiko serves as a vehicle through which Etsuko can examine her own history and guilt while maintaining a certain distance. Thus Etsuko can carefully filter her memory of her past, examining, altering and ultimately approving them before acknowledging them as her own. In an interview, Ishiguro observes:

Whatever the facts were about what happened to Sachiko and her daughter, they are of interest to Etsuko now because she can use them to talk about herself.

This conflation allows Etsuko to put Sachiko on trial in place of herself; it allows her to examine her own role in her daughter’s suicide, to probe the question of her own guilt and the extent of her own responsibility from a safe distance, and to test various interpretations and readings of the past before insisting upon one into her newly constructed account of her own history, Etsuko
seems at first determined to acquit herself and to confirm that she made good choices with regard to her daughter and because she acted always with Keiko’s interest in mind, Niki’s assurance that her mother is “the last person anyone could blame”\textsuperscript{51} has become for Etsuko a possibility that, in some ways she wishes to avoid. Brian W. Shaffer denotes:

\begin{quote}
This is precisely what Etsuko herself would like to believe but cannot, her guilt from removing Keiko from Japan being anything but absolved.\textsuperscript{52}
\end{quote}

As such, memory plays a vital role in the life of Etsuko through which she seeks her identity. Unable to face the painful reality, Etsuko reflects her identity through the character of Sachiko which puts together the dismembered past in order to make sense of the trauma of the present. As Cynthia Wong states:

\begin{quote}
Etsuko remember in order to forget and reconstruct the past in an effort to obliterate it.\textsuperscript{53}
\end{quote}

Thus, the real story of Etsuko is told indirectly. In an interview, Ishiguro notes the way Etsuko uses her own narrative. She “talks around” what is really bothering her, employing a “language of self – deception and self – protection… she tells another story altogether, going back years and talking about somebody she once knew. So the entire strategy of the book is about how ‘someone’ ends up talking about things they cannot face directly through other people’s stories”.\textsuperscript{54} Thus projecting her guilt onto Sachiko, Etsuko attempts to “avoid punishment and self blame by inventing plausible excuses and alibis”\textsuperscript{55} for her misdeeds. Etsuko thus recollects her past in terms of establishing a permanent existence and to accept her own identity so that new interpretations can emerge for an enlarged understanding. Mark Freeman states:
A condition of self – understanding is possible only when the past is re-written, such that new interpretations are made to emerge and there exist the possibility for an enlarged understanding.\textsuperscript{56}

Etsuko, through her memory, does not attempt to render the past unconvincingly, but rather to construct the past. Memory thus becomes, at least partly, a therapeutic process. Again Mark Freeman notes:

Only when memories are appropriated into the fabric of the self – which is to say – only when one commences to rewrite the self by incorporating one’s memories within the context of plausible narrative order – can they be coincident with a measure of psychic healing.\textsuperscript{57}

At the end of the novel, Etsuko has established an identity by returning to the past with her memory which enables her to examine her action from a safe distance. Cynthia F. Wong rightly notes that in an effort to understand how death overtook Keiko, Etsuko returns to her own past, which is filled with signs and premonitions of potential pain and loss. Thus, she seeks self – integrity and forgiveness at a historical moment when such qualities of human strength were in short supply.\textsuperscript{58} Narration and memory are the only sources for Etsuko to identify who she really is and by recollecting the past with her memory, Etsuko has erected a structure to give form to her orderless life.

In Ishiguro’s novels, his narrators attempt to make sense of their present by rewriting their past. This interplay and interaction between past and present is underscored by Ishiguro’s skillful and effective deployment of the narrative form. Just as Frank Kermode notes that the text of the past are indeed regions of secrecy, whose meanings are never wholly to be discovered,\textsuperscript{59} it is there, in the interweaving of episodes both past and present, in the free movement of the
narrative voice between these two points in time, and in the shifting locations (between postwar Japan and the more recent England) of perhaps the late nineteen – seventies or early eighties, that Ishiguro deftly mends now and then, here and there, into one narrative tapestry.

In *The Remains of the Day*, Ishiguro delineates a character who is as unreliable a narrator as Etsuko and Ono. The novel provides a great number of signals of the narrator’s unreliability both in content and in form. The inconsistencies of content are related to Stevens’ view about his profession, by which he tries to suppress certain feelings concerning his past. They often appear in the text as a “conflict between the scenes the narrator and the interpretations that he gives to those scenes”. The novel’s title probably symbolizes the “evening of life”, the phase Stevens has entered and in which he looks back at his past. However, Renata Salecl points out an interesting analogy between *The Remains of the Day* and the Freudian day’s residues. According to Freud, the unconscious processes of “dream work” combine experience from the individual’s working life – the “residues of the day”, that is the memories of the previous day – and the unconscious impulses to form the “manifest” version of the dream. In the dream, in which the unconscious content of the subject’s mind becomes accessible, the memories of the day and the dreamer’s wishes and thoughts therefore appear distorted, disguised as something else. Thus, Salecl’s interpretation of the title implies the narrator’s unreliability: if Stevens’ recollection of the past correspond to the “day’s residues” (in considering ‘day’ as his life), then the reader has to expect to see them transformed by the narrator’s unconscious into the distorted ‘manifest’ version – the story that he presented to the reader. In addition, Freud says that dreams underlie an additional “secondary revision” when the dreamer in his/her presentation of the dream strives to provide it with an acceptable meaning and so alter the dream by the interpretation s/he puts on it. These modifications to the dream resemble Stevens’ adjustments to
the story and his additional explanations of various situations in an attempt to present a coherent story, whose individual parts do not contradict each other. For example, Stevens presents his life as dedicated purely to his profession, therefore he has to correct his comment: “I was not actually engaged in professional matters” regarding his reading romance. Viewing the event in retrospect, he assigns a professional motive to this activity – he claims to work on improving his “command of the English language”, which he holds for a duty.

Stevens, as he grows old, feels that he needs to examine his past. Purely a faithful servant, Stevens is threatened by the prospect that, like Ishiguro’s earlier narrators, he has lived without agency or effect that his existence has been without significant or lasting impact. Just as Ono strives to portray his very failures as successes, Stevens, in his lack of individual glory retraces the path of his history where he tries to locate the precious jewel of greatness. Cynthia F. Wong observes:

Hoping to find ‘some precious jewel’ he may have dropped is an effective metaphor for describing lost opportunity and the futility of its recovery.

In Stevens, Ishiguro depicted a character whose real journey has a metaphorical parallel in the trip which his mind makes to the past. Stevens’ recollection aims to refigure his life and attempts to create a new version of his past, one more acceptable to himself than his real life story. He tries to narrate his life in a way that conceals the “terrible mistake” of his life and that imparts his existence a greater importance. In order to achieve this goal, he distorts some details of what had happened and what he had done in his life. Lilian R. Furst had pointed out that one may misremember in various ways: by distortion through over – or understatement, by partial forgetting, by biased elaboration of past experiences. Daniel L. Schacter also astutely remarks:
When distortions and illusions of remembering do occur, these mistakes provide revealing clues about the nature of memory’s fragile power, and also illustrate dramatically that our day-to-day lives can be turned upside down by what we believe about the past.\textsuperscript{68}

In exploring the workings of memory, Ishiguro has also depicted that the process of remembering involves a complex reconstruction which depends on many factors like the present needs, values and convictions, which have a strong impact on the recollection. This constructive character of memory is an advantage in many respects, rather than supplying the characters with ready-made images, memory adapts to their present level of knowledge and focuses on those aspects that are most pertinent to the present situation. In \textit{The Remains of the Day}, Stevens distorts his memory so as to reveal his identity as a ‘great butler’ but this however comes into conflict with his present identity which reduced him to a man who takes the wrong side in his life. Therefore, in recollecting his past, Stevens is simultaneously as unreliable and as sympathetic a narrator as either Etsuko or Ono. Cynthia F. Wong opines:

\begin{quote}
Their stories promised a mode of detection at work: they both set out to understand the forces of the past as they sought to assemble some puzzle for this self-comprehension. But they also end their stories with keen but unspoken acceptance that the understanding is now futile knowledge.\textsuperscript{69}
\end{quote}

Towards the end of the novel, Stevens comes close to disavowing any culpability with his master’s politics and defends his own decisions in what he believes are his own terms:

\begin{quote}
I carried out my duties to the best of my abilities, ended to a standard which may consider ‘first rate’. It is hardly my fault if his lordship’s life
and work have turned out today to look, at best a sad waste – and it is quite illogical that I should feel any regret or shame on my own account. This passage clearly shows Stevens’ unreliability as narrator where he denotes that he has no reason for shame or regret in working honestly under Lord Darlington who, after his death has become public disgrace. Throughout his encounter with people in 1956, three years after Lord Darlington’s lonely death, Stevens finds that he can no longer account for the devastating demise of Darlington’s good name and estate. He may claim not to feel “any regret or shame”, but those are the precise feelings that have now overcome Stevens as he narrates his life with Darlington between the wars as he is unable to account for his equivocation without revealing the nature of his own wasted existence.

Most of the time, Stevens speaks with authority and confidence about being a butler. According to Stevens, what distinguishes truly great butlers from those who are merely extremely competent is most closely captured by the word ‘dignity’ which he defines as:

A butler’s ability not to abandon the professional being as he inhabits. Stevens modestly protests that it is hard for him to make judgements with regard to whether he himself ever necessarily became a great butler. Ironically, although he declares that truly great butlers “will not be shaken out by events”, Stevens constantly finds the construct of his narrative endangered by outside events, and he must repeatedly readjust his narratives, while presenting new evidence and new claims to parry this threat and to reassert his value and coherence.

Like Etsuko and Ono who admits to a failing memory, Stevens also asserts that he is remembering only as well as he can, given the confusion of the historical times and his
emotional regard for people and events. Like Etsuko and Ono, the gaps and the inconsistencies in Stevens’ memory sometimes appears genuine. However, as in *A Pale View of Hills* and *An Artist of the Floating World*, the emphasis on uncertainty also serves to distort and confuse versions that the narrator desired to remain unexposed. In other words, though Stevens insists that he acted with the best of knowledge, given the circumstances and times, his story also reveals that these limitations conceal important details which are too shameful to bring out into the open.

Newton characterizes Stevens duplicity by the manner in which he is able to glide through his memories, alternately looking and looking away. Moreover, Stevens seems both to know and not to know how past experiences have shaped his present life.

Closer examination of Stevens’ memory and his way of narrating further reveals the tremendous trepidation he has in confronting the past, so much so that he creates a foil for the journey that he will undertake:

It seems increasingly likely that I really will undertake the expedition that has been pre-occupying my imagination for some days.

Brian W. Shaffer observes:

Stevens’ journey is figured as an attempt to break out of the house, out of himself, and out of his physical and psychical routine – to overcome his amatory and political disengagement – in the guise of a “pleasure” trip with business implications, the “professional motive” of restaffing Darlington Hall.

Accordingly, Stevens’ motoring trip reveals his reluctance to face the prospect of an expedition that appears as a simple motoring holiday, but that is also demanding in physical and emotional
ways. Regarding himself to be a great butler by serving Lord Darlington loyally, his dream was shattered when he learnt the fact that Lord Darlington was a Nazi collaborator who was disgraced after the Second World War. Wong deduces that Stevens knows what interpretation history has placed on Lord Darlington’s life but he cannot bring himself to admit the truth. To dissociate himself from his triumphant service to his good master, Stevens would lose all protective illusions of the usefulness of his life.  

Stevens maintains his naivety in both professional and personal instances of his life to great ironic effect. His small laughs in moments of awkwardness reveal his inability to deal directly with embarrassment or confrontation. When he presses himself to make particularly intense scrutiny of memory, he lapses from referring to himself as ‘I’ to ‘one’ as a way to dissociate his present identity from his past identity. For instance, Stevens notes not ‘I’ but that “one would be meeting Miss Kenton again before the day’s end”. Thus, ‘one’ gives Stevens the authority to question and examine his life in the manner that the term ‘I’ cannot. In this connection, Brian W. Shaffer explains that Stevens is a great manipulator of language that he uses words and his narrative to convey information which he is unaware. Most significantly, Stevens can talks about himself only when he talks about others, when he talks about himself directly, he is compelled to lie. As with the route of his meandering car trip, his story itself might seem “unnecessarily circuitous” but that is precisely the point his narrative intentionally impedes his voyage of self – discovery. Thus when Stevens concludes that Lord Darlington’s “life and work have turned out today to look, at best, a sad waste” or that Kenton’s life has become to be “dominated by a sense of waste”, he in fact describes his own “life and work”, when he addresses Kenton’s “guilt” at helping to precipitate his father’s decline in professional status at Darlington Hall, he addresses his own, when he speaks of Kenton’s “nostalgia” for
Darlington Hall of the old days, he accurately reveals his own nostalgia, and when he refers to Kenton’s “sadness and weariness,” he instead registers his own. It is clear of whom Stevens really speaks when he remarks that Kenton undoubtedly “is pondering with regret decisions made in the far-off past that have now left her, deep in middle age, so alone and desolate” and that “the thought of returning to Darlington Hall” must therefore be a great comfort to her. And in those few moments when Stevens actually addresses his own feelings, he fabricates a substitute adjective for a more precise one in order to avoid revealing himself.

Thus, Stevens is unreliable in narrating his story in order to escape a failed past as well as a failed present. He distorts his past in order to conceal the reality that he had lived a wasted life. In the *Remains of the Day*, as in the other novels also, Ishiguro has shown a grasp of human emotions and the way each might manipulate memory in order to placate their pain of loss and reveals how people simultaneously deceive and protect themselves in the language which they have used.

*When We Were Orphans* covers the time span from Christopher Banks’ childhood, which he spent in Shanghai in the 1910s, to the late 1950s, when he leads a quiet life in London. However, the late 1950s are not presented as the ‘narrative present’ throughout the novel. Instead, the novel is divided into seven parts, each of which is headed by a precise date indicating the level of the narrative present. Far from establishing an easily comprehensible chronology, they only provide points of departure for a complex web of memories and reflections. The first part, for example, set ‘24th July 1930’, starts with:

> It was the summer of 1923, the summer I came down from Cambridge, when … I decided my future lay in the capital.
This passage thus immediately leaps back in time before a ‘present self’ of 1930 has come to the fore. More specifically, the layering of ‘past’ and ‘present’ emphasizes two aspects of temporal experience: firstly, the ‘present’ is shifted from part to part throughout the narrative, so that the ‘present self’ can only claim to have an overview of the whole narrative (almost simultaneously with the reader). The present does not appear as a stable observation point from which to survey the past, but as a fleeting phenomenon that is just as elusive as the past. Temporal levels are connected in ever shifting ways, memory being an integral part of the action in the present. This shifting of the present thus contributes to the impression that the narrating self does not give an objective account of his memories but a version influenced by present concerns and needs, and that as these present concerns evolve, so does the rendering of the memory narrative.

The second aspect of temporal experience which is emphasized is the notion that the ‘past’ is shown to be accessible only through the prism of a later consciousness – in many scenes not just once, but twice removed, when the ‘present level’, from which a scene is remembered, is itself also remembered from a slightly later point in time. The past is thus represented as both elusive and pervasive: it can never be grasped directly, but each present moment potentially spawns a host of memories. On the one hand, the novel shows the tenacity of past experience, the power of memory to infiltrate and shape the present. On the other hand, the ‘past’ is as much a product of the present as the other way round, which is shaped by slowly accumulating experience.

In the first three parts, the narrative present is set in London in the early and late 1930s, at a time when the present self Christopher Banks is a young adult. The main development on the time level of the ‘present’ concerns Banks’ career: in 1930, he is beginning to establish himself in society as a detective, while in 1937, he is already well settled. In these first three parts,
Banks’ memory of his childhood in Shanghai is depicted. What is striking, however, is the proliferation of certain contradictions in the present self’s account – contradictions which raise doubts about his reliability. Early in the novel, Banks’ own image of his past self does not match with other characters’ recollections. For example, when an old school friend, James Osbourne remarks:

My goodness, you were such an odd bird at school.\(^{87}\)

Banks is both surprised and annoyed:

In fact, it has always been a puzzle to me that Osbourne should have said such a thing of me that morning, since my own memory is that I blended perfectly into English school life.\(^{88}\)

Contradictions such as this one point to Banks’ blind spots and it is soon realized that he has built up an image of his younger self that comprises stereotypical notions of ‘Englishness’, like a ‘stiff upper lip’ mentality and a public school education marked by comradeship and wholesome activities. However, the first cracks in this image already show almost immediately after it is introduced as one of Banks’ cherished notions about himself. His self image is juxtaposed with a differing version of the impression that Banks makes on other people, but even in passages where there is no second character who could provide a different perspective, there are blatant contradictions. One of the most notable examples is the remark with which he introduces the catastrophe that ended his childhood in Shanghai and brought him to the English public school system:

Actually, odds as it may sound, my lack of parents – indeed, of any close kin in England except my aunt in Shropshire – had long ceased to be of any great inconvenience to me.\(^{89}\)
This stilted attempt at being casual, the inappropriate wording, especially the choice of the word ‘inconvenience’ could suggest supreme callousness and indifference in order to conceal a vulnerable point, as part of the ‘language of self-protection’ because in the course of the novel it is revealed that for Banks, his ‘lack of parents’ is the single most important factor in his life. As it turns out, his parents both disappeared when he was ten years old – first his father, then, a while later, his mother. He was then taken back to England for his education and, up to the narrative ‘present’, never found out what happened to them. In Ishiguro’s novels, the emotions of both remembered and remembering self are suppressed. Although Banks must be deeply shocked by the recent loss of his parents, the past self is represented as completely preoccupied with the image which he conveys to other people – an impulse clearly also shared by the present self. The suppression of emotion and the control of image which he wishes to project have become a deeply engrained part of self protective strategy. So that in looking back, the present self sees only the image which he wanted other people to see.

Banks’ present self that strongly wishes to deny self-protecting memories of his past emotional state may be inaccurate or at least incomplete becomes clear in another instance of an explicit contradiction with another character’s memory, in this case the Colonel’s account of the journey back to England:

Gradually, from behind his cheerful anecdotes, there was emerging a picture of myself on that voyage to which I took exception. His repeated insinuation was that I had gone about the ship withdrawn and moody, likely to burst into tears at the slightest thing. According to my own, quite clear memory, I adapted very ably to the changed realities of my circumstances. I remember very well that, far from being miserable on that
voyage, I was positively excited about life aboard the ship … Of course, I did miss my parents at times, but I can remember telling myself there would be other adults I would come to love and trust.90

Contrary to his explicit comments about his ‘lack of parents’ and his attempt to belittle its emotional impact on his life, Banks memories that are presented in the second part of the novel show that the present self is strongly preoccupied with the troubled memories of his parents’ disappearance and the termination of his happy childhood in Shanghai. These memories lead back into the past that is now idealized as a lost paradise. Clearly, his present identity again plays an important part in the reconstruction of his past via memory. This has been reflected in a seemingly insignificant passage which describes how Banks’ mother argued with one of the health inspectors that were regularly sent by his father’s employer, the trading company Morganbrook and Byatt, to check the family’s household. In this scene, Banks’ mother remarks on the trading company’s profits from the opium trade:

Are you not ashamed, sir? … Tell me, how is your conscience able to rest while you owe your existence to such ungodly wealth?91

Although Banks professes to remember this scene very vividly, the accuracy of his memory is called into question a few pages later:

I am no longer sure she actually put to the inspector the actual words … It now seems to me that even in her impassioned state, she would have been aware of the awkwardness of these words, of the fact that they left her quite open to ridicule. I do not believe my mother would ever have lost control of the situation to such a degree. On the other hand, it is possible I
attribute those words to her precisely because such a question was one she must have put to herself constantly during our life in Shanghai ...

In fact, it is even possible that I have remembered incorrectly the context in which she uttered those words; that it was not to the health inspector she put this question, but to my father, on another morning altogether, during that argument in the dining room.\(^{92}\)

This passage is significant in three respects: firstly, it illustrates how closely memories of the past are enmeshed with present preoccupations, viewpoints and desires. It makes clear that the present self can never be a ‘neutral observer’ of his past, but has an active part in its reconstruction. Secondly, it shows the extent to which Banks – far from being content with asserting an individual ‘memory truth’ – is preoccupied with the desire to ascertain the accuracy of his memory narrative, while also realizing the limitations of its endeavour. And thirdly, the fact that the memory lapse is connected with Banks’ images of his parents is very telling – it shows that he has a tendency towards hypernarrativia with regard to the story of his parents’ disappearance. As it turns out later in the novel, Banks knows and understands very little about his parents’ characters and motivations, but constantly tries to find clues that could tell him what happened. The theory he seems to favour is that his parents’ disappearance was connected with their opposition to the opium trade – a narrative that features his parents as heroes. He declares early in the novel that:

\[
\text{I began to understand, perhaps, something of what had made it possible for my parents to take the stand they did.}^{93}\]

If the sentence that sticks out in his memory was directed at his father, this could bolster the ‘opium theory’ – maybe the mother’s remonstrations finally convinced the father to give up his
position at the company, and maybe they were both kidnapped because they took a stance and
got in the way of some powerful people. At the same time, however, there are hints that Banks’
parents’ marriage was unhappy. For instance, there are passages that suggest that his mother
scoffed at his father because he worked for a company that was involved in the opium trade. While Banks himself does not choose to pursue this point, it however hinted at the dysfunctional
marriage of his parents which would go against the grain of Banks’ conjectures. Therefore, a
close examination of contradictions within Banks’ narrative shows how the present self attempts
to keep the past under control by suppressing unwanted images of himself and his family. This
operation is a factor that connects his identity on the different levels of the narrative ‘present’,
which are otherwise ever shifting through time. In describing his novels, Ishiguro observes:

    We are really witnessing someone playing a kind of hide and seek with
    himself, his memories and his conscience. That’s what the book is about.

    …

    I’m really interested in unreliable narrators in so far as they have very
    interesting reasons for being unreliable, the deep reasons why we all have
to be unreliable narrators. Because most of us when we look at ourselves,
we have to be rather unreliable in order to face ourselves. So it’s these
serious reasons for being unreliable that interest me. How to hold on to
your dignity when you think your life has been a failure. How you wrestle
with things that you regret having done. The unreliability that comes up to
those things interests me.

Therefore, in his fiction, Ishiguro invented a creative form of unreliability. Indeed the
narrators are unreliable in a way that emphasizes their need for self protection and self deception
in order to create a sense of identity. The transparency of the narrators’ self deception signals as well their vulnerable state of mind. In describing Christopher Banks’ own peculiar kind of unreliability, Ishiguro expresses sympathy for his character:

The traditional unreliable narrator is that sort of narrator through whom you can almost measure the distance between craziness and the proper world out there. Christopher Banks is perhaps not quite that sort of conventional unreliable narrator in the sense that it’s not very clear what’s going on out there…I wanted to actually have the world of the book distorted, adopting the logic of the narrator. In paintings, you often see that Expressionist art…is sometimes distorted to reflect the emotion of the artist who is looking at the world…I’m then able to explore people’s inner world much more thoroughly and with much more subtlety.96

In contrast to the other novels, Never Let Me Go is narrated by a clone, set in a society that allows breeding cloned individuals for “spare parts,” it nevertheless projects a world comparable with the reader’s own. The narrator Kathy can be anthropomorphized; although her situation is unique (she watches her old friends die in consequence of their donations of organs and calmly expects the same destiny), her emotions and sensations are not incompatible with the way human beings feel and experience. As with the other novels selected for study, in Never Let Me Go, the narrator’s situation can be read metaphorically: for example, the tensions she and her fellow clones suffer from as a result of their awareness of an alternative life and a simultaneous inaccessibility of this alternative come up frequently among “real-world” people. Kathy is not completely reliable as a narrator, but the issue of unreliability is not as conspicuous here as in A Pale View of Hills, An Artist of the Floating World, The Remains of the Day and When We Were
*Orphans* nor does the element of science fiction have a big influence on the narrative techniques employed.

Kathy disclaims towards the beginning of the narrative that the story she narrates was all a long time ago that she might have some of it wrong[^97] but proceed to tell the story of her childhood friendship with Tommy and Ruth. Kathy’s three part narrative chronicles from the perspective of her present work as a ‘carer’ the seemingly nostalgic childhood of her and her friend’s beloved school, Hailsham. As her memories are reworked in the present circumstances, she begins to identify small but peculiar turning points that might have instigated awareness of their condition. This limit set upon memory is noted early in the novel:

> Thinking back now, I can see we were just at that age when we knew a few things about ourselves – about how we were, how we were different from our guardians, from the people outside – but hadn’t yet understood what any of it meant.^[98]

As she selects events to turn over in her mind, she makes a link between the seeming innocence of childhood play against the subtle, unspoken, and not – yet – known actualities of the world beyond Hailsham.

In recollecting the past, Kathy once again used the term like ‘baffling’, ‘wasn’t clear’, and ‘couldn’t fathom’ which casts a haze over events. Uncertainty terms like ‘maybe’, ‘somehow’ and ‘perhaps’ worked overtime. Like the other narrators, Kathy peers through ‘misted – up’ windows and at foggy vistas. The terrain of her recollection is similarly not clear. Her attempt to establish facts is also unreliable like: ‘I’ll never know for sure’, ‘I don’t really understand it’ and the closest she gets to the definite are formulations such as ‘pretty certain’,

[^97]: [Link](#)
[^98]: [Link](#)
and ‘almost certainly’. However, like the other narrators, Kathy continues to narrate her story in order to come to term with her life. As memory (however fragile), is the only source of her foundation. In this connection, Daniel L. Schacter notes:

Even though memory can be highly elusive in some situations and dead wrong in others, it still forms the foundation for most strongly held beliefs about ourselves … memory’s many limitations on the one hand and its pervasive influence on the other … is central to understanding how the past shapes the present.  

As Kathy’s memories unfold, more and more is revealed about the reality of their lives. Her narrative is about a journey to discover who she really is. From her narration, it is revealed that Hailsham ‘students’ are clones who appear and act in recognizable human ways. ‘Possibles’ are the idealized parents or human models that the students seek in order to understand their make-up; ‘a dream future’ is a heightened fantasy about occupations or careers that the student might seek if they were not already so fated; a ‘deferral’ is a hoped – for delay of their calculated responsibility to supply their organs; and a ‘completion’ is death, or the final event of their abbreviated lives. Even in literal terms, such words – ‘carer’ and human ‘donors’ carry a barrage of horrible implications, prior to becoming donors themselves, each student becomes the caregiver of those who will die. Each stage is a perverse rehearsal and reminder of each and another person’s imminent end. As the students move out of Hailsham at the age of sixteen they are temporarily situated in the ‘cottages,’ an idyllic respite where they can explore emerging adolescent angst and satisfy sexual urges. There, students are sexually active and are even
encouraged to experiment with their creative energies, for this is a last stop before they go ‘outside’.

In the novel, the characters accept their fate and do not rebel against it. They have accepted that their life is predetermined and in the end comes each turn to ‘complete’. The only consolation left is their memory. Kathy feels happy when recollecting her childhood days, her life in Hailsham and her relationship with Tommy and Ruth – right through to her carer years, it gives her substance and a sense of permanence. Even though the story that Kathy narrates may be inaccurate, unreliable and fragile, it anyway helps to strengthen her life and helps in facing whatever the future holds for her. She is very careful about her memories:

I was talking to one of my donors a few days ago who was complaining about how memories, even your most precious ones, fade surprisingly quickly. But I don’t go along with that. The memories I value most, I don’t see them ever fading. I lost Ruth, I lost Tommy, but I won’t lose my memories of them.100

After losing her lover, Tommy and her friend, Ruth, she is alone and it is only her memory that turns out to be the root of the strength and stoicism that enables her to ‘complete’ and control her fantasy. At the close of the novel, she asserts:

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. The fantasy never gets beyond that…I didn’t let it…and though the tears rolled down my face, I wasn’t sobbing or out
of control. I just waited a bit, then turned back to the car, to drive off to wherever it was I was supposed to be.\textsuperscript{101}

Conclusively, all the narrators of Ishiguro’s novels describe important aspects of experiences in order to understand their effect as they see the end of their lives looming. They are engaged in the difficulty of understanding life in order to comfort themselves, even if they must lie in order to discover such ‘truth’ of satisfaction. Paul Connerton observes:

Our past history is an important source of our conception of ourselves; our self-knowledge, our conception of our own character and potentialities, is to a large extent determined by the way in which we view our own past actions. There is, then, an important connection between the concept of personal identity and various backward-looking mental states; thus, the appropriate object of remorse or guilt are past actions or omissions done by a person who feels remorse or guilty. Through memories of this kind, persons have a special access to facts about their own past histories and their own identities, a kind of access that in principle they cannot have to the histories and identities of other persons and things.\textsuperscript{102}

Wong states that unlike autobiographical works, which strives to show discernible beginnings, middles, and ends through retrospection, Ishiguro’s novels instead reveal how such linear or chronological unfolding proves detrimental to expressing the emotional substance of the narrator’s account. Often memories are not ordered in logical fashion, and ambiguous territory such as desires or involuntary memory may be more indicative of how people are inspired to
convey their stories. Thus, Ishiguro seems aware of these gaps and the limitations of linearity and truthful representation of memory when he notes:

I was interested in how people lie to themselves just to make things palatable, to make a sense of yourself bearable. We all dignify our failures a little bit, and make the best of our successes. I was interested in how someone settles on a picture of himself and his life.

The odd self-satisfying moment at the end of each novel of Ishiguro may reveal some of the dissonance between what actually occurred in the narrator’s life with what he or she comes to regard as an acceptable version. Speaking about the events thus allows each narrator to deceive and to protect themselves respectively. Linking this human strategy of survival to a narrative technique, Ishiguro says:

To combat complacency, I suppose I’m always trying to remind myself in my writing that while we may be very pleased with ourselves, we may look back with a different perspectives, and see we may have acted out of cowardice and failure of vision. What I’m interested in is not the actual fact that my characters have done things they later regret. I’m interested in how they come to terms with it.

Speaking about their lives when they are old or when they can no longer eradicate old patterns for living, Ishiguro’s narrators essentially fictionalize their lives by rereading and rewriting their own significance. In depicting the dynamics of memory, Ishiguro’s narrators rewrite their past so that they can have access to facts about their own past histories and
subsequently their own identities. However, memory is so fallible that each character in the novels of Ishiguro (which are selected for study) distorts their past in order to glorify their present status as well as to hide their failed lives. In his discourse, Ishiguro explores the profound effect of memory in the manner in which it shapes one’s life. He also explores how human subjectivity is not entirely coherent; that it is indeed a sight of conflict; that, like unreliable narrators, individual frequently “lie” to oneself, and with just a shadow of awareness- avoid facts that might undermine the coherence or the purpose of narratives while constructing aspects that are related to their lives.
NOTES


7Ibid.


28Ibid.123.

29Ibid.204.

31 Ibid. 64.


37 Ibid. 156.

38 Ibid. 41.

39 Ibid. 156.

40 Ibid. 9.

41 Ibid. 91.

42 Ibid. 10.


46Ibid. 182.

47Ibid. 91.

48Ibid.


57 Ibid.171.


64 Ibid.


65 Ibid. 42.

66 Ibid. 43.


80 Ibid.

81 Ibid. 48.

82 Ibid. 66-7.

83 Ibid. 40, 180.

84 Ibid. 233.

85 Ibid. 48.


87 Ibid. 5.

88 Ibid. 7.

89 Ibid.

90 Ibid. 32.

91 Ibid. 72.

92 Ibid. 80.

93 Ibid. 35.

94 Ibid. 97-103.


98 Ibid. 36.


101 Ibid. 282.


