

## Situating Kazuo Ishiguro Within the Realms of Memory and Identity

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### Abstract

This article focuses on components of memory and identity and their thematic centrality in Kazuo Ishiguro's two novels namely, *A Pale View of Hills* (1982) and *The Remains of the Day* (1988). Ishiguro explores the complexities of memory in his novels, where distortion, suppression, and unreliability serve to define an individual's identity through memory. Memory is a literary trope that Ishiguro has used repeatedly and diversely to enrich both his characters and plots. By examining how memories inform identity, this paper seeks to understand how our memories can affect our sense of self, and how this can shape our identity. The paper proposes that memories are not just simple recollections of events but are also complex narratives that are constructed from various sources. It argues that the interpretations of our memories can have a powerful effect on our sense of self and our identity.

### Keywords

Memory and identity, process of remembering, autobiographical memory, identity struggles, memory and narrative, self-continuity

### Introduction

Kazuo Ishiguro (1954–) has written eight novels thus far. However, this study focuses on two of them, namely, *A Pale View of Hills* (1982) and *The Remains of the Day* (1989) which best illustrate the themes of memory and identity. While the other works are important in understanding Ishiguro's writing, the novels

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selected for study here offer a more focused exploration of the themes of memory and identity. They provide insight into how Ishiguro uses the themes of memory and identity to tell his stories, and this study focuses on these two works in order to gain a better understanding of Ishiguro's writing style.

Ishiguro uses memory as one of his literary devices to recreate Japan, which for him became a place of speculation. 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 a book before it faded away from my memory altogether" (Oe and Ishiguro 53). He was born in Nagasaki, Japan, on 8 November 1954. The family moved to Britain in 1960 when his father, an oceanographer, began a year-long research project supported by the British government. The family intended to stay only briefly, but their visit developed into a longer stay. They remained in Britain and continued to own the family property in Nagasaki. The family never returned, but Ishiguro searches his memory for the tastes and colours that had surrounded him in Japan and tries to incorporate such elements into his discourse. Significantly, his first two books, *A Pale View of Hills* (1982) and *An Artist of the Floating World* (1986), are both set in Japan. Ishiguro has repeatedly found it necessary to defend his fictional works, especially in response to the academic viewpoints of scholars such as Bruce King and others who attempt to define the term "international writer." Ishiguro wants the term to refer to his literary aims and not just to his nationality, which would be pervasive to the point of view of identification.

In Ishiguro's case, writing about his original country (Japan) is an act of fabrication, and in neither of his first two novels does he speak from the point of view of an immigrant (Rushdie 61-70). Ishiguro chooses not to write about his own immigrant experience in Britain. Instead, he focuses on the emotional turmoil of his protagonists' situation against a backdrop of staged nuclear destruction in order to appeal to a wider audience. Ishiguro does not see his books as exercises in intellectual pursuits, nor does he want to write without "communicating a vision" (Vorda and Herzinger 83). His writing focuses on revising or subverting certain mythologies or ideals that structure people, communities or nations, mostly to look at the impact of such views on people's actual lives. Ishiguro's discourse depicts real human suffering and joy rather than attempting to confuse, intellectualise, ridicule, or otherwise appropriate them for their own purposes.

Given his Japanese heritage, it may be appropriate to read Ishiguro's novels through the lens of cultural paradigms, but it is also impossible to ignore the fact that he is a writer who writes intelligently and perceptively about universal human themes. Ishiguro believes that he can convey elements of human problems by focusing on the themes of memory and identity, and his novels as a whole suggest human endurance and optimism. In order to address human difficulties, he uses memory as a dynamic phenomenon, characterised by its

flexibility in the face of current demands and situations. His discourse brings forth what Maurice Blanchot describes as narrators recalling and narrating “past experiences in order to dispose of memories and their history” (Mesher 147).

Memory is a complex system that can produce an illusion of a momentary return to a lost past, while also articulating the complex relationship between the past, present, and future. It is a process of reconstruction, as we constantly draw from our past experiences to interpret and make sense of the present, and to plan for the future. This process of memory formation and reconstruction can result in positive outcomes or to negative ones, depending on how we interpret the past and how we use that knowledge to shape our present and future. 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. (2)

Ishiguro is interested in memories and their problematic role in the creation of identity. His novels are about memories and how they can drift and change, make the past forgotten and mute, and above all, how they can haunt the present. His fictional characters try to deal with loss by making sense of the past through memories. Paul Connerton states that experiences shape the present. He claims that an individual’s identity is constructed through past events and their memories (3). Memory, both individual and social, plays a major role in a cultural context, and so the framing axioms of literary historicism are usually presented by the texts themselves as forms of memory. Memory thus becomes a mediator between the present and the past. It is now generally accepted that memory is the foundation of personal identity and anything that damages it threatens the self. As 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” (299).

These elements are the predominant markers that are central to Kazuo Ishiguro’s primary text. The main character Etsuko in *A Pale View of Hills* uses her memories to cope with loss and find her sense of identity. The reason is that Keiko, her elder daughter, hung herself in a rented room in Manchester. Etsuko is abandoned and alone and her story in the book can be seen as a product of her desperate attempt to create (for herself) a sense of structure and agency in her past. The memory enables her to identify for herself important reasons and cause for her current situation and to reassure herself that she was “not responsible for Keiko’s death” (*A Pale View of Hills* 11). In reflecting upon her past, Etsuko remembers her friendship with Sachiko. Her memory is processed through the characters Sachiko and Mariko, with whom she blurs her own identity and Keiko’s in order to find patterns and tendencies. Stevens in *The Remains of the Day*

represses his feelings and avoids conversation and friendly banter in order to preserve his dignity. However, his idea of dignity makes him an outcast, so he feels the urge to re-evaluate it.

### **Memory and identity**

Scholars have analysed various aspects of Kazuo Ishiguro's works. In "Recollecting Memories, Reconstructing Identities: Narrators as Storytellers in Kazuo Ishiguro's *When We Were Orphans* and *Never Let Me Go*" (2013), Silvia Caporale Bizzini bring forth how Banks in *When We Were Orphans* and Kathy in *Never Let Me Go* act as storytellers, both in a Benjaminian and in an Arendtian sense. S Y Guruprasad's "Memory and Identity in the Novels of Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* and Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*" (2014) examines the themes of memory in *The Shadow Lines* and *Never Let Me Go*. The unpublished PhD dissertation of C. Lalrinfeli, "A Study of Memory and Identity in Select Works by Kazuo Ishiguro" (2012) examines Ishiguro's five texts, namely, *A Pale View of Hills*, *An Artist of the Floating World*, *The Remains of the Day*, *When We Were Orphans*, and *Never Let Me Go*. Based on theories of memory and identity, she examines how identity and memory intertwine, and how identity can be challenged and altered by the memories one chooses to embrace or reject. C. Lalrinfeli's "Memory and Identity in Kazuo Ishiguro's *An Artist of the Floating World*" (2014) investigates Ono's meditation on his history in order to define his own meaning and to reject the unbearable emptiness and impotence of his life. Through the character of Ono, she illustrates the concepts of memory distortion, selectivity, and unreliability, and shows how these recollections enable him to realise his own self. In *Kazuo Ishiguro and the Work of Memory* (2014), Yugin Teo uses a conceptual framework to examine the function of memory in Ishiguro's novels. Despite the fact that Ishiguro's work has been the subject of various scholarships pertaining to memory, the present research differs from existing scholarship. By examining the ways in which memory informs identity, this paper seeks to uncover how identity is shaped by the memories we keep and how these memories impact our sense of self. This paper argues that memory formation and reconstruction can influence our lives positively or negatively, depending on how we interpret the past and how we use information in our present and future identities.

Memory studies has been conducted across disciplines, encouraging collaboration across subject boundaries. According to Nunning et al.: "The genealogy of discourse on memory reveals ... that philosophy, historiography and literature have more in common with neuropsychology than one may be inclined to think" (1). Philosophers, thinkers, and writers of all ages have been fascinated by the concept of memory because of its characteristic quality and apparent indefinability. The concept of memory has never escaped the attention of thinkers or philosophers since Francis A. Yates' publication of *The Art of*

*Memory* (1966). Memory studies has been gaining renewed interest since the 1990s, as it has branched out into other concepts like trauma, Holocaust testimonies, False Memory Syndrome, and collective and cultural memories. Nicola King in *Memory, Narrative, Identity* observes:

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 might also mark a renewed desire to secure a sense of self in the wake of postmodern theories of the decentered human subject. (22)

Accordingly, Kazuo Ishiguro explores “the desire to secure a sense of identity” through memory. He does so by creating characters who are trapped between their past and present and are unable to reconcile the two. Through them, Ishiguro examines how our memories shape our sense of self, and how that can be both a source of strength and a source of sorrow. 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. (21-22)

The novels chosen for this study illustrate Ishiguro’s use of autobiographical/individual memory, which is referred to as the basis for identity. Dorothee Birke argues that one’s own memories are more personal and unique than anything else (24). Ishiguro also emphasises the role played by memory in social transactions, not only drawing attention to the one-sided nature of autobiographical memory as purely individual. Cognitive psychologist Endel Tulving introduces a controversial, yet influential, model for categorising autobiographical memories into “semantic,” “procedural,” and “episodic memory” (Bower 22-23). The memory system most relevant to this study and also to literature is “episodic memory,” which refers to “specific events that occurred at a particular time and place” (Bower 22). In contrast to procedural or semantic memory, episodic memory includes the phenomenon of “autonoetic awareness.” As 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 re-experience of

something that has happened before” (597). Thus, autobiographical memory can provide a different way to process and understand the past. According to Ferrara, “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 fulfilment of an identity (79).

The concept of autobiographical memory is based on assembling memories to form a narrative about who one is, as well as how one relates to others. In the novels selected for this study, narrative and memory allow the creation of meaningful connections between past events and present life, and the development of self as it relates to self from the past. Memory is thus presented as a window through which individuals understand and are understood by others. Herbert Hirsch in *Genocide and the Politics of Memory* writes: “The connection between memory and identity is dialectical because memory both shapes the content of what is communicated by the socialization process and is formed by that process. Ultimately, the self does not develop in a vacuum” (133).

Ishiguro’s works show that continuity between past actions and events and the present experience is critical to forming a sense of identity. The idea that identity, or a sense of self, is created by and through narrative is widely acknowledged. However, creating a sense of identity involves more than just the content of memories, experiences, and tales. The concept of identity which is constructed in narratives is also dependent upon assumptions about the function and process of memory and the kind of access it gives to the past (King 3). Fundamentally, identity formation and self-understanding are driven by memory. Individuals come to a comprehensive hold of their life trajectory with the aid of their memories of certain life events. The core of constructivism, the active creation of reality by a person through mental activity, is memory and the central protagonists in Ishiguro’s novels actively construct their identity from memories and narratives.

### **Reconstructing the past in *A Pale View of Hills***

In *The Past is a Foreign Country*, David Lowenthal emphasises that remembering the past is crucial for a sense of identity. He says: “Self-continuity depends wholly on memory; recalling past experiences links us with our earlier selves, however different we may since have become” (Lowenthal 197). The capacity to remember and identify with the past provides existence with meaning, purpose, and value. The narrators in Ishiguro’s stories create their identities from the information they learn about their pasts, which enables them to comprehend their current situation. As Lowenthal opines: “Those who bring more of their past into their present thereby both confirm their own identity and enrich the present with the past’s amplified residues” (198).

Ishiguro’s discourse raises important questions regarding the role of memory and the manner in which it is reconstructed in narrative and implicated

in conceptions of self-identification — an identity that is repeatedly played out in a narrative that seeks to recover the self who existed “before.” The memories of Ishiguro’s narrators provide a vivid illustration of the reality that much human experience or action occurs under the mark of “what wasn’t known then” (King 22) – what is recalled are events that occurred in a sense of innocence. This approach is suggested by Freud’s reference to the “retranscription” of memories and the structural notion of *Nachträglichkeit* (retrospectiveness). Freud frequently uses the word *Nachträglichkeit*, but he never turns it into a coherent theory. Jean Laplanche translates it as “afterwardness.” This idea makes it evident that, given how memory functions in the present, it must inevitably contain awareness of “what wasn’t known then.” As Lowenthal states: “We interpret the ongoing present while having to live through it, whereas we stand outside the past and view its finished operation, including its now known consequences for whatever was then the future” (91).

By exploring the implications of *Nachträglichkeit*, Andrew Benjamin and Peter Nicholls have fundamentally altered our understanding of the role of memory in constructing and understanding the past. Nicholls suggests that “[t]o remember is ... not simply to restore a forgotten link or moment of experience, nor is it unproblematically to ‘reposses’ or re-enact what has been lost” (53). Therefore, the concept of *Nachträglichkeit* highlights the difficulty of reconciling our present selves with our past selves, challenging the notion that the past can be perfectly remembered. By focusing on how memories are “retranscribed” in the context of new circumstances, this model provides a better understanding of how memory functions and how it is shaped by narrative. It also implies that the creation of the self is a conditional and unremitting process, rather than the “recovery” of an “original” identity. Laplanche and Pontalis explain it thus:

Experiences, impressions and memory-traces may be revised at a later date to fit in with fresh circumstances or to fit in with a new stage of development. They may in that event be endowed not only with the new meaning but also with psychical effectiveness .... It is not lived experience in general which undergoes a deferred revision but, specifically, whatever it has been impossible in the first instance to incorporate fully into a meaningful context. The traumatic event is the epitome of all such unassimilated experience. (111-12)

Nicola King also asserts: “The paradoxical ‘knowing’ and ‘not knowing’ is the position of any autobiographical narrator, who, in the present moment of narration, possesses the knowledge that she did not have ‘then’ in the moment of experience” (2). Etsuko’s account in *A Pale View of Hills* is a desperate attempt to make sense of her life. She is driven by a need “to bring a certain sense of distinctness” (*A Pale View of Hills* 99) to her life as she has limited perspective to see beyond her environment. She wants to find clarity in her life and make sense of her relationships which are shrouded in a fog of uncertainty. Revisiting her

memories of Keiko's death is essential for Etsuko to understand how her guilt has manifested in her relationships. She needs to gain clarity on how her guilt has been affecting her relationships with Sachiko and others, and how it has caused her to become disconnected from her true identity. Only by facing her feelings of guilt, and understanding the impact they have had on her life, can she find the peace that she is seeking.

Etsuko constructs her personal story using two distinct temporal orders, what Genette terms prolepsis (anticipation) and analepsis (flash-back) (Wong 247). When Etsuko returns to England in the early eighties, amidst Nagasaki's reconstruction in the late forties, she revisits two pasts: her own during the reconstruction and an earlier past remembered by others during the same time period. In doing so, she clarifies what she means by two futures: her "present" when she embarks on the narrative task and her "future." She subtly links the "madness" of Keiko's act to the memory of her own self as she describes the tragic tale of her daughter's suicide. A brief scene with her father-in-law shows her referring to herself as "a mad girl" and she asks Ogata-San: "What was I like in those days, Father? Was I like a mad person?" (*A Pale View of Hills* 58) Ogata's response – "We were all shocked, all of us who were left" (*A Pale View of Hills*, 58) – conveys a message that also attributes a similar pain to other survivors of the historical moment that had produced her "madness" rather than validating Etsuko's memory of herself. He establishes a relationship between Etsuko's past and present through his words in a way that is both comforting and disrupting. Ogata-Sans' assessment propels Etsuko towards a better understanding of herself after she admits madness. Etsuko seeks a lucid witness and finds it in Ogata-Sans. Similarly, his perspective reflects or deflects what she is trying to recall about her past, like that of other main characters in her past. From her interactions with other people and from her mirrors of past experiences, Etsuko reconstructs her identity; however, what she reflects back may not agree with what she ultimately understands.

When Etsuko searches for remembrance of relationships she has had with others, her self-absorbed memory alone cannot convey the full meaning of the event. As a result of her memory of others during this period, she is able to identify and place the different pieces of the past into perspective. Each time Etsuko adds a new piece to her memory, her interpretation of events is re-established. The personal story serves as a springboard for other stories, and it also offers a fresh viewpoint on the past. Ishiguro points out that in *A Pale View of Hills*, Etsuko's memories create a multitude of gaps and silences, and he describes it as the "emotional story of how Etsuko came to leave Japan, although she doesn't tell you the actual facts" more than a coherent account of her past (Mason 6). The author adds: "But I'm not interested in the solid facts. The focus of the book is elsewhere, in the emotional upheaval" (Mason 6).

Despite the fact that Etsuko's memories may at times seem too clear and authoritative to label them as those of someone suffering from delusions, Ishiguro is nonetheless interested in casting Etsuko as one who has not yet resolved some important tensions in her life. It is interesting to note that Ishiguro reverses the observation that novels "have beginnings, ends, and potentiality, even if the world has not" (Mason 5), Etsuko's story must remain open-ended and he explains that Sachiko serves as Etsuko's double self to show how one copes with loss and grief. Despite the apparent similarities, Ishiguro does not suggest that Etsuko and Sachiko have a supernatural or imaginary relationship; rather, he expects the text to be more confusing but is not deterred by it. Etsuko uses Sachiko as a way of consoling herself over Keiko's passing, while also establishing her identity at the same time.

Ishiguro argues that identity is created from "incessantly readjusted memories" (Lowenthal 199). The merging of Etsuko's life and the stories she tells about it suggests that identity is a product of the stories we tell. It also suggests that our memories can shape our reality. Ishiguro, like Brunner and Dennett, believes that identity is constantly in flux and shaped by our own unique memory and perspective. By blurring the line between fact and fiction, Ishiguro creates a world in which the boundaries between reality and memory become indistinguishable. He suggests that our sense of identity is created from the narrative we reconstruct and the memories we weave together. This view is consistent with Brunner's and Dennett's perspectives that identity is something which is fluid and ever-changing, as it is constructed over time. According to Brunner: "The self is not an entity that one can simply remember, but is, rather, a complex mental edifice that one constructs by the use of a variety of mental processes, one of which must surely be remembering" (41). Similarly, Etsuko returns to her past to make sense of her identity and express her beliefs, desires, and hopes. This is in an attempt to explain herself and understand others. Yugin Teo in *Kazuo Ishiguro and Memory* observes that returning to the past retrospectively allows an individual to stand at a distance and survey a larger picture of their life from the vantage of the present. Doing so allows an individual to re-examine their past attitudes and opinions, the decisions that have been made, and the consequences of those decisions in the light of the present (95). Etsuko's retrospection thus allows her to grasp a sense of the past and the present. It is through acts of memory that she strives to make her life meaningful, and in this way, memories help create a sense of her own identity as well. Foucault suggests that "continuous history is the indispensable correlative of the founding function of the subject" (Nicholls 12). Significantly, the capacity to tell a coherent narrative of life based on memories seems synonymous with identity. By taking the time to explore her memories and the past, Etsuko gains a deeper understanding of the experiences that have shaped who she is and how she interacts with the world.

### **Rewriting the self through memory in *The Remains of the Day***

Ishiguro illustrates how people construct comforting illusions to protect themselves from reality. This is seen in how his characters create a false narrative of their lives to avoid difficult truths. He shows that people are more than willing to ignore their own needs to maintain their illusions. As a result, his characters often fail to find true fulfilment in their lives. Through the concealment of pain, the narrators reveal both their fear and desire to reveal their lives. Memory is both an act of repentance and condemnation for those who begin a narrative process that leads to self-awareness. *The Remains of the Day* projects Stevens who chooses to confront memories that he has denied in the past, to come to terms with his own suppressed emotions. Through this process, he realises that his life has been a tragedy, marked by suffering and pain. He also recognises how it has been shaped by the emotional distance he maintains from the people around him. He sees how his loyalty to his profession has left him with a false sense of security and emotional fulfilment. He also sees how his dedication to the “dignified life” of an English butler has caused him to deny his own feelings. Through his memories, he understands the cost of his loyalty and accepts that it has been a source of pain and suffering in his life. Deborah Gurth states that memory is a complete dynamic; it resurrects the past imaginatively to construct its meaning (Gurth). This is how the novel presents itself at first, both as a testament to a genteel way of life on the water and Stevens’ attempt to highlight his accomplishments as Lord Darlington’s butler. As Mark Freeman astutely opines that human beings continuously need to be able to re-evaluate past experiences in the context of the present, so that they then can figure and refigure themselves and their world anew in reverse (Freeman 52). Stevens, in exploring his own past, seeks to justify and progressively undermines the basis as well as the purpose of his life.

Stevens finds himself in the employ of the American Mr Farraday after 35 years of service to Lord Darlington. Farraday has instructed Stevens to undertake an expedition across England. In spite of the fact that Stevens has never stepped outside the walls enclosing his life, he asserts that he has actually encountered England and even the world, which, he argues, has enmeshed the structure that separates him from the world, thereby making it unnecessary for him to transcend his confines. His reluctance to leave is rooted in the fact that Darlington Hall will be empty for the first time in this century once he leaves (*The Remains of the Day* 23). As Stevens drives away from the house, however, the surroundings become unrecognisable, and his hesitancy turns to an alarm derived from his knowledge of having “gone beyond all previous boundaries” (*The Remains of the Day* 23-24). As a result of leaving Darlington Hall behind, Stevens has effectively moved outside his own identity. It is for the first time in his career that Stevens’ identity has been left empty, ready to be examined from an

unfamiliar, outside perspective for the first time; his journey across England is as much an exploration of his past as it is a journey into his own identity.

Stevens seems to suppress the past more consciously than he lets on, taking a mental trip back in time and anticipating a more physical future. The suppressed events of the past are now returning to his consciousness, dissociating him from them and causing him to relive them. Though Stevens is unable to hide the guilt he feels over his past choices, even with a failed memory, he is still torn by them. The irony lies in his dismissal of the value of hindsight as he moves closer to the revelation, dismissing the fact that when searching for such “turning points,” one begins to see them everywhere (*The Remains of the Day* 175). It manifests Stevens’ ardent desire to explain matters from his specific vantage point, to establish a coherent identity. It is therefore possible to read Stevens’ narrative as a defence against out-dated ideals that even he now deems obsolete and in error, as he unfolds his narrative as an explanation or interpretation. Despite his best efforts, his attempts to rework the lies that founded his life only become more transparent, and the consequences of his inability to produce an acceptable version of the truth become apparent. Miss Kenton reveals to Stevens that she is in fact married, has a daughter, and is expecting a grandchild. She reminds him that life is about more than just work and that there is still a lot of joy and fulfilment to be found in family and relationships (*The Remains of the Day* -237). Stevens does not immediately respond when Miss Kenton exposes the emptiness of his life, revealing the torment in both his life and narrative (*The Remains of the Day* 239). At this point, Stevens prepares a reply that restores his dignity. He tries to find solace in his work to avoid loneliness and emptiness on the inside. He struggles to maintain his facade of dignity and respectability. He is willing to take to extensive lengths to avoid admitting that his life is devoid of meaningful connections. However, Miss Kenton’s comment is ultimately a catalyst for the butler’s self-reflection.

Stevens finally acknowledges that he “has tried, but it’s no use” and “given what he could” (*The Remains of the Day*, 243). He has undertaken numerous attempts with his memory and narrative to establish a satisfying sense of self, but they have all been unsuccessful. Though his attempts to make sense of his memory and narrative have been in vain, Stevens still refuses to let go of his illusions. He does this because he still hopes to find some meaning in his life just the way he wishes. However, Stevens flatly relates that, at the moment of his conversation with Miss Kenton, his heart was breaking (*The Remains of the Day* 173). He desperately seeks resolution, a way to make sense of his life and experiences. There is a need for him to feel validated for the life he has lived and to feel hopeful about the future. Finally, Stevens asserts that there is no “point in worrying oneself too much about what one could or could not have done to control the course one’s life took” (*The Remains of the Day* 239) and “cease looking back so much” and concentrate instead on “what remains of [his] day” (*The*

*Remains of the Day* 244). Subsequently, Stevens' life still has a lasting impact, as he has learned to live with life's uncertainty and ambiguity. He has come to terms with the fact that he will never be able to fully construct an identity that is entirely satisfactory to him. Instead, he has embraced the complexity of the human condition. Despite his failures, Stevens' life and his narrative demonstrate that he still has the capacity to find and create meaning, even if it is not the one he had originally set out to achieve.

The narrative reconstructions of the past with memory enable Stevens to recognise his purpose and determine his actions. He looks back at his life events and gains insight into his past choices and decisions that have shaped his present state. Through this process, he develops a more comprehensive understanding of the past, as well as a better grasp of his current decisions and actions. By looking back at his life, he gains perspective on where he is now and how he got there. As a result, Ishiguro's fiction reconstructs a life under the mark of "what wasn't known then," emphasising incidents that, in retrospect, appear significant.

### **Conclusion**

The characters in Ishiguro's novels do not rewrite the past in the traditional sense, by merely reliving events. Instead, the narrators rethink where they fit into the new environment and how they contribute to the personal and historical events. Ishiguro's characters thus use their memories to narrate the past, to establish and confirm their existence. However, the painful past cannot be recovered, and so they hope to shift their identity through their narrative and the construction of their account. In Ishiguro's novels, then, memory functions as a means of constructing narratives and identity, while at the same time representing the essence of memory, which is characterised by its unreliability. As Ishiguro puts it:

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. (Dunn)

Ishiguro's works reflect that dignity lies in the acceptance of one's identity and that memory, however fragile, is the foundation of identity. The novels selected for this study support Ishiguro's contention that although his characters fail at something essential in their lives, they eventually find the momentum and energy (with the help of their memories) to keep moving forward. The futility of their plight, coupled with their ability to remain forward-looking, adds a poignant dimension to Ishiguro's view of the world. With his literary approach to memory, he has contributed to the understanding of how the human mind works and how memory remains integral to identity formation.

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