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**THE ROLE OF THE PAST, MEMORY AND HISTORY IN THE
WORKS OF KAZUO ISHIGURO**

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Abstract:

The aim of the thesis is to explore the ways Kazuo Ishiguro uses the past, memory and history in his works. They will be described in the context of five novels: *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*. The three phenomena are considered Ishiguro's main areas of interest and, therefore, the thesis tries to answer why he is so fascinated with them and whether they serve to convey a particular message. A special attention will be drawn to what seems to be central for Kazuo Ishiguro - going back to his characters' early years and pointing out the key moments that shaped their lives, attitudes and opinions in the future. The focus within the defined field of interest will be on the position of an individual in historical events, themes of guilt, loss, self-deception and regret.

Abstrakt:

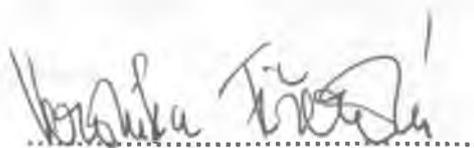
Cílem této diplomové práce je popsat, jakým způsobem pracuje ve svých románech Kazuo Ishiguro s minulostí, vzpomínkou, pamětí a historií. Tyto fenomény budou zkoumány v kontextu pěti románů: *A Pale View of Hills*, *An Artist of the Floating World*, *The Remains of the Day*, *When We Were Orphans* a *Never Let Me Go*. Minulost, vzpomínka, paměť a historie jsou u Ishigura považovány za hlavní oblasti zájmu, a proto se tato práce pokusí zodpovědět otázku, proč je těmito fenomény Ishiguro fascinován a zda mu slouží ke sdělení určitého poselství. Zvláštní pozornost je pak věnována dalším hlavním rysům autorovy tvorby, především útěku postav do vlastní minulosti a hledání důležitých momentů života, které předurčily jejich postoje a názory. V rámci vymezeného okruhu se práce dále zaměřuje na pojetí pozice jednotlivce v průběhu důležitých historických událostí, témata viny, ztráty, sebeklamu a lítosti.

Čestné prohlášení:

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Table of contents:

1	Introduction	6
2	A Pale View of the Hills	14
2.1	Pieces of memory	15
2.2	The painful past	18
3	An Artist of the Floating World	21
3.1	What is the floating world?	22
3.2	Mea culpa	25
4	The Remains of the Day	28
4.1	The great and the humble in history	29
4.2	Searching for our own triumphs	31
4.3	Twisting the past	34
4.4	What is done cannot be undone	37
5	When We Were Orphans	40
5.1	Orphans and us	41
5.2	What I saw is not what you saw	43
5.3	Illusion and the past	46
6	Never Let Me Go	49
6.1	Loss	50
6.2	I remember, therefore I am still alive	53
6.3	We remember, therefore we are	56
7	Conclusion	59
	Biography	64

1. Introduction

The past is undoubtedly an integral part of every human being. Everything that we do, everything that we are has its roots in the time before. However hard we might try, our past is simply inescapable. It seems that in the world of the 21st century, where we came from and who our ancestors were plays an important role as never before. As Lowenthal remarks *regards for roots and recollection permeates the Western world and pervades the rest* (Lowenthal 1998:1). There are several possible reasons for this phenomenon. We might attribute it to the post-modern world, in which faiths are manifold and securities scarce. In such an environment one can find an anchor in their roots and solace in the time of their youth, where life must have been better. We cherish the monuments of the past that remind us of another era, spend enormous amounts of money trying to maintain them so that they would look like the day they were first built. It is as if the things of the past belonged to a sacred realm and should anyone disrespect them, they would be accused of a cardinal sin. Another explanation could be that the past helps constitute our identity and as such it is a universal human phenomenon. We are all a result of our past experiences and states. Knowing what you were means that you know what you are.

Many maintain touch with their past selves through attachment to natal or long-inhabited locales [...] Some need the tangible feel of native soil; mere traces of the past suffice to keep others in touch with their own development [...] Those who lack links with a place must forge an identity through other pasts. Immigrant cut off from their roots remain dislocated; discontinuity impels many who grow up in pioneer lands either to exaggerate attachments to romanticized homelands or stridently to assert an adoptive belonging. (Lowenthal [1985] 2006: 42)

The past is not, of course, a physical place which can be visited. It can only be relived over and over again either in our memories or by coming into a contact with the relics of the past. To see the past we need to employ memories and history. Understanding of the words such as the past, memory and history tends to be confused as the definitions represent a difficult philosophical issue which I do not attempt to resolve here. However, a basic clarification of these terms needs to be done. In this diploma thesis I will treat these three terms according to the definition of David Lowenthal, who believes that the past *was a set of events and situations*

and it *no longer exists* (Lowenthal [1985] 2006: 215). On the subject of memory, the philosopher claims that *all awareness of the past is founded on memory. Through recollection we recover consciousness of former events, distinguish yesterday from today, and confirm that we have experienced a past* (Lowenthal [1985] 2006:193) and *whereas the past that I remember is partly shared with others, much of it is uniquely my own* (Lowenthal [1985] 2006: 213). Once we try to collect memories of other people and study relics of the past in order to interpret the past to create an account, that would be generally accepted, we construct history and so *historical knowledge is by its nature consensual. Because it is seen or heard in much the same form by many people, it can often be verified or falsified as memories seldom can be* (Lowenthal [1985] 2006: 214).

All these terms are very complex and each of them opens a wide range of questions. The most obvious one is that of the relationship between memory and history. Following the definitions above, a possible distinction between the two would be to claim that memories are based on subjectivism and history is more objective. However, the distinction is not so clear-cut. If history is, apart from its relics (i.e. buildings and texts from a particular era), based on collected memories and their interpretations, how can it ever be objective? And who has a say in the final decision as to which memories and accounts will be considered and which will be left in oblivion? To this point Stanford adds:

A greater bias results from the fact that the winners, not the **losers** write history[...] Indeed, many documents, not only the memoirs of public men and women, are written for the record. The intention is not to reveal the truth to posterity but to distort or to conceal it.

(Stanford 1998: 66; emphasis added)

Such questions are especially topical of feminist or post-colonial theory as they study texts narrated from the point of view of the 'losers', i.e. they give voice to those, who were traditionally silent and who provide a different account of the past (compare, for example, Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* or Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*). Postmodern literature in which *the local and the regional are stressed in the face of mass culture and a kind of vast global informational*

village (Hutcheon [1998] 2003:12) finds the complexity of the past, history and memory extremely interesting. It sees it highly problematic to accept that there is just one version of the past events, however, *it does not deny the existence of the past; it does question whether we can ever know that past other than through its textualized remains* (Hutcheon [1998] 2003: 20).

In conclusion, neither memories, nor history seem to be able to picture the past as it really was because this image is always processed through an individual human mind, and other factors, such as the possibility of a deliberate distortion of the past events, must be also taken into consideration. There is probably no such thing as objective past because even with the best intention to picture every single detail of a past event, it will always be just an account, an interpretation, prone to haziness and inconsistencies.

In this diploma thesis the three phenomena, that were briefly introduced above, will be put in the context of the works of a British writer Kazuo Ishiguro. Five of his novels will be interpreted with a special emphasis put on what techniques he uses to work with the past, memory and history. I will try to explain how this technique affects his narration and plotline. As he frequently uses the three phenomena in almost all his works, I will also try to find out why he is so fascinated with them and whether they serve to convey a particular message. My attention will be drawn to what seems to be quite central for Ishiguro- going back to his characters' early years and pointing out the key moments that shaped their lives, attitudes and opinions in the future. The focus within the defined field of interest will be on the position of an individual in historical events, themes of guilt, loss, self-deception and regret.

Kazuo Ishiguro

Kazuo Ishiguro is a British writer of Japanese origin. His family moved to Britain from Nagasaki, where he was born in 1954. As he has lived in Britain since the age of six, he is considered a British writer, yet his exact position within the world of literature is debated and it varies with the point of view from a literary critic to a critic.

Dominic Head mentions Ishiguro's name in a chapter called *Multicultural Personae*. He sees his works in the context of the *postcolonial era* where *the question of identity and national affiliation becomes complex and indeterminate*. In his view *Ishiguro's own position, as someone born in Japan but brought up in Britain, gives him an intriguing 'semi-detached' or dual perspective* (Head 2002: 156). This special position enables him to hint at a *post-imperial, post-industrial world in which the individual must manoeuvre with ingenuity to retain ownership of those cultural codes that are subject to 'incorporation' in the world of multinational enterprise* (Head 2002: 157). Ronald Carter and John McRae include Ishiguro in a chapter titled *Internationalism* but unlike Head they believe that Kazuo Ishiguro is linked to a phenomenon that started much earlier at the end of the nineteenth century in English literature:

In the late 1970s and 1980s a distinctive group of younger writers emerged who had been associated with Malcolm Bradbury at the University of East Anglia. [...]Kazuo Ishiguro was born in Japan, and Ian McEwan spent part of his childhood outside Britain. Other writers who do not belong to this group, such as William Boyd and Salman Rushdie, were also raised outside the United Kingdom, and Julian Barnes has set his novels in countries as diverse as France and Bulgaria. This echoes the sense of an enlarging world, an ever-growing internationalism, which emerged in writing at the end of the nineteenth century, when 'outsiders' like Shaw and Conrad began to make their mark on English literature.

(Carter, McRae [1997] 2001: 492-3)

Another point of view comes from Lars Ole Sauerberg who notices a wave of international features in English novel towards the end of the twentieth century. This wave, however, covers a lot of writers whose roots actually do lie in Britain. Martin Amis, Julian Barnes, Ian McEwan, Angela Carter, Penelope Lively, Graham Swift *have brought the late twentieth-century English novel out of its insularity and made it international* (Sauerberg 2001: 14). As to the writers of

non-British origins such as Salman Rushdie, V.S. Naipaul, Hanif Kureishi and Kazuo Ishiguro, Sauerberg claims that they bring a distinctive multicultural tone in contemporary literature:

They all practise an uncertain tightrope walk between the tradition of their native countries and the English tradition of their choice. But the very consciousness of that choice is important, because it implies individuality as an experiment with socially determined roles or masks. With two different cultures as simultaneous points of reference, ideas and imagined fates can be played against each other in the space created between the two cultures.

(Sauerberg 2001: 12)

Susheila Nasta, connected with a well-known magazine *Wasafiri* devoted to post-colonial literature and multicultural authors writing in English, ranks Kazuo Ishiguro to '*outsiders' or migrants within Britain* hailed by some as evidence that *contemporary British writing has finally begun to change*. These changes *reinvented 'Englishness' and eroded what seemed previously to be the impassable boundaries of culture, race and class* (Nasta 2004: 3). Even the fact that Ishiguro is discussed in this magazine puts him in the category of the writers that the periodical is interested in.

The writer himself does not seem to be concerned with where he belongs in literary criticism and on the subject of the generation of writers he comes from he comments that *when I started to send my stuff to publishers, books by foreigners were hot. If you had a funny name and were writing about faraway places, you had a head start* (The Daily Mail 4 March 2006). As the quotations above show, there is a tendency to see Ishiguro only in the context of a multicultural, post-colonial society. Given his Japanese origin and British upbringing, it is more than tempting to assume that his specific life experience found its way into his novels and there is a tendency to ascribe to his writing some kind of intentional internationalism simply because some of his novels are set outside Britain. It is understandable that some critics assume that his Japanese novels attempt to portray Japanese society and make a comparison with British society. It seems as if where Ishiguro comes from predestined how his novels would be critically reviewed. However, the writer himself contradicts that view and suggests that his novels do not necessarily aspire to tackle international issues :

When I set my books in Japan, their relevance seemed to be diminished in the eyes of some readers. People seemed to say, 'That's a very interesting thing we've learned about Japanese society', rather than, 'Oh, isn't that indeed how people think and behave - how we behave'. There seemed to be a block about applying my books universally because the setting was so overwhelmingly alien. I thought that by dropping Japan, people would focus on the more abstract themes, the emotional story.

(Nasta 2004: 160)

This point could be supported by the fact that for Ishiguro writing has got *more to do with regret or melancholy* (Nasta 2004: 166) stemming from his realization that *you start to get a sense of the limit of what you can do* (Nasta 2004: 164) and you see that there are things that you will not be able to achieve in your life anymore. Putting these feelings about lost opportunities on the paper might be his way of dealing with them and he could also study them as a general human condition. In this diploma thesis I will therefore read the novels with respect to the emotional story rather than concentrating on the assumed international or post-colonial features.

Kazuo Ishiguro is an author of six novels and three screenplays. *A Pale View of the Hills* (1982, won Winifred Holtby Memorial Prize), *A Profile of Arthur J Mason* (original screenplay, 1984), *An Artist of the Floating World* (1986, won the Whitbread Prize and shortlisted for the Booker Prize), *The Remains of the Day* (1989, won the Booker Prize, made into an award-winning film), *The Unconsoled* (1995, won the Cheltenham Prize), *When We Were Orphans* (2000, shortlisted for the Whitbread Prize and for the Booker Prize), *the Saddest Music in the World* (original screenplay, 2003), *Never Let Me Go* (2005, shortlisted for the Whitbread Prize), *The White Countess* (original screenplay, 2005).

The first three novels established Ishiguro as a writer of memory. They are narrated in the first person and they share the same features. According to James M. Lang *Ishiguro seems fascinated with the uneasy coexistence of private and public memories in his characters. One of the structuring conflicts of each of his novels emerges from the main character's struggle--usually unsuccessful--to reconcile his private memories with the public memories of the nation and his fellow citizens* (Lang 2000: Vol.29). In *A Pale View of the Hills* a widowed Japanese woman called Etsuko, whose daughter committed suicide, harks back on her days of youth in

Nagasaki and she especially pays attention to her friendship with another, slightly older woman Sachiko. Sachiko, who later against the will of her small daughter decides to leave Japan and move to U.S., bears striking similarities with Etsuko. This leads us to believe that they both represent Etsuko, who finds it too painful to remember the past directly. *An Artist of the Floating World* shows the post-war days of an elderly painter Ono who believes that his paintings took a great part in history before and during the war. The tension arises with a clash of his recollections and those of his family and other people. These leave the reader in doubts whether his role in the war was as significant as he would like us to believe. The painter recalls his life story on the background of World War II. He provides the account that helps us understand the period and people who lived in it better. Cynthia Wong claims that *all of Ishiguro's narrators structure their tales according to discernible historical events and, in the unfolding of their texts, the narrators appear to arrive closer at uncovering some missing version of truth about that period* (Wong 1995: Vol. 24). *The Remains of the Day* is, like the previous novels, also connected with World War II. It deals with a butler of a great English mansion who ponders on his life with respect to what might have been different had he made different decisions. Again, what the narrator would like the reader to believe is ambiguous as the butler uses very formal language and subtle hints that could be understood in different ways. His memories of Lord Darlington as an idealist politician fighting relentlessly to put the world right do not correspond with his after-war reputation of a Nazi supporter. The novel thus questions the value of historical truth and the widely accepted grand narratives. James M. Lang adds that *while Stevens recognizes some truth in that grand narrative, he also wants to counter it with his personal narrative, one which resists the clumsy, broad brush strokes of collective history* (Lang 2000: Vol.29). The fourth novel, *The Unconsoled*, represents a detour from the themes typical for Ishiguro. The novel is an experiment with narration bearing absurd features. A pianist arrives in a town and he is about to have a concert there but he cannot remember why he came and when he agreed to arrive. The past and memory are not central in the novel as it is set in a dream-like space and therefore it will not be dealt with in this diploma thesis. *When We Were Orphans* uses some features of a detective novel. In the center stands a detective who is haunted by guilt that he let down his parents, who had been mysteriously kidnapped in

Shanghai when he was a boy. Many years later he sets out on a journey, which should resolve the mystery of his childhood. Ishiguro, as if still influenced by his previous, rather experimental, novel constructs the novel in a dream-like fashion where the reader wonders whether they are entering the world of memories or just a fantasy devised by a man with a traumatic past. As he tells the story it helps him to put the painful past behind him. The author himself sums up the novel main theme. *This latest book is very much about someone who loses that childhood garden of paradise very suddenly. For years, as he grows up, unconsciously perhaps, his big aim in life is to fix that thing that went wrong then, so that he can pick up where he left off* (Wong 2001: Vol. 30). *Never Let Me Go* is the most recent novel, in which the author sets the plotline to the end of the twentieth century when clones are a common sight. It is a dystopia in which one of the clones, Kathy H., remembers her growing up at a boarding school Hailsham and thus reveals how she and her peers learnt or failed to cope with their inevitable fate. Although the novel uses some motifs typical for sci-fi literature, it is, above all, meant to be read as a metaphor of human being trying to find out what the meaning of their life is and how to cope with death which cannot be escaped. As a reviewer cleverly encapsulated *In Never Let Me Go* *Ishiguro has made the terms of life - which even for the fortunate among us, the well and the prosperous, are so brief, so limited, so inadequate to our desires - systematically more terrible yet* (Sexton, The Evening Standard 14 February 2005).

2. A Pale View of the Hills

Looking back at one's past is hazy and unclear. It is just like old photographs that lose their colours with piling years and, gradually, they are just a reflection of what once they used to be. Another metaphor, that lends itself very well to the process of remembering, are hills that might look pale from the far.

When talking about human memory, there is one important difference, though. Whereas old photographs and natural sights lose their clarity by natural processes, human mind might intentionally distort memories. It does not necessarily need to be spurred by malicious motives. Sometimes the past is difficult to face, especially when one feels that their past actions were misguided or foolish and they brought about tragedies.

A Japanese woman Etsuko, who married an English man and moved to England, remembers one particular summer in the post-war Nagasaki when she, heavily pregnant, used to spend her time with another woman called Sachiko. Etsuko, whose first daughter commits suicide, tries to relive some of the important moments of that hot summer, in which she, apart from other things, gets to meet Sachiko's peculiar daughter. The picture that she constructs is a rather disturbing one, as it is the summer during which a couple of children fall victims to a serial killer, who hangs one of the corpses on a tree. On top of all, Satchiko's daughter claims to have repeatedly seen a woman, who is presumably dead.

With the plot unfolding, the two different women start to merge in one and disturbing images seem to be premonitions of the things to come. The journey to the past is more complex and less innocent than it often seems.

2. 1 Pieces of memory

Memory, I realize, can be an unreliable thing; often it is heavily coloured by the circumstances in which one remembers, and no doubt this applies to certain of the recollections I have gathered here.

(Ishiguro [1982] 1991: 156)

The novel is narrated from a point of view of a widowed Japanese woman living in England in an undefined time. The visit of her younger daughter Niki starts her recollections of the past events when she, a young, newly married and pregnant woman, lived with her husband in Nagasaki, badly damaged by the war. Her musing over her time in Nagasaki dominates over the time of the point of narration and the novel is, therefore, mainly set in the far past. We learn directly very little about why she is in England or what the story of her older daughter, who not long ago from the point of narration, committed suicide, was. And yet it is only towards the end of the novel that we can piece up the story of Etsuko's life and realize that throughout the story the narrator gives various hints and clues as to how the story should be read.

The account is not chronological, it is not precisely dated and Ishiguro wants to keep the reader in suspense. He, for example, disconnects abruptly the memory of the women looking for a missing child at one night in Nagasaki and goes back (or forward?) to England, leaving the reader with a feeling that when they come back again to Nagasaki, something terrible is about to happen.

Another device to create tension in the plotline are recurring motifs of hurt or dead children, *First a boy, then a small girl had been found battered to death. When a third victim, another little girl, had been found hanging from a tree there was near-panic amongst the mothers in the neighbourhood* (Ishiguro [1982] 1991: 100), or of a woman, who killed herself. This woman keeps coming back and seems to be visible only to the child. *The other woman. The woman from across the river. She was here last night. While mother was away [...] She said she'd take me to her house, but I didn't go with her. Because it was dark. She said we could take the lantern with us* (Ishiguro [1982] 1991: 19). These hints are all connected with Etsuko's daughter and serve as a premonition of what is about to happen to her.

What is worth noticing is that motifs like these are especially used during the narration concerning Sachiko and her daughter. Memories of them are often teemed with spiders. *She stood in front of me. The spider inside her cupped hands. Through a gap in her fingers, I could see a leg moving slowly and rhythmically* (Ishiguro [1982] 1991: 82), *She reached out a finger and the shape moved a little. Only then did I realize it was a spider* (Ishiguro [1982] 1991: 78). There are also sights of blood. *Mariko had been lying in a puddle and one side of her short dress was soaked in dark water. The blood was coming from a wound on the inside of her thigh* (Ishiguro [1982] 1991: 41). At one point the reader witnesses a cruel scene of Sachiko drowning kittens that need to be get rid of. *Sachiko brought her hands out of the water and stared at the kitten she was still holding. She brought it closer to her face and the water ran down her wrists and arms. "It's still alive," she said, tiredly* (Ishiguro [1982] 1991: 167). Whereas in other parts of her scattered memories events flow almost peacefully without such unpleasant sights, in the ones connected with Mariko and her mother, the images are always quite worrying. Sachiko remains fairly mysterious throughout the accounts and Mariko is portrayed as an unusual child unable to find friends among her peers and living in a world of her own. As we can only follow them through Etsuko's memories, they are constructs of her subconscious. They might be read as premonitions of what happened later and so they are directly linked with the suicide of Keiko. As such the bleak atmosphere surrounding the two could mirror Etsuko's realization of how horrific experience concerning her dead daughter she has been through. They could also show that she is recovering from a trauma and remembering is a part of her therapy. As Lowenthal notes, *bringing to consciousness long-concealed feelings and events helps shake off dependence on the past and conduces toward a freely chosen future* (Lowenthal [1985] 2006: 411). Pieces of memories might help Etsuko to move on in her life.

Although Etsuko claims that the past is over for her, her constant harking back on the old days contradicts it. The intensity with which she remembers that particular summer in Nagasaki suggests that to her it is the turning point of her life. Whereas in other Ishiguro's novels, characters might see the past as the better part of their lives, Etsuko is not nostalgic about her youth and she does not show a great regret about what happened, or about bad decisions she made. She simply revisits that summer to reach an awareness of the fact that when she was

young, she put her happiness first and ignored her daughter's wish to stay in Japan. She left her Japanese husband, who found the meaning of his life in his work and did not pay much attention to his wife. Etsuko was trapped in a traditional Japanese society in which the man is always right and the woman must obey. While at first she claims that *my motives for leaving Japan were justifiable, and I know I always kept Keiko's interests very much at heart. There is nothing to be gained in going over such matters again* (Ishiguro [1982] 1991: 91), later, after all of her story was told, she confides with her younger daughter *I knew all along. I knew along she wouldn't be happy over here. But I decided to bring her just the same* (Ishiguro [1982] 1991: 176).

It seems that Etsuko had to go through her memories to be able to admit that she is probably partly responsible for her daughter's death, who, as a Japanese, could never find home in English society, where her mother found a new, English husband. That man, however, never treated her as his own daughter. Etsuko is a very realistic character. She knows that some of her memories might be distorted and she knows that they cannot change the past but towards the end of life one must be able to admit to one's mistakes.

2. 2 The painful past

But I remember with some distinctness the eerie spell which seemed to bind the two of us as we stood there in the coming darkness looking towards that shape further down the bank. Then the spell broke and we both began to run.

(Ishiguro [1982] 1991: 41)

The narrator tells the story without any emotions. There are no tears and no doubts as to whether one should have done something in a different way. To realise how painful the past recalled really is, the reader needs to read between the lines and understand what game the author intends to play from the very beginning. There are enough reasons to believe that the time of life, that the woman is remembering, was not a happy one. Etsuko is not only living with a slightly despotic man, but she must also face the losses that the war brought. She sees the results of the war around her every day as the landscape is affected by bombs. She also talks about *"misgivings about motherhood"* (p. 94), which gives an impression that she is not sure about giving birth to a child at that time.

And then there is her friend Sachiko. A single woman with a daughter who is the complete opposite of Etsuko. Unlike a decent Japanese woman she moves from place to place and has a relationship with an American called Frank. She has a choice to live at her uncle's but she opts for an unreliable foreigner. Although this man does not treat her well, she is resolved to leave Japan and move to America with him. She is (accidentally?) troubled by similar qualms about life in Japan but unlike Etsuko, she decides to take her fate in her hands and do something to change it. She gives clear reasons for her decisions. Her daughter *could study painting at college and become an artist [...] Japan is no place for a girl. What can she look forward to here?* (Ishiguro [1982] 1991: 170) and she also confides her excitement about leaving Japan to Etsuko. *You have no idea, Etsuko, how relieved I'll be to leave this place.* (Ishiguro [1982] 1991: 164). Sachiko's daughter Mariko does not see it that way, though. She hates Frank and the idea of moving. During the last encounter of Etsuko and Mariko, Etsuko persuades Mariko to accept that moving is good for **us** (i.e. she includes herself in the process of moving): *"In any case," I went on, "if you don't like it over there we can always come back."*

(Ishiguro [1982] 1991: 173; emphasis added). Why does she suddenly change to the first person plural when it is not her who is moving? When the narration finally returns to England Etsuko remembers a day out with Keiko which resembles a similar day that had been described before. However, Keiko is not mentioned the first time the outing is recalled. It is a trip that Etsuko goes on with her friend and her daughter Mariko. Although the novel ends on a rather unresolved and gloomy note, the last memory Etsuko has is a happy one:

“That's a view of the harbour in Nagasaki. This morning I was remembering the time we went there once, on a day-trip. Those hills over the harbour are very beautiful” [...] “What was so special about it?” said Niki [...] “Oh, there was nothing special about it. I was just remembering it, that's all. Keiko was very happy that day. [...] It's just a happy memory, that's all.

(Ishiguro [1982] 1991: 182)

As we know that Etsuko is living in England at the time of narration and her older daughter committed suicide by hanging herself because she did not get used to England and her new English father, we can assume that Sachiko is actually another self or version of Etsuko at the time she made the crucial decision about moving. The two women are pictured as complete opposites, which suggests that Etsuko constructs herself in her memories as she thinks she should have acted, as an obedient woman who stays in the country where she belongs, married to a Japanese man. Sachiko, on the contrary, is probably a more real portrait of Etsuko at that time, a woman who goes against conventions and does not favour the happiness of her child over her own. Later Etsuko does not deliver her promise that they would come back if life in England turned a disaster and that, consequently, leads to her daughter's suicide.

Ageing Etsuko does not need to be verbally emotional about her past. Ishiguro has intricate ways of showing that the past might sometimes be too excruciating. His main character builds another version of herself to face the past and this speaks for all emotional turmoil inside of her better than words. Although Etsuko does not say which one of the selves made the better choice, it is obvious, that it is a great burden to her. Throughout her recollections she is haunted by chilling sights. A dead woman, who can only be visible to Mariko, is probably the most

frightening one. She beckons to Mariko and wants to take her to the other bank of the river- a metaphor which clearly stands for death.

As I mentioned before, Ishiguro does not tell anything about how the narrator feels exactly about her past. Nevertheless, the nightmarish visions can be interpreted as the ghosts of the past that keep creeping up on her or even as the horror of a parent whose child killed herself. The woman beckoning to the child on the other shore predicts the fate of a girl, who can see her at that time, but her mother counts it among one of the girl's fantasies. It is only many years later, after the suicide, when Etsuko realises that the woman embodied the result of her choice and that it was exactly at that point when her daughter's fate was sealed.

3. An Artist of the Floating World

The plotline of *An Artist of the Floating World* is true to its title. It floats gently and peacefully and it is only in the frequent flashbacks when we sense that the undisturbed surface ripples under the weight of memories. Both history and the past in contrast with the present help Ishiguro create the suspense in the novel. It is a very subtle, yet exciting pondering on the winners and losers of history and the moral ramifications each war inevitably brings. It also deals with how an individual's life finds its anchor in the past which in the end will show how firmly it holds the ship.

History and the past do not only serve as objects of the study. They are not only phenomena which Ishiguro is clearly fascinated by, they also set the pace of the novel and provide its landmarks. Typically for Ishiguro, the present does not push the plot forward, it is the past in which the story unfolds and only by the careful combination of the hints dropped both in the past and present the plot can be generated. In the novel the past is very complex and it sometimes mingles with the present. Although Ishiguro leads his heroes down the path of their memories in a very crafty and complex way, it is always obvious that both time levels (i.e. the past and the present) stand for clearly defined eras. The time before the war is a happy one. It is a place where many characters of the novel are drawn in their nostalgic moments. The present represents the opposite pole. It is the post-war Japan in which the dilapidating buildings of the pleasure district stand as a symbol of a country which is trying to deal with its past. The country must get rid of its pre-war decaying buildings in order to move on. And while the country is on the crossroads, an ageing painter Ono must come to terms with his pre-war decisions which still cast an enormous shadow not only over his name but also over his family.

3.1 What is the floating world?

Of course, at times, when I remember those brightly-lit bars and all those people gathered beneath the lamps, laughing a little more boisterously perhaps than those young men yesterday, but with much the same good-heartedness, I feel a certain nostalgia for the past and the district as it used to be.

(Ishiguro 1986: 206)

The key to a novel may sometimes lie with its title. In order to understand how Ishiguro grasps the concept of history and the past, we need to understand the idea of the floating world.

The narrator Masuji Ono spent his apprentice days in the house of a master painter whose only concern was to paint the floating world. It existed in the pleasure quarters at night when one could become, just for a moment, anybody they ever wished to be. The floating world was not only the physical world existing in the pre-war Japan, but it was, above all, the world of dreams of one's life and ideals one held about themselves.

But then sometimes we used to drink and enjoy ourselves with the women of the pleasure quarters, and Gisaburo would become happy. Those women would tell him all the things he wanted to hear, and for the night anyway, he would be able to believe them. Once the morning came, of course, he was too intelligent a man to go on believing such things. But Gisaburo didn't value those nights any the less for that. The best things, he always used to say, are put together of a night and vanish with the morning. What people call the floating world, Ono, was a world Gisaburo knew how to value.

(Ishiguro 1986: 149-150)

As the quotation above shows, it was a construct that people made, yet not a single one of them could believe it really existed. In the end everyone, appreciating the fragile beauty of that world, had to own up to the fact that they had been living under an illusion, which was created by seeing themselves in the most favourable light and listening to those who reinforced these ideas.

Ono disassociated himself from that school and made paintings with clear patriotic messages that would spur Japan's militarism in the World War II. He was convinced that art should serve the needs of the country and society, it should have a purpose of raising an awareness of problems that need to be tackled. While his master would produce a rather

impressionist paintings, where no clear outlines would be marked and lights of the pleasure quarter would flutter in the night breeze, Ono refused this style and did what he considered best for his country in difficult times. This can be well demonstrated by Ono's description of a painting he made:

And these faces, I need not remind you, resembled those of three prominent politicians. For the lower, more dominant image, the three poverty-stricken boys had become stern-faced soldiers; two of them held bayoneted rifles, flanking an officer who held out his sword, pointing the way forward, west towards Asia. Behind them there was no longer a backdrop of poverty; simply the military flag of the rising sun.
(Ishiguro 1986: 169)

In the context of the novel we can understand the floating world as a metaphor for views one holds about themselves and the narratives through which one constructs their identity. It is a picture that changes in time. It is not fixed and therefore it resembles a floating image. Its outlines are not clear and the way one sees it are very subjective. The floating world is also the way a school of painters to which Ono belonged saw the world around them, as an ever-changing image. Having refused the style before the war, Ono, paradoxically, later becomes an artist of that floating world. The world of illusions that one believes in so that they can paint a better picture of themselves. He shows his mastery by his reminiscing on his life which is by no means an objective account. Ono himself admits that he may not remember a particular event correctly. *To be fair, it is possible she did not say anything quite so unpleasant. Indeed, it is possible I misinterpreted entirely what she actually said* (Ishiguro 1986: 158).

Therefore, we are left with an impression of his floating world, his floating life. If we cannot believe that his accounts are true to how events really happened, and the phrase 'misinterpreted entirely' is self-evident, it means that the story loses its credibility and the narrator might be at any point of his life accused of self-deception. It is odd to believe that anyone would want to present themselves as inconsistent in what they recall. The narrator seems to acknowledge the fact that his accounts are constantly changing and admits to it. It is, however, beyond our power to discern what is a true account and what could rather be classified as wishful thinking. The narrator leaves us with no clear outlines to his life. The only

way of understanding more about his past is to rely on Ono's harking back on memories of what he did some years before. But why are memories so important to the artist that he spends most of his life as a pensioner back in the past? Why would anyone wish to remember the days which were not particularly pleasant with such an obsession? What usually happens is that we tend to forget the bad memories. Bringing them back to life equals to bringing back the negative emotions that surrounded them. In the case of the painter, memories are not meant to hurt but to heal his troubled conscience.

3. 2 Mea Culpa

Japan's ostrich-like attitude towards its own past has left it with feet of clay. It seems uncomprehending towards the huge resentments that animate not only the Chinese, but also the Koreans, Filipinos and many others. Indeed, it appears almost nonplussed by the latest protests, a sentiment reflected in Koizumi's statement yesterday, which merely represented a repetition of previous utterances. It would not be difficult - in theory at least - for Japan to disarm its critics by a sincere display of remorse, by a willingness to engage in open bilateral investigations of the past, in a heartfelt rather than grudging mea culpa.

(Jacques, Guardian 23 April 2005)

When someone dies, their family bury them and goes through a painful but necessary process of saying goodbye. When one ends a relationship, one cuts all links with their ex-partner and also goes through a similarly painful process. This is a closure which enables us to deal with our loss. It does not mean that we forget. On the contrary, the people who were once with us will always be our part and they will always be one of the reasons why we are who we are.

It seems that our own past needs closures, too. Although it can never be escaped completely, the way forward means having admitted what was done and being able to understand why it happened and what changes it brought about. As Lowenthal points out, *completion also makes the past comprehensible; we see things more clearly when their consequences have emerged. To be sure, the past has new consequences for each successive generation; we are forever reinterpreting it* (Lowenthal [1985] 2006: 62). Recapitulating and reinterpreting is not a straightforward process and it is never really objective.

In a country's past what counts is the point of view presented by the lucky few who were granted the privilege to write books about history and who are being invited as experts to television studios. This is how history is made- by putting together pieces of evidence and narratives in order to make sense of the past. What constitutes an individual's view of their past is, above all, memories and also the opinions of the lucky few that tell us, rather categorically, how things were.

Masuji Ono is an old man who believes that his family's life has been marred by his pro-war attitude. His days are preoccupied with trying to understand whether his paintings were so powerful to feed Japan's militarism and if he has his share of responsibility for the *mistakes it [Japan] may have made in the past* (Ishiguro 1986: 206). Ono believes that his personality played an important role and so his whole family has been punished. He is convinced, for example, that his daughter remains unmarried because no family would want to be connected with her father's name. Whether this really is happening or not remains dubious. However, the painter believes so and he is on a quest to his past. Retelling his life story in pieces of memories and making subtle remarks about the war years serve him to outline how grave his mistakes were. The narration of his life story gives him a sense of purpose and, gradually, it enables him to reconcile with his past and potential mistakes.

Masuji Ono is not the only one sensitive individual who perceives his war deeds as a great burden. It concerns other characters, too and it seems that the theme of guilt and how to deal with it is not only the main theme of the novel but also of the whole post-war Japan. Not everyone reverts to a quiet ponderation, though, as the artist notices:

The world seems to have gone mad. Every day there seems to be a report of someone else killing himself in apology. Tell me, Mr Miyake, don't you find it a great waste? After all, if your country is at war, you do all you can in support, there's no shame in that. What need is there to apologize by death?

(Ishiguro 1986: 55)

What seems to be just a quiet quest of an old man turns out to be an issue of a big and developed country, which, as some may see it, is not resolved yet. What does it prove? How does literature reflect the real life that starts writing other stories when we close the book? The author seems to be trying to say that the past and history are present with a human being at every point of their life. It is a part of them not only because the past experience changes us as people, we grow as we go through life, but there is a number of issues of the past that are hard to get over. This is true not only for people but also for nations. Ishiguro also shows how personal history mingles with a history of the place where one lives. Masuji Ono did not choose

to make such difficult decisions but he accepts his responsibility for them later. The course of history has its rules and any human being has often no other choice than to abide by them.

As was shown in the quotations above, this issue is not to be taken lightly. It is not only an individual who, so to say, must bear the grunt, but it is the whole nations dealing with the past events for years and years later. The process of getting over the mistakes of the past can take various shapes and forms. When it is too hard to say 'heartfelt rather than grudging mea culpa', or one does not want to take drastic actions such as suicide, one can also apply another strategy- to be oblivious to what happened and twist the past actions so that their weight is not so crushing. There is another novel of Kazuo Ishiguro that can tell us more about how the picture of our past can easily be distorted.

4. The Remains of the Day

The Remains of the Day is the book that secured Kazuo Ishiguro a place in the sun or, to be in tune with our topic, after its publishing Ishiguro earned his place in history. Not only did the novel win the Booker Prize, it was also made into a successful film. The plot revolves around a butler whose heyday is long over and all he can do is to bring it back in his memories. It is not, however, a desperate attempt to run into the past because the present does not offer enough pleasure. The butler is well aware of what he is doing and he needs to do so in order to make sense of his life.

Memories are, as always, essential and it is through them that a number of issues are dealt with, even though they might not be addressed directly. The novel questions the role of an individual in great historic events and how the winners and the losers of history come to existence. It also studies the ways by which in retrospective people justify their mistakes and thus come to terms with them. These ways are never objective and what one thinks was happening can be strikingly different in other people's point of view. The novel tries to understand how a person changes over the time and when looking back on one's loyalties or opinions one can find them foolish. Other issues explored are human relationships, loneliness and missed opportunities, that painfully remind us that what is done cannot be undone. A strong sense of nostalgia runs through the novel as well. It is a nostalgia emerging between the two great eras that the butler was lucky or unlucky to experience. As he decides to go for a holiday just once in his lifetime, he finds himself unoccupied with other people's needs. And that is exactly the moment when one single memory triggers a story after a story underlined by the wondering about what would have happened if the course of one's life had taken a different route.

4. 1 The great and the humble in history

It seems increasingly likely that I really will undertake the expedition that has been preoccupying my imagination now for some days. An expedition, I should say, which I will undertake alone, in the comfort of Mr Farraday's Ford.

(Ishiguro [1989] 1999: 3)

In 1956 a butler called Stevens starts an unusual journey in which he plans to travel around England and see the beautiful sights that he has up to then only read about. The physical journey is, however, not the one that we should be interested in. Although the butler really does undertake an expedition, it is down the path of his memory.

Just as the journey can be understood metaphorically, so can be the Darlington Hall where Stevens spent all his life, serving Lord Darlington and coming to a contact with people who believed that they were taking part in some of the most crucial events of the twentieth century. The Darlington Hall, which is in 1956 owned by an American, shares the same fate as the British Empire. World War II is over and the Empire is beyond its days of glory because it had by then stopped 'ruling the waves'. The United States are, on the contrary, starting their journey on which they become one of the most powerful countries of the world. Darlington Hall can no more accommodate those distinguished gentlemen who, just like its previous owner, devoted their life to making history, or trying at least to leave their indelible mark in it. The suspense of the novel arises at the point when their making of history is contrasted with an ordinary individual who humbly leaves those great affairs to those who, as he believes, have been predestined to do so. Instead he concentrates on finding his place in posterity by different means.

History is an ungrateful child, though. It needs to be made but one must be careful where their loyalties lie. Lord Darlington is an example of how history can make villains out of people who might have had the best intentions but they simply chose the wrong side of the barricade, or believed in what, after some time, proved to be wrong. When he confides with Stevens that *democracy is something for a bygone era* (Ishiguro [1989] 1999: 208) and calls for a firm leadership of one man, he actually believes that time is ripe for a change of regime and a new

approach for a new changing world. He is portrayed by Stevens as an idealistic member of aristocracy who does not realize that the time when aristocracy had a sole access to power is over. Although it used to make sense that only the members of the noble circles decided about the destiny of the country, democratized education enabled other social classes to be eligible leaders. The development of science, technologies and new theories made it impossible for a small group of privileged men to have so much power in their hands. However, caught between two eras, having experienced the glorious Empire but also World War I, Lord Darlington has every right to make assumptions as to where his country should be going from that point in history. We, knowing about the outcome of such ideas, can say that it was foolish and tragic but at that time and in his position Nazi ideology seemed to offer one of the feasible alternatives. We have the advantage of a step back- what we know now differs from what one could see in the past, the then present. However, being on the losers' side in history means that one is denounced and condemned and Lord Darlington learnt about that too well.

The butler, on the other hand, does not aspire to take any side of the barricade because he is convinced that it is beyond his capacities:

The fact is, such great affairs will always be beyond the understanding of those such as you and me, and those of us who wish to make our mark must realize that we best do so by concentrating on what is within our realm; that is to say, by devoting our attention to providing the best possible service to those great gentlemen in whose hands the destiny of civilization truly lies.

(Ishiguro [1989] 1999: 209)

The outcome of such an attitude is by no means better than Lord Darlington's approach. Stevens realizes that his master's *life and work have turned out today to look, at best, a sad waste* (Ishiguro [1989] 1999: 211) but at least he was allowed to make his own mistakes. The butler must admit bitterly that although he believes no mistakes occurred on his side, unlike his master, he did not even choose a path in his life. Towards the end of his professional life he feels like a pawn in a game whose result was never meant to lie in his hands.

4. 2 Searching for our own triumphs

And there across the hall, behind the very doors upon which my gaze was resting, within the very room where I had just executed my duties, the most powerful gentleman of Europe were conferring over the fate of our continent. Who would have doubt at that moment that I had indeed come as close to the great hub of things as any butler could wish?

(Ishiguro [1989] 1999: 238)

While Lord Darlington is working hard on making sure that his name will appear in history books, his butler is concerned with something of a smaller importance for the world, yet important enough for him to sacrifice his private life to it. One of the leitmotifs of the novel is the question of dignity. It is not only a quality of a human being but it also applies to English countryside which *knows of its own beauty, of its own greatness, and does not need to shout it.* (Ishiguro [1989] 1999: 28) The United States and Great Britain are yet again presented as stark opposites. While *magnificent canyons and waterfalls, raggedly beautiful mountains* (Ishiguro [1989] 1999: 28) show their charm in a superficial way, the true beauty and dignity lie somewhere else. These qualities are also represented by Stevens' employers. Lord Darlington is a calm, self-possessed aristocrat. Mr Farraday, on the contrary, shows more energy. Stevens' inability to catch up with his American employer's sense of humour and bantering reveals the difference of two great countries.

How dignity can be achieved and whether it is possible is the question that baffles the butler. For him dignity lies in the ability to keep calm in every situation and refrain from showing inappropriate emotions. Similarly to the countryside lacking drama, emotions should not be exposed. By doing so one can rank himself next to other well-known and respected butlers in England. It might sound foolish or misguided but Steven's way of making history and searching for triumphs in his lifetime means coming as close as possible to the image of a dignified butler. And it is probably one of the most sensible ways of doing so when one sees himself as a mere pawn who cannot affect any serious affairs. The supreme showcase for his dignity is undoubtedly the night in 1923 when Lord Darlington hosts the most distinguished men of Europe to discuss the position of Germany after World War I. Stevens attends to the visitors

although he knows that his father is dying in his room. In spite of the fact that his father passes away that night, he is pleased with how he handles the situation. As he shows a great deal of dignity, he is very proud of himself and remarks:

If you consider the pressures contingent on me that night, you may not think I delude myself unduly if I go so far as to suggest that I did perhaps display, in the face of everything, at least in some modest degree a 'dignity' worthy of someone like Mr Marshal [...] For all its sad associations, wherever I recall that evening today, I find I do so with a large sense of triumph.

(Ishiguro [1989] 1999: 115)

Triumphs, unfortunately, never come for free. They must be paid for and in the butler's case the price means living someone else's life because his opinions and emotions can never be shown. A proper butler is never caught off-guard. It also means that the moment his father is dying the butler is attending to the sore feet of a French politician and he also never manages to express his feelings for Mrs Kenton, who also works at Darlington Hall. Although he uses these examples to show how high professional standards he achieved, since emotions never prevailed over sense in such difficult situations, there is a tinge of sadness and nostalgia in his recollections. In the end he realizes that his life is only connected with his work. Once Lord Darlington is dead, there is not much in his life left he can take pride in.

Stevens is a man who devotes his life to performing his profession to the best of his abilities. Being a butler means being Mr Stevens. His whole existence and self-esteem is tied to his work and Darlington Hall. This is well illustrated by his uneasiness at the beginning of the trip. As soon as he does not recognize the countryside around him anymore, he feels a *slight sense of alarm- a sense aggravated by the feeling that I was perhaps not on the correct road at all* (Ishiguro [1989] 1999: 24). He feels out of his depth because he could only live his life directed by everyday routines and responsibilities. Above all, a reliable butler must express loyalty. It is important to realise how he understands the word loyalty. For him it is a complete submission to his employer who he chooses well. *This employer embodies all that I find noble and admirable. I will hereafter devote myself to serving him* (Ishiguro [1989] 1999: 210). Loyalty equals supressing one's own feelings and opinions. Once a butler fails in this respect,

he has no worth. And what would then be Mr Stevens if he were not a butler? Self-effacement of the butler is inevitable. He does not understand that loyalty has its boundaries and there are moments in life when making our own decisions and mistakes is well in place. Although it is more comfortable to let others define our position within a difficult historical period or in life as such, it might result in unfulfilled ambitions and dreams. Self-effacement of Stevens produces an empty person who is like a vessel waiting to be filled up by his master's view.

Apart from achieving dignity, Stevens also finds the purpose of his life in a belief that by serving someone with noble ideas, however misguided they turn out to be, means being a part of great affairs. *Indeed, you will appreciate that to have served his lordship at Darlington Hall during those years was to come as close to the hub of this world's wheel as one such as I could ever have dreamt* (Ishiguro [1989] 1999: 133). Stevens is challenged at one point whether he does not see what risks Lord Darlington is taking by associating himself with the rising Nazis. His reply resembles a set of learnt phrases. *I cannot see that his lordship is doing anything other than that which is highest and noblest. He is doing what he can, after all, to ensure that peace will continue to prevail in Europe* (Ishiguro [1989] 1999: 236). This seems to suggest that he does not dare to question his master's actions as he has an unshakable belief in him.

The humble searching for their own triumphs are not averse to staying in the light of the great and enjoying the glow. As it turns out later, though, as long as the place stays warm, everything is perfectly all right. When it grows cold, the place is not as enjoyable as before.

4.3 Twisting the past

But the actual past is beyond retrieval; all we have left are much-eroded traces and partial records filtered through diverse eyes and minds.

(Lowenthal 1998: 106)

The Remains of the Day is not a title without significance. It symbolizes what is left from our life after the greater part of it is over. It is, so to say, the evening after a busy day when everything comes to a halt and one can start looking back on what it had brought. The butler finds himself at dusk and that is why his journey down the path of his memory can begin.

There is one aspect of the novel, which has not been discussed yet and that is the reliability of memories. There is not much action happening in 1956. It is only the journey and the images that trigger off a myriad of memories which can date back up to thirty years. Although the narrator mentions historical events and names of the people who really existed in that period (Winston Churchill, Lord Halifax and others), it is by no means an attempt to describe this historical era through an eye of a historian. The novel does not intend to provide an objective account of how things were simply because that would be against the author's technique that plays with and relies on unreliable memories. The butler reveals unintentionally how much biased his account of the past events is and thus the novel illustrates the fragile reliability of memories. In his recollection his life was successful because he achieved dignity in his service. He mentions how triumphant his life was but the picture that we get is a butler who was always too busy or shy to disclose his feelings for the housekeeper at Darlington Hall Miss Kenton. The fact that he was not indifferent to her is proved by the motivation for the trip. When he starts the trip in 1956 he makes it sound as if it were the wonders of English countryside he was interested in (*an expedition which, as I foresee it, will take me through much of the finest countryside of England to the West Country* (Ishiguro [1989] 1999: 3)). Later through his recollections, which also apart from other things center around Miss Kenton, we gather that his main goal is to see her again and offer her to come back to work at Darlington Hall. Although he claims that his motives are purely professional, the way he already assumes that she will come back before he asked her suggests how desperate he is for her to come back. He also

misinterprets her letter that leads him to believe that her life without Darlington Hall has no sense:

Of course, one has to remember there is nothing stated specifically in Miss Kenton's letter- which, incidentally, I reread last night up in my room before putting out the light- to indicate unambiguously her desire to return to her former position. In fact, one has to accept the distinct possibility that one may have previously-perhaps through wishful thinking of a professional kind- exaggerated what evidence there was regarding such a desire on her part.

(Ishiguro [1989] 1999: 149)

Another instance of his recounting the past events is the case with the Jewish servants who in the atmosphere of rising antisemitism had to leave the mansion because Lord Darlington and his visitors could not bear them. While Miss Kenton is appalled, Stevens does as he is told and does not question whether it is right or wrong. When it happens that later he and Miss Kenton remember this particular affair, he claims that he was as appalled as she was.

The best example of his failing memory is, however, the way Stevens talks about Lord Darlington after the war, when he is accused of collaboration with the Nazis and dies a broken man. Although during the years of great glory he is proud of his master and even admits it later in his recollections, when asked about his previous master when the war is over, he lies on several occasions. When asked if he actually worked for 'that' Lord Darlington he replies *Oh no, I am employed by Mr John Farraday, the American gentleman who bought the house from Darlington family* (Ishiguro [1989] 1999: 126). All of a sudden his working situation is not as prestigious as it used to be and it is easier to deny it.

Although once he felt to be a part of great affairs affecting the course of history, the present situation does not favour the connection. Stevens hopelessly tries to conclude his life by finding some dignity in it. When he does not tell the truth about his past employment, it is only because he, as always, shirks from taking responsibility for his actions. The profession of his did not require him to form his own attitudes as he would always hide behind his loyalty to Lord Darlington. The bad reputation of the misguided Lord can be dealt with when Stevens' connection with Lord Darlington is severed. He manages to fool some people but he does not

convince himself that it was only Lord Darlington who wasted his life by devoting his attention to the wrong issues:

Lord Darlington wasn't a bad man. He wasn't a bad man at all. And at least he had the privilege of being able to say at the end of his life that he made his own mistakes. His lordship was a courageous man. He chose a certain path in life, it proved to be a misguided one, but there, he chose it, he can say that at least. As for myself, I cannot even claim that. You see, I *trusted*. I trusted I was doing something worthwhile. I can't even say I made my own mistakes. Really- one has to ask oneself- what dignity is there in that?

(Ishiguro [1989] 1999: 256)

Stevens' account of the past probably changes according to the current situation. When we can detect the instances of such misabuse of the past and memories it shows the novel in a different light and we can ask many questions. Can we read it as an artistic study of processing of the past events in the human mind? Does it say anything about the deceptive nature of memories? Is there anything reliable in this world, when our understanding of the world comes from the past and it must be recalled with such an unreliable tool as memory?

4. 4 What is done cannot be undone

After all, what can we ever gain in forever looking back and blaming ourselves if our lives have not turned out quite as we might have wished? [...] What is the point in worrying oneself too much about what one could or could not have done to control the course one's life took?

(Ishiguro [1989] 1999: 257)

Nostalgia appears to be a strong undertone of the novel. This phenomenon is often a side effect of having lived through a 'golden era' which came to an end. It also accompanies memories of youth or any time which is after some years viewed as wonderful. Nostalgia is according to David Lowenthal *memory with the pain removed, the pain is today, we shed tears for the landscapes we find no longer what it was, what we thought it was, or what what we hoped it would be* (Lowenthal [1985] 2006: 8). Nostalgia, however, is also linked with regrets and a sense of wasted life and Stevens has all reasons to feel nostalgic. Not only did he experience a great time, he has also had a very successful professional life that is at the point of narration coming to an end.

The butler's language is extremely formal and it does not show any emotions. And although the butler himself seems to be a very boring kind of a person, one who is almost annoyingly passive, there is something immensely poignant in the recollection of his life. It is the sense of a missed opportunity which comes only once in a lifetime. The butler is assuring himself that his life was a success but in the end even he finds out what the reader must have known before- he feels that he did not make a full use of all opportunities he had and this bitter encounter with reality is mostly related to Miss Kenton. She also admits, a long time after she got married and at the end of the journey in 1956, that she often thinks about how life would have been had she spent it with Stevens. *And you get to thinking about a different life, a better life you might have had. For instance, I get to thinking about a life I might have had with you, Mr Stevens* (Ishiguro [1989] 1999: 251). Although Stevens admits that at this realization his *heart was breaking* (Ishiguro [1989] 1999: 251), surprisingly, he feels a relief after the meeting and resolves to stop brooding over the past events that can never be brought back or altered.

Kazuo Ishiguro prefers narration through memory, that is beyond dispute. It is effective when a writer is concerned with certain issues such as regret, nostalgia or memories themselves. In each novel it serves a specific purpose. In *The Remains of the Day* there is an ageing butler who sacrificed his life to a man who he believed was great and predestined to fight for a noble cause. In his shadow the butler could be a part of the process and also achieve greatness in his very own field. This did and did not work. Although there was some achievement in his life, his master's plan failed terribly. The shadow which was meant to bring the butler a bit of a glory grew ominous. Towards the end of his life he has a need to recapitulate it because he has a feeling that he was somehow cheated, that he was not given his share. He also feels that he should fight for his master's reputation and thus save his. As he walks down the past of his memories there are things that he does not like and so, probably, he alters them. He depicts Lord Darlington as a true gentleman who meant well but who was extremely unlucky in what he had chosen to fight for. And even though the unpleasant things continue to rise to the surface, he needs to know about them because it is the remains of his day that can still be saved. However, this can only take place once he comes to terms with what was wrong and what was good in his life. The good thing was his quest for dignity, the bad thing was how much it cost him to achieve. And so the novel stirs the reader to pondering on what the true values of human life are, or how treacherous the path when one wants to leave a mark in history can be. The characters in the novel fight for something they believe in, but it is only up to the reader to pass judgement as to whether it was worth it or not.

Apart from pondering on the poignant story of a misguided butler, the novel also shows one important feature of the post-modern literature. Nowadays it seems to be 'a truth universally acknowledged' (as a part of the post-modern legacy) that there is no such thing as one history but plurality of histories:

The contradictory nature of postmodernism involves its offering of multiple, provisional alternatives to traditional, fixed unitary concepts in full knowledge of (and even exploiting) the continuing appeal of those very concepts.

(Hutcheon [1998] 2003: 60)

What is interesting is a view of a person who does not see Lord Darlington as a traitor. Instead by justifying his actions and clarifying what went on behind the scene he says that maybe there are more sides to the problem of the villains and heroes of history. He is the voice that undermines the generally accepted truths and accounts

5. When We Were Orphans

At the beginning of the twentieth century an English family lives in Shanghai where the British Empire, at the peak of its glory, controls opium import from India. This import not only brings wealth but it also leaves thousands of Chinese addicted to the mighty substance and consequently dependent on the Empire. Christopher Banks' father works for the trading company which represents the Crown in Shanghai and the boy grows up in an idyllic International Settlement, oblivious of the devastating effect his country has on the world beyond its frontiers, and engaging himself in endless fantasy games with his Japanese friend Akira. When he is ten, both his parents disappear, Christopher returns back to England and later becomes a famous detective. It is only then, that he resolves to find out about what happened to his parents, a case that has never stopped puzzling him, and so he goes back to Shanghai to track them down.

On one level *When We Were Orphans* deals with a quest for truth. A man wants to know why he had to grow up without parents. However, the novel is very intricate and offers many other levels on which it can be read. It deals, of course, with a mysterious disappearance that has, as the reader finds out towards the end of the book, a simple explanation. However, what turns out to be important is what happens in the meantime. In this light the plot itself loses its importance and what stands in the foreground are issues common to all people- maturing and disconnecting oneself from parents, letting go of the past, accepting inevitable changes, growing up without roots or losing directions in life. These themes are expressed by the means of the narration that comes back to the key moments in Christopher's life and that creates almost a dream-like atmosphere. In the novel reality and imagination blend, memory plays its tricks and what starts with a clear and straightforward account of a rather unfortunate childhood turns into a story full of symbols and metaphors.

5. 1 Orphans and us

But for those like us, our fate is to face the world as orphans, chasing through long years the shadows of vanished parents. There is nothing for it but to try and see through our missions to the end, as best we can, for until we do so, we will be permitted no calm.

(Ishiguro 2000: 313)

The novel is full of orphans. Christopher, Sarah - his London friend and a potential lover, Jennifer - the girl adopted by Christopher or the Chinese girl, whose parents were killed in the Sino-Japanese War. These people are and always will be orphans because their parents are dead and they can never be replaced. The title of the novel is, however, in the past tense, suggesting that the orphans the author has in mind are not to be taken literally. The title suggests that being an orphan does not have to be a permanent state.

Although the novel takes place in the first half of the twentieth century, it touches upon issues that are close to our time. Christopher Banks spent a considerable and crucial part of his life in Asia and only later returned to the homeland of his parents. He was not able to fit and he did not consider England as his home. On his way to England he sees it as *a strange land where I did not know a soul, while the city steadily receding before me contained all I knew* (Ishiguro 2000: 28). His is a feeling of a person living between two cultures and not really being able to fit into either of them, it is a feeling that is becoming commonplace in the globalized world. Besides, the country one is attached to is often called motherland or fatherland. As Christopher does not have a land that could be truly called like this, he also represents an orphan in that sense of the word.

Another reading of the theme of orphan is connected with colonialism. Britain believed that it had a right to colonise other countries because of its long history and refined culture:

The British Empire in its ascendancy before the First World War was a vast mosaic of colonies, states and territories, extending over a quarter of the globe (on which, as it was said, the sun did not set). Thinkers from Ruskin to Seeley saw it as the special genius of the Anglo-Saxon race to rule the world.

(Walder 1998: 38)

The British Empire put itself in the role of a parent in its colonies. Taking on the role of a parent who guides the child and offers them security is then in a stark contrast with how Britain actually treats its adopted child. Not only does the Empire forget to guide, it even abuses its child and intentionally does not care for its well-being because it is more profitable to keep it helpless and dependent. The colony is, therefore, structured in a discourse as an abandoned child, an orphan.

All the orphans in the novel are miserable species. Their lives seem to be somehow marred. Jeniffer, although well looked after in her childhood, attempts to commit suicide as an adult woman, Sarah dies fairly young in Hong Kong with a sense of unfinished business in her life, Christopher himself spends a large part of his life searching for truth and for the answer to the question where his roots lie and what the purpose of his life is. They are all searching for something which is often hard to define, but they have a feeling that there is a piece missing in their life and that makes them abandoned, orphaned. Whether we call it a sense of purpose or the meaning of life, the use of the theme of being an orphan could be also understood as a pondering on the general condition of the human being who is constantly searching for something, that would make their life complete and bring a sense of security. Finding it would also mean that they are not orphans any more but, as the title suggests, once they were.

5.2 What I saw is not what you saw

Everything that has existed for more than a few moments is likely to have undergone some change and is a relic of its former, slightly different self.

(Stanford 1998: 63)

The narrator of the novel is highly unreliable. His memories, for example, do not correspond with those of the people who remembered him as a child. While his friend recalls him as *an odd bird* (Ishiguro 2000: 5) during his school days, Christopher refuses it and states that *my own memory is that I blended perfectly into English school life* (Ishiguro 2000: 7). He is even annoyed that people so frequently do not have the same recollections, needless to say that his are always more favourable than theirs. He is not pretending that his memories are always accurate, though. Sometimes he admits *I do not remember now if the dining-room episode occurred before or after the health inspector's visit* (Ishiguro 2000: 69) or he is fully aware of the fact that children often see events more dramatical and places larger and remarks *I suspect this memory of the house is very much a child's vision, and that in reality, it was nothing so grand* (Ishiguro 2000: 51). As the narration is built on his memories and recollections of the past, this approach leaves the reader in uncertainty as to whether the events retold really happened the way they are pictured.

The message of the author is quite obvious. Human mind is not capable of recalling the past as it really happened a minute after a minute and, as a result, each recollection is a construct that can be challenged. Ishiguro never provides a definite solution or a point of view and so the outcome is always as hazy as his narrators' memories. Lowenthal adds that *what seems to have happened undergoes continual change. Heightening certain events in recall, we then reinterpret them in the light of subsequent experience and present need.* (Lowenthal [1985] 2006: 206). This also means that memories are a personal and unique way of seeing the past and they must differ with every single individual.

The memories, however, do not need consist of only our own experience. Christopher Banks' memories are, for example, made up from other sources. They are shaped by how other people saw and later retold an event. *I cannot be sure today how much of my memory of that*

morning derives from what I actually witnessed from the landing, and to what extent it has merged over time with my mother's accounts of the episode (Ishiguro 2000: 58). Merging of memories, which are again very subjective on both sides, adds to the misty nature of the narration.

The process of recovering all these memories is also worth studying. It does not happen chronologically and neither does the narration. As Stevenson points out, this is not a novelty:

As the novel increasingly reflects 'the mind within', so it comes to rely on what Woolf calls 'time in the mind' rather than 'time on the clock': on characters' memories and recollections, returning to and associating with the present moments events long distant from it in time, stitching past experience into present consciousness.

(Stevenson 1996: 443)

There are seven parts in the novel and each is dated precisely to the year and the day and each also states a place. However, the storyline developed in each part hardly falls into that particular day. The time reference belongs to the day when the events from the past were retrieved but the day is often only touched upon. For example the first chapter of the first part dated London, 24th July, 1930 begins with a sentence *It was the summer 1923,...* (Ishiguro 2000: 3). In this part, just like in others, the narrator moves freely back and forth and no exact date occurs any more. It seems that time reference such as *almost two years after I first saw her...* (Ishiguro 2000: 19) or *my first few weeks in England* (Ishiguro 2000: 10) should suffice as the author clearly does not intend to write a biography where precision of that kind would be required. In this respect the novel reminds us of a jigsaw puzzle in which pieces of a story are put together. This does not happen in a chronological order, the story does not unfold logically and comfortably for the reader.

The author works with recurrent motifs that are developed as the novel proceeds. Thus the reader is invited to read the story carefully, as otherwise they would miss important details. This technique mimics the way our memory works. In spite of what history books would like us to believe, the past refuses to be packed into a neat chronological story line. Memories as the main bridge to the past cannot follow the pattern either. They are very disorganized and fuelled by associations. When remembering one particular event, other also surface. This explains why

the narrator drops anticipatory hints that are explained later. As the narration tries to mirror the process of recollecting, some events are remembered, mentioned and passed only to be returned to later. For instance, page 25 gives us the first hint of the story of the disappeared parents. *Then I remembered him saying: 'My poor lad. First your father. Now your mother'* (Ishiguro 2000: 25). At that point the reader is introduced to the parents. Christopher remembers the time when he had to leave Shanghai after his parents' mysterious disappearance and it is only then that the reader realizes that something unpleasant must have happened to them and that is why he was brought up by his aunt who is mentioned in the beginning. The whole story of his parents then keeps unfolding until the last page through other hints and memories but it is never presented as a consistent and conventionally constructed story.

5. 3 Illusion and the past

Our narratives concerning my father had, as I said, endless variations, but fairly quickly we established a basic recurring story-line. My father was held captive in a house somewhere beyond the Settlement boundaries. His captors were a gang intent on extorting a huge ransom. Many small details evolved quite rapidly until they too became fixtures.

(Ishiguro 2000: 109-110)

As we have already shown, the author uses complex ways to move about the plotline. There are no boundaries for the narrator as to how he should go through his memories and so the plotline falls into a lot of pieces of different stories that need to be put together by the reader. In such an environment there is a lot of space for hypotheses and illusions. These can be demonstrated in the novel not only by seeing oneself in a more favourable light, but also by the whole passages that, as one can argue, only exist in the narrator's mind, but they are significant for what the author wishes to communicate to the reader.

Parts five and six of the novel take place in Shanghai, Cathay Hotel, 20th September and 20th October 1937. Since the very first paragraphs the story is full of rather absurd hints and coincidences. Christopher Banks, who is probably in his late thirties, finally comes to Shanghai to find out what happened to his parents. He chooses to do so in the most inconvenient time when the Sino-Japanese war is raging in the region. He has no doubt that he will solve the case and believes that his parents were both kidnapped and kept in a house where they would still be easy to find. In Shanghai everyone knows about his case and preparations of the welcoming ceremony of the parents are being done. The amount of attention that he is given and the gravity with which the case is referred to gives an impression that his success or failure will have a long-term effect on the region and the people who happen to live there:

“Mr Banks,"she was saying," do you have any idea at all how relieved we all feel now that you're finally with us? Of course we didn 't like to show it, but we were getting extremely concerned about, well” – she gestured towards the sound of gunfire-“my husband, he insists that the Japanese will never dare attack the International Settlement.”

(Ishiguro 2000: 159)

Moreover, while looking for the house where his parents should be staying, Banks enters the warzone and meets his childhood friend Akira, who is at that time a wounded Japanese soldier fighting the Chinese. Whether the man he meets really is Akira is not sure, though, and even Christopher doubts it. *"This soldier. You had met him somewhere previously?" "I thought I had. I thought he was a friend of mine from my childhood. But now I'm not so certain. I'm beginning to see now, many things aren't as I supposed."* (Ishiguro 2000: 277).

This part of the novel is certainly open to a series of different interpretations. One of them might be that these events never took place and they are only a dream or a fantasy of the detective. What leads us to that is the fact that some parts resemble the childhood games Christopher and Akira played after the kidnapping. For instance, their games always ended with a huge ceremony in Jessfield Park. The same park is suggested when the ceremony is, quite prematurely, planned later. Another suspicious motif in the plotline is the naivety with which it is recalled. The timing of the rescue and the importance everybody ascribes to Banks' presence lead us to believe that what we witness is only how Christopher Banks would like it to have happened and that his journey to Shanghai was not as adventurous and pompous as it looks. Perhaps it was a journey in a way, but not in the physical sense, and the author had to undergo it in order to being able to come to terms with letting his parents, and his mother especially, down. At one point a Japanese colonel mentions that *our childhood becomes like a foreign land once we have grown* (Ishiguro 2000: 277). Christopher Banks is keen to come back to that land. At the end of it he finds only debris of a house and he realizes that he is too late. Christopher Banks finally comprehends that there is nothing he can do to turn back time and bring his parents back.

Whether the journey is only metaphorical or the author meant it to be taken for real, is not such a crucial issue to discuss. Either way it can be read as a need of a person to come back and solve something in the past which, of course, cannot be solved any more. The destitute state of the once sunny place, where Christopher lived as a child, symbolizes that there is no way back and even if he tries, the house, where he expects to find his parents as if nothing ever happened, must inevitably be empty. Moreover, events of the past seem more

prosaic than he would like to acknowledge. Fathers do not face a punishment of the Chinese underworld for fighting the exploitative opium trade. They simply leave families for their mistresses. Mothers do not follow their husbands' fate either. They trade their child's happiness for a life in a Chinese warlord's harem.

When the detective finally manages to track down his mother in an institution for old people with mental problems, it is not the woman he knew. After all, he expected to see her just like the day before she vanished. However, her reappearance in Christopher's life is the conclusive evidence that his childhood is definitely the thing of the past and the world needs to be accepted in all its cruelty that we do not tend to see as children. This realization also helps him get rid of guilt he felt up to that point. And so the journey is over, the past stays behind where it should be. In the final part, which is set in England in the fifties, Christopher Banks lives a lonely life with *a sort of emptiness* (Ishiguro 2000: 313), yet what haunted him about his childhood is resolved and he accepts that it is the way his life is meant to be.

6. Never Let Me Go

Ishiguro's last novel so far seems to be diverting from his trademark features. It does not refer to any specific historical events. Neither does it allude to anything significant in human's history and so the readers cannot find a hidden reference between the lines as they so often could with the earlier works. It does not explore a contrast between what an individual remembers and what the course of history was and it does not draw a picture of a person caught in their world of illusions and regrets. The novel, which is in fact a dystopia, takes the reader to the late 1990s when certain human beings are growing up separately in the shadows so that they provide their organs for the rest of the population once they reached maturity. However scientific it might sound, the novel does not aspire to fill up the shelves of sci-fi books that are being published nowadays. It is not set in a far future where people travel in space and live significantly different lives. On the contrary, the setting is England with real places such as Dover or Norfolk and people seem to be leading the same lives as we do. The striking similarity with our era might actually be suggesting that Ishiguro is making a hypothesis about what would have happened if *in the early days, after the war* (Ishiguro 2005: 239) science had made a huge leap and cloning of people would consequently become possible and in our time a widely accepted procedure.

The past, memories and nostalgia are again the main aids for building the story. Although the past is very important in the novel, Ishiguro enters an entirely new and undiscovered territory. While the narrator Kathy, one of the clones, or the 'Students' as they are called, searches through her memory and the story of her growing up emerges, we face a range of other issues that are new to the author. He questions the legitimacy of cloning and shows the ethical problems that would need to be addressed if it were possible. By doing that Ishiguro tries to unravel what constitutes the human being and what really matters in human life. Although the novel is based on a game in which the author plays with the idea what if something similar to this happened one day, the issues are not hypothetical at all. They concern every single one of us.

6. 1 Loss

I started to imagine just a little fantasy thing, because this was Norfolk after all, and it was only a couple of weeks since I'd lost him. I was thinking about the rubbish, the flapping plastic in the branches, the shore-line of odd stuff caught along the fencing, and I half-closed my eyes and imagined this was the spot where everything I'd ever lost since my childhood had washed up and I was now standing here in front of it, and if I waited long enough, a tiny figure would appear on the horizon across the field.

(Ishiguro 2005: 263)

A sense of loss permeates the novel from the beginning to the very end. A lot of characters are searching for something. The narrator is driving along the country with a clear purpose to look after other clones in hospitals but while doing that Kathy H. starts remembering the most important parts of her life and thus she tries to find if there ever was any meaning in it. Driving across the country itself implies a search for something. As Kathy H. admits:

Driving around the country now I still see things that will remind me of Hailsham. I might pass the corner of a misty field, or see part of a large house in the distance as I come down the side of a valley, even a particular arrangement of poplar trees up on a hillside, and I'll think: "Maybe that's it! I've found it! This actually is Hailsham!" Then I see it's impossible and I go on driving, my thought drifting on elsewhere.

(Ishiguro 2005: 5)

She remembers how much time she spent looking for a tape with a song called *Never Let Me Go*. It was a song which, as she believed, expressed a fear of losing someone. She remembers how Ruth, her friend, was looking for a person whose genes were used to clone her. She also remembers how teenagers at Hailsham played make-believe games about a place in Norfolk where all things that get lost in life go. If they wanted they could always find the place and retrieve them. In the games they wanted to believe that although something had been gone, it could be found again. It is comforting to believe that you could claim back something or someone who is irreversibly lost. At the end of the novel Kathy H. finds a field in Norfolk and believes that her boyfriend who is dead will be there. Although she knows that it is just a fantasy of hers, she cannot help imagining that it will happen. Kathy H. remembers the game when she

realises that she keeps losing everyone she ever knew at Hailsham. It is not by chance that apart from the tape, nobody ever finds anything. In the context of the novel the theme of loss is used to portray the moment when one finds that certain places, experiences or people of their life are inevitably gone. Even though Kathy H. knows that Norfolk is nothing more than a childhood game, she finds it comforting to believe that in a perfect world it would be possible. Her coping strategies are based on keeping her memories fresh and also indulging in fantasies about a nonexistent place.

Loss is always present in the story as it circles around 'Students' who are bound to lose everything. For them loss is something they must accept. It is important to believe that there is a place where they could find what has disappeared from their life as they face a fate of those who lose friends but also ideals, dreams and hopes. With such a bleak outlook they will ultimately also lose direction in their lives.

Kathy H. uses her memory to relive some of the happiest moments of her life. She finds comfort in going back to the old days and although Norfolk is a place, in the novel it is also a metaphor for memory. As memory stores accounts of our past life, the things which are gone still remain there and can possibly be reached. However, just like Norfolk cannot be found physically, neither can memories bring exactly the past moments. What they bring are only the constructs affected by illusions.

Kathy H. looks back on Hailsham as if it were the best time of her life. Yet, the unconsolable present situation always finds its way into her narrative. Her losses left her scarred and she finds it hard to learn to live with her absence. Even though our losses are irretrievable and should be therefore left in the past, they continue to shape everyday life:

We do not forget our losses, because loss-especially of those we love, or of crucial places or things- reshapes our world, and obliges us to learn again the task of navigating it. Absence is a large presence. [...] For that reason bereavement, divorce, loss of a job, loss of a home -the major losses- are the most stressful and distressing of all experiences. And they can happen with such cruel suddenness that they make us lose other things besides: faith in the world, confidence in ourselves.

(Grayling [2001] 2003:167)

After reviewing her life Kathy H. decides that her losses are more than she can take and she opts for becoming a donor too. After she finds out that there really is not any chance of her becoming a normal human being there is no reason she should avoid her fate. As far as loss is concerned, the novel ends on a very pessimistic note. It is unavoidable to lose as we go through our lives and there is very little hope that our memories will suffice to come to terms with our losses. However, as Kathy H. remarks, there is some hope after all. *I'll have Hailsham safely with me in my head, and that will be something no one can take away from me* (Ishiguro 2005: 262).

6.2 I remember, therefore I am still alive

"It's weird. Thinking it's all gone now." I turned in my seat to face her again. "Yeah, it's really strange," I said. "I can't really believe it's not there any more."

"It's so weird," Laura said. "I suppose it shouldn't make any difference to me now. But somehow it does."

"I know what you mean."

It was that exchange, when we finally mentioned the closing of Hailsham, that suddenly brought us close again, and we hugged, quite spontaneously, not so much to comfort one another, but as a way of affirming Hailsham, the fact that it was still there in both our memories.

(Ishiguro 2005: 193)

Whereas in other novels the author plays with failing memories of characters whose life did not turn out the way they had expected and they need to reconcile themselves to a sense of loss and wasted life, the narrator Kathy H. seems to be giving an objective account of her previous years. This view is supported by the fact that her description of places is very detailed and thus our impression is that her memory serves her very well. Other characters sometimes lose their temper or cannot help being emotional. Kathy H. remains rational and keeps her composure. It is probably one of the reasons she is allowed to look after other donors and not become one of them for a long time. On the other hand, unlike some other narrators in Ishiguro's novels, we cannot match her account to any other point of view or fact as those simply do not occur in the book. Although Kathy H. sometimes admits that *this was all a long time ago so I might have some of it wrong* (Ishiguro 2005:12), we are left with a fairly confident recapitulation of her life which is narrated from a point of view of someone who finally realised what the focal points in it were. The question remains where the narrator stands in time when narrating. The peace of her remembering, her trying to understand and thus bring something to an end, no hard feelings about her fate imply that she is close to death or even beyond it.

The theme of death and an end are crucial. As it was suggested above, the narrator herself probably knows that her days are soon to be over. In her memories most people she knew back at the "boarding school" called Hailsham are dying for the purpose they were

brought to the world for and the school had been closed somewhere along the line. When she says that *these days, of course, there are fewer and fewer donors left who I remember* (Ishiguro 2005: 4) it is in a very matter-of-fact way and although she is saying that all her friends from Hailsham have already been killed, she is not stirred by it. She accepts her fate and does not question whether it is right or wrong.

Everything that ever mattered to her stopped existing and the only thing she is left with are her memories. What happens now, at the point of narration, does not matter anymore. And so as long as she remembers every single detail of her journey, she can avert the end, or in other words, as long as something exists in one person's memory, it can never finish or die, it can never be lost.

I was talking to one of most 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, then I lost Tommy, but I won't lose my memories of them.

(Ishiguro 2005: 262)

Remembering her past is also a means of affirming her own existence and purpose. As she was denied any future that could be determined by what she wants, she can only rely on her past where she can find a source of happiness or *a feeling of glow* (Ishiguro 2005: 70). Revisiting the past is for most characters of Kazuo Ishiguro a way of dealing with guilt or unfulfilled ambitions. They are obsessed with the idea that the present situation can be somehow redeemed or at least alleviated by making a more flattering picture of the past. For Kathy H. this is not the main issue. She does not need to feel guilty about what she did because she was always surprisingly docile and led an exemplary life. In spite of the fact that she is the youngest narrator out of all novels, she is the least confused about the course of her life that seems to be over. She does not spot any mistakes in her life simply because it was so carefully planned by other people. To her memories are a solace. They store pictures of the better days but they also remind her of her purpose and of how she was groomed to believe that it was the only way she could live. A belief that never left her.

Whereas Hailsham, represents the good days, what came afterwards is bleak and scary. Kathy's schoolfriends are completing (an euphemism that means being killed after all their vital organs have been donated) one by one. The past offers comfort which the present situation cannot offer. This phenomenon is also observed by Lowenthal:

The present alone is inadequate to our desires, not least because it is continuously depleted to enlarge the past. Disenchantment with today impels us to try to recover yesterday.

(Lowenthal [1985] 2006: 33)

The past offers freedom. It is only in Kathy's memories that she can go where she wants, that is to the days of her youth. However, we will see soon that her need to remember the better days with all her feelings and her clinging to a collection of various art works she had created back at Hailsham might mean something more.

6. 3 We remember, therefore we are

**Man hath all which Nature hath, but more,
And in that More lies all his hopes of good.**

(Arnold 1849, *To an Independent Preacher*)

Let's accept that it would be possible to raise children, who are clones of already existing people, as a reservoir of organs. Let's believe that this could be happening in our world and the clones themselves would not object to it and when their time comes, they would hand over their bodies for the sake of other people. Let's leave aside other questions regarding the possibility of the plot and concentrate on some general issues that are being dealt with. The first and foremost is, of course, cloning and ethic, which is not a subject of this thesis and, therefore, it should be touched upon only briefly.

While in other novels of Kazuo Ishiguro the author's main interest lies with more intimate issues such as personal loss and self-effacement, *Never Let Me Go* represents an attempt to raise a few questions about a topical problem whose solution might concern everybody. Would it be right to farm people for the sake of other people? What justification would we have to find for it so that such a process would not equal to murder? A philosopher and acclaimed literary journalist A.C. Grayling believes that as long as cloning helped relieve suffering, it would not be unacceptable:

The nonsense people talk about cloning stems from the prison-cell of religious belief. Pious exclamations about the sanctity of life, and about not interfering with God's purpose, conceal a farrago of confusion. Life's sanctity resides in its quality, not its mere quantity, for there is nothing sacred in suffering. And if we were to 'avoid the interfering with God's purposes' we would not use penicillin, nor raise money for the Third World's starving.

(Grayling [2001] 2003:194)

Grayling mentions the quality of life of people and so the question is whether the quality of life should not be granted to the potential donors too. It would all depend on one crucial decision, though. Could be the donors considered people?

One of the dilemmas, that is not presented directly, but which permeates the whole story, is how we would treat these people and whether we could call them people or human beings at all. In the book they are referred to as 'Donors' or 'Students'. What we learn about the way they are looked at by society is that other people feel unpleasant in their company, they pity them or they treat them with a revulsion. *Art students, that's what she thought we were. Do you think she'd have talked to us like that if she'd known what we really were? [...] She'd have thrown us out. We know it so we might as well just say it* (Ishiguro 2005: 152). The idea behind creating the boarding school where they would be educated and looked after by Guardians is that it should give them humane conditions before they donor their organs. The 'Students' live as any other people of their age but a special emphasis is put on them being creative. This serves the purpose to prove that they are not to be scared of because when they can create and appreciate art, they must be like real human beings. *We took away your art because we thought that it would reveal your souls. Or to put it more finely, we did it to prove you had souls at all* (Ishiguro 2005: 238). They are also encouraged to keep a collection of what they have made. It seems that the author intends to portray these 'Donors' just like normal people in order to show what possible obstacles there are ahead of us once the process of cloning was honed to perfection. To show the human side of 'Students' they are attributed with certain prerogatives of the human kind. They have feelings, they can love, hate and, most importantly, they have memories. They can reflect on their life and make hypotheses about alternative outcomes if they had made a different decision. They can constitute their personal histories. They are aware of their existence and past, they understand their continuity in time and they know that one day it comes to an end.

From that point of view the novel can be seen in a different light. The ability to retell a life proves that the person is a human being and they deserve to be treated so. The technique that Ishiguro always used, that is pushing the plot further by letting the main character piece up their memories and often create their very own outlook on the course of their life, is in *Never Let Me Go* upgraded to another level. It is used to depict, in a very subtle way, what the essence of the human kind is and it also might answer the question why Ishiguro goes back to that structure over and over again. It does not only show that people in general reflect on their life with a lot

discrepancies and one version of a single event will always differ from a person to person, but the need to make sense of one's past is also in our make-up, it constitutes the human kind and as such it is worth exploring.

Another way of understanding the book is to read it in the context of the world of the 21st century. Kathy H. drives around Britain, looking after other donors. Not unlike Stevens in *The Remains of the Day*, the framework of the novel is set within a journey on which major events of life surface. The resemblance the journey bears to life as such is striking. It is hard not to read a novel with such a framework as a metaphor for human life. *Never Let Me Go* describes a condition of a human being on the verge of the 21st century. The clones wander through life without a clear purpose of their own. Their fate has been decided for them and what surprises me is how unable to rebel against it they seem to be. It looks like it is the author's intention to portray them helpless in order to liken their condition to the situation of people in general. Although it is said that every person has their fate in their hands, it is not true. Our fate is by far and most influenced by the luck of the draw. Just like the clones who simply did not choose to be born as a reservoir of organs, neither have we this choice. Just like at Hailsham, where the students are taught to be reconciled with their fate, we are being educated to be able to fit into our society and to conform with its norms that not always agree with us.

7. Conclusion

In this diploma thesis I have identified the past, memory and history as the main features of Kazuo Ishiguro's novels. I have analysed five novels of this author with respect to how the use of the past, memory and history influences his narration and plotline and whether the frequent use of the phenomena has any significance. I have also decided to focus my attention on the position of an individual in historical events, themes of guilt, loss, self-deception and regret.

It is clear that the plot in all analyzed novels is predominantly set in the past. As I have outlined in my introduction, the only way to reach the past is through memories and so this explains why memories play an important role. They are also employed in the interpretation of the past which creates history once one of the interpretations has been widely agreed on.

The position of an individual in historical events is shown in *An Artist of the Floating World*. In this novel the artist had to make a decision about his loyalties in the war. He was unlucky to be born into a difficult era and had no choice as to whether he wanted or not to make his decision. This character demonstrates the way Ishiguro sees an individual against the background of events of huge importance. Their choice in these times can always end in a complete disaster and from our perspective they can be seen as traitors or the villains. Another character, the butler in *The Remains of the Day*, opts to leave the choice to others who he trusts. His intentional refusal to participate actively on the course of his life can be seen as a safe choice. Taking no stand on the situation does not make one a traitor but heroes are not made this way either. The contrast of the artist and the butler poses a question whether making decisions, although they might turn out misguided, is better than leaving the choice to others. The answer to this question defines how an individual wishes to go through their life. Is it a risky independent trek with potential abyss at the end of it, or is it a straight guided tour leading you home safely?

Whatever decision you finally make there is always a possibility that later you will feel guilty about it. Feelings of guilt appear in all Ishiguro's novels. In *An Artist of the Floating World* the painter is worried about his reputation that could mar his daughter's engagement. *When We Were Orphans* shows a detective trying to solve a mystery of his parents' disappearance. His

life starts to be haunted by the thought that he could have done something to prevent it from happening. What Ishiguro finds worth noticing is that guilty feelings might have an impact on the whole life. We often imagine that we missed something in the past and that failure is at the root of all problems. Inability to move on impedes our personal growth. As the writer shows, doubts about the past decisions can be unfounded. The painter is probably exaggerating his role in historical events and his daughter's bad luck in getting married might be as simple as that she still did not find the right person to marry. Similarly, the detective does not see at first that his parents disappeared from his life out of the reasons that he as a nine-year-old boy or even later could not have affected.

The theme of loss is touched upon in all novels. Whether it is a nostalgia for lost moments and places of the past or it concerns a loss of a close person. In *A Pale View of Hills* Etsuko's memories are connected with her dead daughter. However, her loss is so overpowering that she is not able to remember her directly. In *An Artist of the Floating World* the artist laments the loss of the pre-war Japan and the place where he used to spend many nights with his friends, discussing the beauty of the floating world. The artist idealizes the lost places because they were all connected with his youth and the days that are gone. The novel which works with the motif to a great extent is *The Remains of the Day*. As the butler sees one big era going away and another approaching, he cannot help feeling nostalgic. The past days were for him better and the more he sees that he cannot bring them back the more idealized they get. It is not only the past era that is lost. He must deal with a realization that he squandered opportunities in his life and he did not make the most of it. The greatest loss of his life is that of Miss Kenton. The first time she disappears from his life is when he is not able to express overtly his feelings for her. The second time, which also brings the ultimate loss of her, is when she admits that she was never happy in her marriage and wished she had married Stevens. At that point he is still not capable of disclosing his true emotions. In *When We Were Orphans* the detective lost his parents and was never able to get over it. Just like other characters in the novel he feels incomplete because his life was deprived of the sense of security. He spent a part of his life abroad which also affected his sense of belonging somewhere. Losing his roots meant that he partly lost direction in his life. *Never Let Me Go*

works with the theme of loss in a subtle way. Ishiguro's characters look back on their losses and by acknowledging their existence they come to terms with them, yet they never seem to fully recover.

Self-deception is linked to all discussed themes. In order to avoid feelings of guilt and loss, characters in the novel deceive themselves. As I have explained memories are not a true image of the past events and so they are to a certain extent an illusion and can be used for self-deception. *A Pale View of the Hills* is itself an illusion. It is a projection of Etsuko's life as a life of someone else. Besides, at the end of the novel she admits that she has always known that her daughter would be unhappy in England. Although she claimed that she decided to leave Japan for her daughter's sake, it was just a ruse of her subconscious. In *An Artist of the Floating World* the artist is lying to himself but it is hard to say where the truth is. He is probably imagining that his paintings influenced the nation in the war. It is hard to accept that his art was not as far-reaching as he had hoped. *The Remains of the Day* portrays a master of self-deception. Stevens does not see the world how it is but how he would like it to be. He believes that Miss Kenton wants to come back to work at Darlington Hall and so he reads it in her letter. When he works instead of being with his dying father he convinces himself that his father would want him to stick to his responsibilities rather than attending to him. All his life the butler wanted to believe that he sacrificed his personal life for great causes. He not only worked for a great man but he also achieved dignity in his service. The truth is, however, that for a long time he did not wish to acknowledge that his life failed terribly because of his suppressed feelings. Although he emphasizes his professional triumphs, he feels that his life was not fulfilled. He is also not able to admit that he is ashamed of his previous master and out of loyalty or good manners, he still justifies Lord Darlington's actions. Self-deception is chosen as a frequent theme to demonstrate that we construct the sense of our life achievements or failures very inaccurately and the way we see ourselves probably differs to how other people do. The picture is painted, just like memories, in a highly subjective way.

The past of the characters in the novels of Kazuo Ishiguro usually represents the happier part of their life. The contrast between the now and the then generates regret. If there were an easy way to summarize what the novels deal with, we would have to say that they

predominantly picture a person whose life did not turn the way they had expected. Apart from the last novel, the voice of the narrator always belongs to an older person who has retired and the time on their hands enables them to ponder about their life. They are not very keen on the prospect of reaching these days. Although they are often the days of their personal and professional peak, they also represent a corner where unpleasant truths lurk. Nevertheless, somehow they feel that their life cannot be concluded without it. Significant undertone of regret appears in three novels. In *An Artist of the Floating World* the elderly painter regrets that the time of his youth is over. It is not the main issue of the novel but the painter perceives the changes in Japanese post-war society with a sense of nostalgia and regret. In *The Remains of the Day* the butler regrets wasted opportunities and, again, the time of his younger days when the Empire was still strong. Although the narrator makes the story sound as a contented account of professional achievements, regret starts to appear as the failures dawn on the butler. The final realization of the butler that his life was not so successful brings tears in his eyes. It is the climax of the novel in which the prevailing emotion is a sense of regret. In *When We Were Orphans* the detective regrets that he could not do anything to keep his family together. Regret is accompanied by guilt and they provide the incentive for the detective to go back and deal with his long suppressed traumas of the past.

To conclude, the past, memories and history play an important role in the works of Kazuo Ishiguro. His choice to set the plot in the past and let characters review their past choices and actions enables him to study how inaccurate but also painful our memories can be. By doing that he touches upon a number of issues. Firstly, there is not a single interpretation of the past. As the past constitutes the present state, what we call reality or objectivity does not seem to exist. Ishiguro embraces the plurality of perspectives. Secondly, memories and history are constantly reassessed in connection with how we mature and how generally held beliefs change. The transient and malleable nature of memories is often used to create a better picture of the past and thus to reconcile ourselves to the bitter truth. As Ishiguro uses the themes of guilt, loss, self-deception and regret frequently, it seems that he perceives them as an important, omnipresent and integral part of life. Thirdly, the ability to hold memories, be aware of the past and to interpret it is a unique human quality which can be double-edged. It can help us

reach the better part of our life but it stores the traumatising moments too. I believe that literature should lead us to understand ourselves better and this is what Kazuo Ishiguro aims to do. The author's use of the phenomena discussed aspires to capture what it means to be a human being.

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