

Charles University in Prague

Faculty of Education

BACHELOR'S THESIS

2012

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**The Theme of Memories in Kazuo Ishiguro's
Never Let Me Go and Julian Barnes' *The Sense
Of An Ending***

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2012

Abstract

The aim of this bachelor's thesis is to analyse how the theme of memories is represented in two novels of contemporary British literature, *Never Let Me Go* (2005) by Kazuo Ishiguro and *The Sense of an Ending* (2011) by Julian Barnes. The thesis is concerned with unreliable narrations of the novels and examines how the theme of memories is integrated in the plotlines. Theoretical part of the thesis focuses on memories from psychological perspective, on the nature of memories, unreliable narrator and output of the authors. In the practical part, the analysis of the selected novels is performed.

Key words: Memories, unreliable narrator, psychology, Barnes, Ishiguro

Abstrakt

Cílem této bakalářské práce je rozebrat způsob, jakým je ve dvou románech současné britské literatury, *Neopouštěj mě* (2005) od Kazua Ishigura a *Vědomí konce* (2011) od Juliana Barnese, prezentováno téma vzpomínek. Práce se zabývá nespolehlivým vypravěčstvím těchto románů a zkoumá, jakým způsobem je téma vzpomínek včleněno do zápletek. Teoretická část se soustředí na vzpomínky z pohledu psychologie, povahu vzpomínek, problematiku nespolehlivého vypravěče a dílo autorů. V praktické části je proveden rozbor vybraných děl.

Klíčová slova: Vzpomínky, nespolehlivý vypravěč, psychologie, Barnes, Ishiguro

Acknowledgement

I would hereby like to thank my supervisor PhDr. Petr Chalupský for his valuable advice, time, patience and support throughout the writing of this thesis.

Declaration

I hereby declare that this bachelor thesis is the result of my own work and that I used only the sources listed on the Works Cited page.

Prague 2012

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Table of Contents

Introduction	1
1 Theoretical Part	2
1.1 Psychological perspective on memories.....	2
1.2 The nature of memories.....	4
1.3 The unreliable narrator	5
1.4 Kazuo Ishiguro	7
1.5 Julian Barnes	8
2 Practical Part	10
2.1 Never Let Me Go.....	10
Narration and memories.....	10
Memories and identity	13
2.2 The Sense of an Ending.....	15
Memories, narration and self-deception	15
Conclusion	22
Works Cited	24

Introduction

This thesis discusses representation of the theme of memory in selected contemporary novels. Memory has always been an important theme in literature as it provides link between past and present, between the world and human mind. Narrators in postmodernist novels are unreliable, they often depend only on their subjective recollections of the past when telling their story. For the thesis I chose two novels by contemporary British writers, Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* (2005) and *The Sense of an Ending* (2011) by Julian Barnes. Although in both novels the narrators are trying to come to terms with their past, the two books are very different. The first one is a dystopian novel from an alternative present, where the reader gets to know the world of the novel through the retrospective narration of the main protagonist. In the latter novel, memories are the central theme; by thinking back the narrator is trying to find the cause of some events which happened earlier in his life.

The main purpose of this thesis is to analyse how the story of the above mentioned novels is displayed through the narrator's memories and how the theme of memory is employed in the plotline. The first part of the thesis focuses on memories from the psychological point of view, on the nature of memories and on the concept of an unreliable narrator. There are also mentioned facts about the authors and their work relevant to the objective of the thesis. The second part works with the primary sources. It analyses the unreliable narrations of the novels, how the narrator's memory affects his or her reliability. The theme of how memory is explored in the novels and what importance the theme of memory has in the plotlines is also discussed.

1 Theoretical Part

1.1 Psychological perspective on memories

From the scientific point of view, there are many different kinds of memories such as short term memory or working memory, but these are not relevant to the objectives of this thesis. For our purpose much more significant researches have been made in study of autobiographical memory, episodic memory and the mechanisms of forgetting and retrieval. The main intention of this chapter is to explore what scientists have found out about the (un)reliability and subjectivity of memory, as this is one of the central themes in postmodernist fiction, and also in the two novels discussed in this work.

Autobiographical memory is “memory for information related to the self” (Brewer 22). Authors of books concerned in this thesis let the main protagonists use their autobiographical memory to tell their story. Scientific studies of autobiographical memories try to describe how this kind of memory work, what its features are and to which degree it is reliable.

Autobiographical memory is structured. On the top of the pyramid there is the overall life story, which is linked to general, broad themes such as work or personal relationships. When people relate these themes to certain period of their life, they can recall some more specific memories such as “my first job”. These memories include some more specific events – places, people involved or activities. Recalling these still relatively abstract and general memories leads to evoking specific episodic memories. According to A. Baddeley, “they are stored at a more fundamental level containing more detailed sensory-perceptual information” (Baddeley 146). In genuine episodic memories, there are more exact spatial and temporal information than in confabulations. Also it is easier for us to justify the genuineness of our memories when the memories contain some strong perceptual detail (Johnson et al. 375).

Memories never show reality as it really happened, we can see this from various studies in the field of episodic memory. “Episodic memory is a system that allows us to remember personally experienced events and travel backwards in time to reexperience these events” (Atance 99). In the studies, people were to remember a

story or a characteristic of a person. After analysing the results, the scientists came more or less to the same conclusions. “The recollection of the text was shorter, more coherent and tended to fit more closely with the participant’s own viewpoint than the original” (Baddeley 95). There are also researches on how social and emotional factors influence memories. Nowadays we know that in remembering an event people generally tend to think they played more important role than it was in reality. One more general tendency in recollecting is that people more often remember success and praise than failure. This is probably a protecting mechanism that helps people to maintain their self esteem and keep their psychological health.

Another phenomenon that affirms the unreliability of memory is the false memory syndrome. It is a term “applied to cases in which the rememberer becomes convinced of an event that did not happen” (Baddeley 150). This can easily occur especially with children, but also with some adults. Various experiments have been carried out where adult individuals were encouraged to believe some event which reportedly happened in their childhood. Although the event in fact did not happen, “an average of 37% of participants succumb to such persuasion, and in addition might come up with some detailed and vivid memories” (Baddeley151).

The example of the false memory syndrome may seem a little extreme, when questioning the genuineness of memories, as it is a rather rare phenomenon. There are however two processes that occur in all people and that significantly influence the authenticity of memories – the process of retrieval and the process of forgetting. When we try to retrieve an experience, we often remember only some aspects of it. To make the recollection complete, we are forced to use a tool called reconstructive memory (Baddeley 180). It means that we actively figure out the forgotten aspects of the experience using logic and our other knowledge. This is often an active and conscious process, though the reconstructive memory can also be used unconsciously. Reconstructive memory is useful in everyday life, but it often leads to errors and makes our memories less authentic.

It is apparent that the information about the past taken from our memories is very specific. Its quality depends on our mental state, social status, suggestibility, current mood and self perception. The ability to retrieve information also depends on the number and quality of cues and other outer circumstances. There is already

much scientific information about memory available and the subject is still widely explored nowadays. Autobiographical memory, however, is a very difficult field to study, as there is often no objective record of the remembered event and the scientific methodology in this field is insufficient.

1.2 The nature of memories

People remember single elements from the past, simple events and sensory details, which they organise, synthesise and process in many other different ways. The results are memories which are organised similarly as pieces of a narrative (Smiešková 5). Memories provide a link between human mind and the reality as well as between the past and the present. When trying to describe a past event, people have no other choice than to rely on their or somebody else's recollections. In writing fiction, the author uses his or her memory and past experience to create a new story, and in every narrative the actions of characters are based on their past knowledge.

“Memory pervades life” (Lowenthal 194). What we do and how we think in the present is largely influenced by what we experienced and what we remember. A great part of our current mental capacity is devoted to either conscious or unconscious recollections. “Remembering the past is crucial for our sense of identity” (Lowenthal 197). Our perception of ourselves is from a large extent based on our memories. We know who we are because we know where we come from; the integrity of our personality is dependent on the knowledge of our past. As memories form our identity, we often tend to alter them, so the view of our past fits our self perception better. If people do something cowardly, they try to justify their action, give reasons why they could not act otherwise, because they do not want to be perceived, by themselves and by others, as cowards. In the end, their weak action is in their memory seen as an inevitable and sensible deed.

Memories are originally private and personal. We can choose to make them public by telling them to others. Although we commonly say that we share our memories, this is not the case. As Lowenthal states, “we could no more share a memory than we could share a pain” (Lowenthal 195). Although it is impossible to

share memories completely, we try at least partial sharing all the time. If there is nobody who remembers the same entities as us we start to doubt the authenticity of our memories. As people share memories it is often difficult to distinguish which memory was genuinely our own and which we have adopted as ours from somebody else. “In fact, we need other people’s memories both to confirm our own and to give them endurance [...] we revise personal components to fit the collectively remembered past, and gradually cease to distinguish between them” (Lowenthal 196). If people talk about something they experienced together, their memories can differ dramatically. However, as the time passes the memories of individuals seem more and more similar and the line between one’s own experience and the experience of others becomes blurred.

Our recollections are not “verbatim copies” of the past (Nevid 205). They are only reflections of what really happened, sometimes more and sometimes less accurate. They are altered not only by factors mentioned in the previous chapter; they have to correspond with our identity and they change under the influence of other people’s recollections. Memories are originally fragmentary, but thanks to the reconstructive memory they are formed into a coherent shape, which enables us to narrate our life story. In the two novels discussed in this thesis, the narrators tell their stories relying only on their recollections. As the previous two chapters demonstrate, memories are highly subjective and do not accurately describe, what has really happened. Therefore, both narrators in the novels must be considered unreliable.

1.3 The unreliable narrator

A very widely cited definition of the term unreliable narrator is that of Wayne Booth who writes that the narrator is “reliable when he speaks for or acts in accordance of the norms of the work (which is to say the implied author’s norms), unreliable when he does not” (Booth 158 – 159). The term “implied author’s norms” can be understood as the message that the author intends to tell or as the fictional reality of the book. The narrator is unreliable when he or she, for a variety

of reasons, does not give an objective, truthful and complete picture of the fictional reality.

There are various possible classifications of unreliable narrators and many explanations why particular narrators can be considered unreliable. If the narration is in the first person, it is subjective and therefore to some degree it must also be unreliable. However, if the degree of unreliability is not significant, and there are no other signs of the unreliable narration than the first person, then the narrator is by most critics not considered unreliable.

Some authors create unreliable narrators who are unaware of their own untrustworthiness. These narrators try to tell the truth and describe the reality objectively. However, merely the fact that they are talking from their subjective point of view makes them to some degree unreliable, and there are more factors that increase the narrator's unreliability. One such example can be naivety of a narrator. Naive narrators do not fully grasp the background and the reader has to read between the lines to understand the fictional reality of such a narrative. A similar situation occurs when the narrator simply does not have enough information about the background. Some characters may be mentally ill or obsessed with some ideas, which also decreases their ability to judge the fictional reality objectively, and makes them less reliable (Fludernik 27). The degree of a narrator's unreliability becomes even higher when the narrator is not telling the truth on purpose. The narrator may intentionally conceal or change some information, sometimes because they are compromising or embarrassing, or the narrator may wish to show him or herself in a better light.

The unreliable narrator is not simply clear-cut as some critics do not agree with Booth's definition of the term. They criticize the concept of the "implied author's norms" as being too vague and suggest that instead of comparing actions and talks of the narrator to the norms of the implied author, it should be compared to the generally accepted cultural models. This includes society's moral standards, common sense, patterns of thinking and behaviour perceived by the society as normal or for example conventional stylistic devices of expressing opinions and telling the story. If the narrator somehow differs from the generally accepted norms, he or she can be considered unreliable (Nünning 34 – 43). However, the concept of

generally accepted norms is also rather unclear, because each reader can have a different set of norms. Therefore, when readers evaluate the (un)reliability of a narrator according to this definition, each reader can come to a completely different conclusion. Fortunately, there can be found also less subjective criteria of how to recognise an unreliable narrator, such as “discrepancies between a narrator’s statements and his actions, linguistic signals of expressivity and subjectivity, a high number of direct turns to the reader coupled with attempts to guide his reception of the text and syntactic indicators of a high degree of emotional involvement” (Nunius 110). Narrators of the novels discussed in this thesis are both unreliable first person narrators. The Findings described in this chapter will help to analyze the unreliable narrations in the novels.

1.4 Kazuo Ishiguro

Kazuo Ishiguro was born in 1954 in Nagasaki and moved to England with his parents in 1960. He studied English and Philosophy at the University of Kent and also Creative writing at the University of East Anglia. In a postgraduate course run by Malcolm Bradbury he met Angela Carter, who became his other tutor. He has been a successful writer practically from the very beginning of his writing career, which started in the early 1980’s (British Council).

When Ishiguro’s family moved to England at his age of five, the original plan was to stay only temporarily. Several years after their move the parents still intended to go back to Japan eventually, but in the end the family stayed in England. To this, Ishiguro once said: “I have a sense of having just left without saying goodbye, and of this whole other world just kind of fading away. I have the feeling of this whole alternative person I should have become. There was another life I might have had, but I’m having this one” (Ishiguro, *Conversations* 189). Perhaps this notion of unfinished matter in his life and the experience of loss foreshadowed the choice of themes in his writings. His protagonists often recollect in order to come to terms with their past. By going back in their thoughts they try to evaluate their past actions, find a meaning of past events. Their recollecting is forming their sense of identity, it has almost a healing effect on them. Ishiguro

frequently talks about his interest in the theme of the past and memories, as in one of his interviews: “I’m interested in memory, because it’s a filter through which we see our lives, and because it’s foggy and obscure, the opportunities for self-deception are there. In the end, as a writer, I’m more interested in what people tell themselves happened, than what actually happened” (Rennison 74). Although this citation is from an interview about his novel *When We Were Orphans* (2000), his occupation with memories can be seen in all his works.

His first two novels, *The Pale View on Hills* (1982) and *The Artist of the Floating world* (1986), are both set in Japan and are about individuals who try to come to terms with their individual past as well as with the past of their nation (Rennison 73). His third and most successful novel, *The Remains of the Day*, for which he received a Booker Prize in 1989, discusses similar themes, but its setting is in England. The main protagonist, a butler Stevens, has worked all his life in the house of lord Darlington, a sympathizer with Nazis. Stevens recollects his life, thinking about his sense of duty, butler’s dignity and professionalism, which were the values he always put before everything else. Ishiguro’s next novels are *The Unconsoled* (1995), which incorporates surrealistic features, *When We Were Orphans* and *Never let Me Go*. Apart from the novels, Ishiguro has also written *Nocturnes: Five Stories of Music and Nightfall* (2009), a book of short stories which are linked by the themes of music and memory.

1.5 Julian Barnes

Julian Barnes was born in Leicester in 1946. He graduated at Magdalene College in Oxford in Modern languages and, after that, he worked as a lexicographer for *Oxford English Dictionary*. Later he worked as a reviewer for the *New Statesmen* and the *New Reviewer* and from 1979 to 1986 he was employed in *The New Statesmen* and *The Observer* as a television critic. His success in the field of writing started already with his first novel *Metroland* (1981), for which he received Somerset Maugham Award. Since then, he has written numerous novels, essays and short stories. He also translates from French and German (Roberts).

Barnes is a very versatile writer and in his works has employed a wide range of themes such as love and sexuality, truth, national identity, religion, death, and also history, past and memory. His third novel *Flaubert's Parrot* was shortlisted for the Booker Prize in 1984. The main protagonist is very fond of his collection of stuffed parrots and also of Gustav Flaubert and his work. This obsession is a way of coping with his past, with memories of his wife's infidelity and suicide. He reflects the imperfections of memories and the inability to see the truth (Boylan). Another example of a book where Barnes discusses the theme of the unreliability of memory and the subjective nature of history and past is his playful novel *A History of the World in 10 and ½ Chapters* (1989). Each chapter is written in different style, has a different narrator and is set in different time. What link the chapters together are some motives such as boats or a woodworm. The first chapter is rather daring, as it describes the biblical event of the Great Flood from the perspective of a woodworm. One of the messages the reader can take from this story is that individual memories of historical events can be completely different than those described in official sources. In 1998 another Barnes' novel was nominated for the Booker prize. This time, it was his satire *England England*, which employs themes of national identity, relation between the original and replica and also genuineness of national as well as personal memories (Henstra 95).

Barnes' next novel *Arthur and George* (2005) is a historical fiction where Arthur is in fact the creator of Sherlock Holmes, Arthur Conan Doyle. The genre of the book enables Barnes to discuss his favourite themes of relation between subjective and real or fiction and history in yet different way, than in his previous novels (Hadley 68). In 2008, Barnes' memoir *Nothing to be Frightened of* was published. In the book he deals with his fear of death, discusses the question of religion and atheism and also reflects on fallibility of memories (Tayler). Barnes' last book, *The Sense of an Ending* is the winner of the Booker Prize for 2011 and is fully devoted to the theme of memory.

2 Practical Part

2.1 Never Let Me Go

Narration and memory

The plot of *Never Let Me Go* is set in an alternative present, where cloned people are created for the purpose of donating their vital organs after they grow up. As the world is fictional, the reader has no other option than getting to know it through the retrospective narration of Kathy, one of the clones and the narrator of the book.

When Kathy starts to tell her story, she knows much more information about her world than the reader. At the beginning of the book, the only thing the reader knows is that the narration starts in England in the late 1990's. At this point, Kathy is 31 and she talks about her being a carer, about donors and memories of a place called Hailsham. It is clear that Kathy expects her audience to be more informed than the readers of the book actually are. In the beginning she says: "I've been a carer now for over eleven years. That sounds long enough, I know, but actually they want me to go on for another eight months" (Ishiguro 3). As K. Palonen says, "it is immediately clear, that Kathy H. is telling the story to someone other than to an ordinary English listener. The receiver of the story already knows what 'other' and 'they' signify" (Palonen 206). Similarly, the parenthesis "I know" suggests that Kathy expects her audience to have a notion of some normal, average length of the period for which the people in her world are employed as carers. Kathy does not feel a need to explain realities which to her seem common. It is a game the author of the book plays with the reader, and its effect is, that the reader gets to know Kathy's background in a similar manner as the children who grow up in Hailsham. This way, the reader is forced to reveal the reality of the book gradually, through Kathy's autobiographical memories.

In the first part of the novel, Kathy recollects her growing up in Hailsham, a special kind of children's home or boarding school. Her childhood recollections are seemingly idyllic, but as the story progresses, they start to be more disturbing as the characters – and with them the reader - gradually realize what future is designed for them. Miss Lucy, one of Kathy's guardians in Hailsham once remarks that they –

Kathy and her friends - have been “told and not told” (Ishiguro 80). Kathy claims that, at some level, they always knew what kind of fate awaits them, it was never kept a secret, but they did not really understand it and the realization came progressively. Likewise, it was never kept a secret from the reader, as on the first pages of the book Kathy talks about her work as a carer. However, at first, the input information does not make much sense and the realization of what all the carer – donor talks really mean comes later.

When Kathy describes past events, she also tries to recall her past interpretations of them and her feelings back then. However this is often impossible, because at the moment she narrates her story, she already knows about the importance or future impact of these events and looks at them from a detached view. She recalls Miss Lucy’s remarks and actions, which back in Hailsham seemed rather confusing and of less importance, but when reflecting them in years distance and with more information, Kathy starts to see their logic. “If these incidents now seem more of significance and all of a piece, it’s probably because I’m looking at them in the light of what came later” (Ishiguro 77). Kathy’s revisions of her past feelings and discrepancies between her past and present interpretations of events are relatively frequent in the novel.

Kathy sometimes lets the reader see her and then somebody else’s perspective of the same past event. Although these different views are sieved through Kathy’s own memory, they can perhaps give the reader a little more objective picture of the fictional reality. An example of such event is when in Hailsham Madame saw Kathy dancing with the pillow, singing along with her favourite tape and, having seen this scene, she started crying. At that time, Kathy imagined she was holding a baby and therefore she thought Madame was crying because she knew Kathy would never have babies and she was sorry for her (Ishiguro 73). Then later in the book we learn Madame’s interpretation of the event. Madame explains that she felt that a “more scientific” and “more efficient” but “harsh and cruel” world is coming. During the incident she claims she “saw a little girl, [...] holding to her breast the old kind of world, [...] and she was holding it and pleading never to let her go” (Ishiguro 267). Kathy and Madame’s different perceptions of this incident result from their

different interpretation of it. The factual details – where, when and how it happened, are the same in memories of Kathy and in those of Madame.

Another example of Kathy's letting the reader see a discrepancy between her memory and memory of other character is, when she is Ruth's carer, and they talk about the secret guard. Back in Hailsham, Ruth in her admiration of the guardian Miss Geraldine created a secret guard for her and managed also to involve other students in protecting her and caring for her well being. During their joint recollecting of it Ruth claims that "it had been just a matter of two or three weeks" (Ishiguro 49). Kathy disagrees, she thinks that it all took much longer. As Kathy is the narrator of the novel, she justifies her version and gives the explanation, that Ruth was "embarrassed about it so the whole thing had shrunk in her memory" (Ishiguro 49). However it is impossible for the reader to know where the truth is, as Ruth is not given space to justify her version.

Kathy's recollecting of the secret guard provides the reader interesting information about her suggestibility. The leader of the secret guard was Ruth, she created a set of conspiracy theories about people wanting to kidnap Miss Geraldine to the woods. As the leader, Ruth had the right to expel from whomever she wanted the guard, justifying her decision by indicating, that she knew much more about what is going on than others. When Kathy was expelled from the secret guard, she had a conversation with other expelled student who suggested, that "It's just another of Ruth's made up things, that's all". To this, Kathy's response was: "Then how come I've personally heard them talking about it? Talking about how they're going to take Miss Geraldine to the woods in the milk van? [...] I heard them talking, clear as anything, heard every word, they didn't know I was there" (Ishiguro 55). When Kathy reflects on this event later, it seems that back then she really believed in the secret guard. Or that she, out of loyalty to Ruth or some other reason, wanted to believe in the secret guard so hard, that in the end she really got to believe in it. Of course, she was a child back then, and children in general are more suggestible than adults. Yet this example can give the reader a clue that Kathy may have kept some suggestibility to her adulthood.

When Kathy in the book recollects together with other characters, their memories usually agree surprisingly well. Apart from some little, technical

discrepancies there are no major conflicts. This makes Kathy look as a relatively reliable narrator. However as the reader has nothing else to compare Kathy's recollections with, the conclusion cannot be too certain. We cannot know to which extent the memories of others were changed in Kathy's mind to support her narration and to prove her point and to which extent she retained her suggestibility.

Memory and identity

One of the main themes in *Never Let Me Go* is the characters' searching for their identity, their place in the world. As was already mentioned, identity of people is largely shaped by their past. The environment in which we grow up is crucial for shaping our self-perception and self-realization, the notion of who we are. For the majority, this process starts in the early childhood in their family, then the larger context starts to be important. Teachers and classmates at school, our friends, cultural environment, the place where we live or our nationality, that all shapes our personality, morals, our nature, interests and future aiming. We need memories - links to our past to know, who we are in the present and who we are going to possibly become in the future.

The characters in *Never Let Me Go* have a completely different starting position for finding their identity than ordinary people in our, non-fictional world. They do not have a family; instead, they grow up in Hailsham, a place similar to a children's home or a boarding school and later they learn, that their future prospects are very restricted. In the book, stories of Kathy and her friends are described from their early childhood to the end of their lives. Much space in the novel is devoted to different strategies of the characters in exploring their identity, and to the importance of memory in the process of finding their identity.

Kathy's friend's Ruth's searching for identity and her place in the world is different from that of Tommy and Kathy. Tommy and Kathy are more realistic, they look for evidence, they try to derive the conclusions about their background and future prospects from real events, from things they were directly told by authorities, or from something they actually saw or overheard. Ruth, on the other hand, is a dreamer. "As opposed to Kathy, the character of Ruth has a tendency to let go of

her past” (Hellerung, Skaarup 6). She does not focus on where she comes from and what it means for her, rather she focuses on who she wants to be. She does not want to dwell in the past; instead, she tries to maintain an influence on others in her present and dreams about her— however illusory – future possibilities. In contrast to Kathy and Tommy, who mostly rely on their memory, Ruth relies on her imagination.

When the three of them move from Hailsham to the Cottages, they sometimes talk about their “dream future”. As Kathy says, “we probably knew, they [the talks] couldn’t be serious, but then again we didn’t regard them as a fantasy either” (Ishiguro 140). Ruth gets carried away in these discussions more than anybody else, talking about how she will work in the office full of “the dynamic, go-ahead types” (Ishiguro 142), which would probably suit her well, because Ruth herself is such kind of a person. Ruth refuses to look back in her past, because she does not want to accept who she is. Her nature is active; she is a natural leader, so the notion of herself with the history over which she has no control and with the inevitable future is too painful for her.

When Ruth becomes a donor, her attitude changes. She becomes reflective of her past and starts to revise her actions and past behaviour. When Kathy becomes her carer, Ruth often expresses regrets with her past deeds. For Ruth, the connection with Hailsham never seemed as significant as for the other characters in the book. However as her life is coming to an end, Hailsham and recollecting gain more importance. At one point, she confides to Kathy, how after moving to the Cottages, she got rid of her precious collection of things from Hailsham. According to Kathy, Ruth did this because back then, she wanted to “grow up and leave Hailsham behind” (Ishiguro 128). To this subject, Ruth says to Kathy: “You were different, I remember. You were never embarrassed by your collection and you kept it. I wish now I’d done that too” (Ishiguro 129). Ruth also feels guilty conscience about her past manipulative behaviour and that - as she says - she kept Kathy and Tommy apart. Her giving them Madame’s address and encouraging them to try to get the deferral is her way to gain inner peace, to conciliate with her past.

Kathy starts to narrate her story in the time, when her life is coming to the closure. She does not expect anything significant to happen anymore, she knows

that she will work few more months, then became a donor and eventually die. Kathy does not try to fight her fate, she is reconciled with what is going to happen. She claims, that at this stage of her life, she will “welcome the chance to rest – to stop and think and remember” (Ishiguro 37). In her memories, she finds solace. She lost her two closest friends; the place where she grew up does not exist anymore. As she travels through the English country side, she keeps seeing things that remind her of Hailsham, but she knows that the place is gone. In the ending of the book, she travels to Norfolk, which is the symbol of lost things – her regrets, lost hopes. In physical world, she does not have much to turn to anymore. So she focuses on her recollections. “I lost Ruth, I lost Tommy, but I won’t lose my memories of them” (Ishiguro 280). Elsewhere she says: “I’ll have Hailsham with me, safely in my head, and that’ll be something no one can take away” (Ishiguro 281). For Kathy, her memories are the most precious possession she has. They help her to understand who she is and to come to terms with her past. Focusing on her recollections enables Kathy to accept her destiny.

2.2 The Sense of an Ending

Memories, narration and self-deception

The narrator and the main character in *The Sense of an Ending* is Tony, an English middle class man in his sixties. His favourite word when describing his life is “peaceable”. His life seems sorted out, a chain of little victories and failures with no real unresolved past mysteries. When Tony receives a letter from a solicitor that the deceased mother of his college girlfriend Veronica left him £500 and two documents, it does not make much sense to him. Tony starts to re-examine his past, he thinks back about his relationship with Veronica and about his friend Adrian, who started going out with Veronica after Tony, and who later committed suicide. He looks back and tries to find truth about events which happened in the past not so much to him, but to people with whom he was once connected. He tries to find out what exactly happened and how he was personally involved in it. The novel is concerned almost exclusively with memories and what time does to them.

The book is formally divided into two parts. Part one could be described as before the solicitor's letter, part two as after the letter. In part one, the reader gets a simple record of Tony's past, sieved through his autobiographical memory. For Tony, there is no evidence to support or disprove truthfulness of his memories in the first part of the book, apart from his own reflections of their reliability. And indeed, Tony gives the reliability of his memories many thoughts. Through the whole novel, Tony challenges the exactness of memory, either by his own thinking, or through his recollections of discussions between his secondary school history teacher, his friend Adrian and the rest of the class. These discussions about the relationship of past, time and memory are described at the beginning of the book, and fragments of them are a leitmotiv through whole of the novel. However, even of these discussions there is no objective record. As Tony remarks, "Was this their exact exchange? Almost certainly not. Still, it is my best memory of their exchange" (Barnes 19).

Tony's constant questioning of truthfulness of his own memory makes the reader aware of his unreliability. Paradoxically, at the same time, it gives Tony an aura of frankness and honesty. Tony of course is an unreliable narrator, but his unreliability seems to result from fallibility of memory, not from a twisted personality and intentional lying. Tony seems to try to be as honest with the reader just as he is with himself. This appears as the problem, however, because it is often hard for him to confess himself bad feelings or to recall unpleasant or shameful memories. This tendency can be observed, for example, when he reflects on his relationship with his daughter. "I get on well with Susie. [...] But the younger generation no longer feels the need, or even the obligation to keep in touch. [...] Email will do for Dad – pity he hasn't learnt to text. [...] I do hope, he doesn't get Alzheimer's, that's my greatest worry, really because Mum's hardly going to have him back, is she? No: I exaggerate, I misrepresent. Susie doesn't feel like that, I am sure. [...] Susie and I get on fine" (Barnes 61 – 62). Tony tries to persuade himself that there is no problem in his relationship with Susie, but his imagining of Susie's thoughts clearly proves the opposite. Their relationship may be fairly good on the surface, but really, it is far from ideal. Tony's suppressing of the uncomfortable thoughts and memories

is a psychological protective mechanism: he denies them as they may be too shameful for him or bring back bad feelings.

Tony sometimes turns to the reader in search of compassion or in an attempt to be emphatic. When Tony recalls his relationship with Veronica, he remembers how she was denying him sex, how she acted more mature and serious than him and, as the time passes, he starts to see her behaviour as a manipulation. With time, the neutral or bad memories of Veronica prevail over the good ones. Therefore, when he is recalling how after their breakup they slept together and then Tony decided to tell her that their relationship had no future, he remembers himself in the talk as being quite cynical. He is persuaded that he was the victim of Veronica's calculating behaviour and that it gave him the right to be sarcastic and nasty during their second breakup. As he says at the beginning of this chapter: "After we broke up [meaning their first breakup], she slept with me. Yes, I know, I expect you're thinking: The poor sap, how did he not see that coming?" (Barnes 36). Not only is he sure Veronica slept with him to manipulate him, his direct addressing of the reader suggests that the reader is supposed to see it too and should sympathize with Tony. The reader, however, does not have enough information to decide whether to believe Tony and whether to stand on his side or not. For instance, Tony did not say how and why exactly they broke up for the first time. He only foreshadowed their nearing breakup and then later in one sentence simply stated that it happened. More importantly, we only have Tony's version of the relationship and the breakup, no objective record, not at least also Veronica's version of their shared past.

The plot of the first part of the novel is constituted by Tony's memories from the secondary school to the present and most of its story takes place in the distant past. The plot of the second part is about events which happened in Tony's present or near past, and which make Tony re-examine his memories described in the first part of the book. At the time when Tony learns, that he inherited the money and Adrian's diary from Veronica's mother, Tony's view of his past is challenged only by his own thoughts about (un)reliability of memory. He does not have any other sources of information about his past than his memories - no tangible records, and with people who could remember the same events as him he is either no longer in contact, or they are dead. So he does not expect to find out much about his past

anymore. Yet, with the strange inheritance, new questions arise. He does not understand how he deserved the inheritance in the first place, how Veronica's mother was involved in Adrian's life that she was in possession of his diary.

Tony does not manage to get the diary, though he gets two documents which help to throw new light on how the events in the past really happened. One of them is a copy of the letter Tony sent to Adrian after Adrian had let Tony know that he and Veronica had become a couple. This letter is also briefly mentioned in the first part of the book and when it appears on the scene in uncensored version in the second part, it is a wakeup call for all readers, who ever had a tendency to believe Tony's memories.

When in the first part of the novel Tony describes his reaction after he learned about Adrian's and Veronica's relationship, he admits he felt bitter. He felt that the purpose of the letter was to "let me [him] know how she, Veronica, had traded up: To my [Tony's] cleverest friend and what's more, a Cambridge chap like brother Jack. Also, to warn me [Tony], that she would be hanging around if I [Tony] planned on seeing Adrian" (Barnes 41). There is no record of the full version of Adrian's letter but there is not much reason to assume that Adrian's intention was to provoke such feelings. Adrian was always cleverer and more reflective than Tony, Veronica's brother Jack came from higher social class than Tony and they both went to a more prestigious university than him. Therefore, Tony always felt somehow insufficient compared to them and with the letter these feelings came up.

Tony's first answer to Adrian is a postcard with an artificial, pretentious text about everything being fine, but later he decides to respond, as he says, "properly". "I didn't use any of that silly 'epistle' language. As far as I remember, I told him pretty much what I thought of their joint moral scruples. I also advised him to be prudent, because in my opinion, Veronica had suffered damage long way back. Then I wished him good luck [...]" (Barnes 42). Knowing this information about what Tony has written, it is not too difficult for the reader to sympathise with him. None of what Tony describes seems overtly harmful. It may be rather nasty to imply someone is "damaged" without evidence, but it is understandable because, of course, Tony felt hurt. Also, the matter of a friend going out with his friend's ex-girlfriend is commonly seen as rather controversial, so the sarcastic remark about

morality seems justifiable too. Indeed, Tony's confession about writing a genuine letter about his feelings is likely to gain him more sympathy with the reader than his sending of the pretentious postcard.

When the copy of Tony's letter appears on the scene, the reader learns it contained much more than what Tony described. He does not only warn Adrian about Veronica's supposed "damage" – "I will leave the precise diagnoses to the headshrinkers [...] Even her own mother warned me against her"- he hopes that they "get so involved, that the mutual damage will be permanent". He anticipates they will break up and after that, they will be "left with a lifetime of bitterness that will poison your [their] subsequent relationships". The letter is full of insults, bleak prospects for their future. There are also many references on time's showing them consequences of their decision. "I'm a great believer in time's revenge", "give her time and she will look down on you just as she looks down on me", "I can't do anything to you now, but time can. Time will. It always does" (Barnes 95-97).

The letter shows the reader, and Tony as well, how those memories which did not fit into his self perception have altered or disappeared. Tony longs for a peaceable life, or as Veronica once put it, he is cowardly. As he says, he has a "certain instinct of self preservation" (Barnes 64). This instinct has caused Tony's repression of bad feelings connected with Veronica. He tried to forget the bitterness and humiliation he felt after he found out about Adrian's and Veronica's relationship and he succeeded. The process of repressing bad memories is partly unintentional, but in Tony it was largely deliberate. As the history professor during the discussion at secondary school remarked, "mental states can often be inferred from actions" (Barnes 18). And when Tony recollects about the letter from Adrian, he says he "burnt it in an empty grate [...] and decided the two of them were now out of my [Tony's] life forever" (Barnes 43). Tony's action of burning the letter shows his attempt to forget everything hurtful about his, Adrian's and Veronica's relationship.

From the letter, the reader can derive some information about Tony's feelings, concerns and fears, as he projects these into his characteristics of Veronica and Adrian and into their future prospects. He accuses Veronica of "inability to imagine anyone else's feelings or emotional life". It is Tony, however, who always found it

difficult to understand Veronica and perceived it as an issue. Tony also fears, that it will be him, who will be “left with a lifetime of bitterness” - that is the reason, why he decided to suppress memories of Veronica. In Tony’s present situation, concerning his present state of mind, it is ironic to see, what he wrote in the past. In the letter, he mentions great art - “you’re not great art, just a cartoonist’s doodle” (Barnes 95). When Tony was young, his and his friend’s fear was, that “life wouldn’t turn out to be like Literature”, that they will end up being “onlookers and bystanders, part of a social backdrop against which real, true, important things could happen” (Barnes 15). Yet in *The Sense of an Ending*, if someone complies with the requirements of a great literature hero, it is Adrian and perhaps Veronica, although we do not have sufficient record for that. And indeed, Tony’s character falls rather in the category of the “social backdrop”, or “cartoonist’s doodle”.

The other document from the past which might enlighten what happened, why Adrian committed suicide and how was Tony involved in it is a photocopy of one page from Adrian’s diary. On this very theoretical page Adrian tries to describe human relationships with mathematical equations and tries to find out, how to apportion responsibility between people involved in an event. After that, he is probably going to set a practical example and writes: “So for instance if Tony” (Barnes 86), and then the page ends. The ending of the book reveals rather a concrete and plausible interpretation of the fragment from Adrian’s diary. However, at the time Tony receives it, he does not know anything about the situational context in which it was written, he does not know what precedes and what follows. Yet he tries for its interpretation, especially of the last, unfinished sentence. At this point Tony starts to think, whether his settling for a content, peaceable life was a good option. “Yes indeed if Tony had seen more clearly, acted more decisively, held to truer moral values, settled less easily for a passive peaceableness which he first called happiness and later contentment. If Tony hadn’t been fearful, hadn’t counted on the approval of others for his own self-approval...” (Barnes 88 – 89).

As Tony searches for tangible evidence of his past, his old feelings start to reappear and with them, long buried, suppressed memories. “Just when you think, everything is a matter of decrease, of subtraction and division, your brain, your memory may surprise you. As if it’s saying: Don’t imagine you can rely on some

comforting process of gradual decline – life’s *much* more complicated than that” (Barnes 112). When his old feelings for Veronica renew, the old memories connected with her come up. All these memories are strongly connected with emotions, which he forgot thanks to his “instinct for self preservation”. And so suddenly he remembers Veronica’s dancing in his room and the feeling of intimacy between them, although earlier he mentioned Veronica never danced. He remembers the intimate moments of their infra – sex: “How attracted to one another we had been; how light she felt on my lap; how, even though we weren’t having ‘full sex’, all the elements of it – the lust, the tenderness, the candour, the trust – were there anyway. And how part of me hadn’t minded not ‘going the whole way’” (Barnes 117).

At the end of the novel Tony finds out why Veronica’s mother left him Adrian’s diary, he learns more about the circumstances of Adrian’s suicide and which role did he play in it. Yet “once all the questions are answered, the reader is left in the same state that Tony is in the book’s final pages—floored at life’s essential mysteries, and frustrated that they cannot be relived” (Geoff). Tony’s searching for answers about his past caused reappearance of his repressed emotions and memories: it induced Tony to revise his past actions and his way of thinking. It removed Tony’s protective shield of self-deception and brought a strong feelings of remorse and unrest.

Conclusion

The theme of memory in the novels discussed occurs on two levels – on the level of the narration and on the level of the plotline. In the narration the theme of memory is implemented by the unreliable narrators who tell their story depending largely or exclusively on their subjective recollections of the past. Memory in the plot is covered by the interconnection with other themes and by the importance of the theme for the story.

Never Let Me Go is set in an alternative, dystopian present, unknown to the reader. As Kathy narrates about her coming of age, the reader gets to know her world gradually, similarly as Kathy and her friends. Kathy's life is coming to an end and telling the story is her way to maintain inner peace, to conciliate with her past. As Kathy recollects, she tries to see the past events how she perceived them back then and also put them in the context of events which came later. Kathy as a narrator admits that her memories may not be accurate, that they are reflections of the events as she remembers them. There can also be found some evidence about Kathy's suggestibility in the text. At the end of the novel, Kathy is satisfied with her version of seeing the past, she feels no need to question her conclusions. She considers her memories the way they are to be her most precious possession.

In the novel, a large importance is attached to memory in finding ones identity. It is demonstrated not only on the character of Kathy, but also on the character of her friend Ruth. Through most of the novel, Ruth is a dreamer who tries to leave her past behind and focuses on the future. Yet in the end she also turns to her memories, expressing regrets with her past behaviour and actions.

In the *Sense of an Ending*, the retired narrator Tony resumes his content and rather uninteresting life. He came to a point, when he accepted his life as it was, non-special and average, but as he says, peaceable, with no reason to feel regrets about his past. As a narrator he tries to be honest, but he himself is aware of the unreliability of his memories and admits that he has no evidence to ground his story. For the reader, the clues for Tony's unreliability are his unwillingness to recall unpleasant memories or his searching for the reader's compassion while

recalling controversial matter. When a mysterious bequest from Veronica's mother, and with it a corroboration of his past actions, appears on the scene, Tony is induced to revise his notion of his past. His feelings and memories from the past which he deliberately forgot reappear. As his self-preserving shell breaks, Tony is left with feeling of loneliness, remorse and unrest at the end of the novel.

In a way, Tony's feelings about his past before the solicitor's letter are similar to those of Kathy at the end of *Never Let Me Go*. They both are aware, that their memories may not be accurate and accept it. They feel that their story is closed and they are reconciled with it. Kathy's story actually ends at this point, leaving questions about details of the novel's dystopian world or about its character's passively accepting their future. Yet, these questions are left for the reader, not for Kathy, who seems to have all answers she needed. Tony's story, however, does not end when he is at peace with his past, but rather begins there. In the second part of the novel when he is challenged by new information about the past to revise his memories, this revision raises disturbing questions about the way he deceived himself in order to avoid strong feelings.

In *Never Let Me Go*, the theme of memory is important, but it is not the chief concern of the novel. Memory here serves as means to find one's identity, to narrate a life story and to conciliate with one's past. In *The Sense of an Ending*, memory is the main concern. As the narrator revises his memories, he is induced to question their fallibility and deceitfulness.

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