

An Analysis of the Narrative Techniques of the Former Novels of Kazuo Ishiguro

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Abstract: Ishiguro's earliest novels, *A Pale View of Hills* and *An Artist of the Floating World*, were set in Japan after World War II. After the war, Masuji Ono had a hard time adjusting to the new ways of life. Although set in post-war England in the 1950s, *The Remains of the Day* has similarities with Ishiguro's earlier work, *An Artist of the Floating World*, in its exploration of conflicting loyalties and ideals during the Imperial era. These novels depict the subtle overlappings of ambiguity of memories, identity and regret. The characters' unreliability, which is explicitly understood via narrations, forms the strong base for the unreliable narratives in all the novels. Mostly, the pacing in first-person narration brings the chaotic experiences of the characters very close for examination. Estuko, Ono and Stevens are the protagonists of the novels *A Pale View of the Hills*, *An Artist of the Floating World* and *The Remains of the Day*, respectively, and are closely paced in various forms of narration, especially as unreliable narrators, to rekindle the regrets of past, missed opportunities and mixed psychosocial conditions.

Keywords: Unreliable Narration, Past, First Person Narration, Ambiguity

INTRODUCTION

The former novels of Ishiguro, *A Pale View of the Hills*, *An Artist of the Floating World* and *The Remains of the Day* hold unreliable narration as a recurring style and act as a lens to substantiate the storyline. The novels *An Artist of the Floating World* and *The Remains of the Day* are based on the Diary Narrative Technique. Ishiguro's literary works exhibit what he calls the texture of memory, which means that everyday life's disorder and turmoil are frequently underscored and not always solved. He cares about ordinary people's struggles in their daily lives and stresses characters and psychosocial state more than story or action. His work cannot be viewed without understanding the Japanese essence. The first two works by Ishiguro indicate a strong connection between English and Japanese society. Ishiguro's works depict how ideas about nationhood are made

up in real life and fiction. Japan is a made-up place that comes from memories, predictions, and imaginations. Japanese influence can be seen in Ishiguro's use of Irony and vague speech in his writing. Ishiguro's narrative technique effectively illustrates the protagonists' distressing experience of being caught between their trauma-affected lives in Japan and their trauma-affected existences in Britain. The narration is continually revisited and reinterpreted to understand the depth of the protagonist's agony in all the novels. A striking similarity observed between the protagonists of Ishiguro is the unreliable narration.

The first novel of Kazuo Ishiguro, *A Pale View of Hills*, has a connection to his ancestry. He was born in Nagasaki and migrated to Britain with his family when he was five. The first-person narrator of *A Pale View of Hills* is Etsuko, a middle-aged Japanese housewife evaluating her life in the aftermath of her oldest daughter, Keiko's, recent demise. The daughter kills herself in her Manchester room and seems to be haunting Etsuko and her younger daughter, Niki. Etsuko's thoughts on her family history are influenced by the encompassing story of her old friend, Sachiko, and her daughter Mariko, as well as her recent experiences in England and the postwar misery of living in Nagasaki. Etsuko's investigative style is reminiscent throughout the novel. The narrator tries to cope with the severe loss of Keiko, and she also strives to cope with melancholy and solitude. The plot's narrative voids and dual-layered structure raise provocative questions, including the reason for Keiko's death, the nature of Etsuko's post-Japan existence, and the possible events she witnessed during the war.

Etsuko's narration goes through a framed pattern that depicts her as a mother who is sad at present, a mother-to-be in the past, and simultaneously a cruel mother to Keiko in the Nagasaki story. Etsuko's storyline is not very well organised, but it is framed.

This is evident as the story jumps around a lot, going from the present to the late 1940s and back to the present again, and three-quarters of the story takes place in the past. Estuko, being an unreliable narrator, does not stay objectively far away from what is being said; she jumps in to give her opinion.. Keiko, the daughter of Esuko, committed suicide, which serves as the end of her adolescence. To reconstruct her past, her mother employs an alternative form of repression: a narrative language that emphasises the absence of words rather than the content of the words. Eventually, the narration returns to Nagasaki to direct it into the defence strategy of projection, as war plays an inevitable trauma in Estuko's life. On the other hand, this strongly paves the way for a meta-narrative for Sachiko and Mariko, where Estuko finds solace in losing her elder daughter, Keiko. This whole process is also unreliable and ambiguous.

Etsuko's narration on Sachiko and her daughter Mariko sometimes reflects her experiences with her daughter. At various moments, Etsuko's manner of speaking to Mariko resembles that of a mother. While Etsuko and Sachiko are ostensibly the same individual, they are not identical in a literal sense. A lady called Sachiko may have lived in the past, yet Etsuko's narration of her narrative does not suggest that she is captivated by Sachiko. Sachiko embodies the narrative's goal, Etsuko recounts, and the events that transpired with Sachiko directly reflect Etsuko's experiences. Thus, Etsuko's daughter, Keiko, and Mariko, Sachiko's troubled child in Nagasaki, are very similar. It is precise, but not in a literal sense, creating an intense ambiguity in the storyline. Etsuko narrates this narrative because it resembles her own life, depicting a scenario between a mother and her daughter that closely parallels her experiences, thus instigating the ambiguity and unreliability.

Although migration is a socioeconomic and monetary phenomenon, the narrative adopts an alternative viewpoint, focusing on its psychological and emotional dimensions. Even though Etsuko may have experienced pain from her symbolic shift from femininity to parenthood and her actual transfer from post-war Nagasaki to a more settled existence in Britain, the story does not focus on these aspects. Etsuko's persistent feelings of regret and inadequacy are communicated via her efforts to articulate the spectres of her past. Ishiguro's intricate first-person narrative demonstrates that articulating suffering in any other manner is practically impossible. The

migration process is perpetually incomplete for Etsuko, resulting in a dichotomy between her former self and her current identity. This exemplifies Ishiguro's use of unreliable narration. The reader is bewildered and impacted by her narrative due to the author's storytelling method.

The story of *An Artist of the Floating World* continues from Ishiguro's debut book, *A Pale View of Hills*. Masuji Ono, a painter, actively supported the military and patriotism in Japan in the 1930s, even reporting an uncooperative former student to the police. The whole narration has been recounted by Ono, the protagonist, who is traditionally unreliable; hence, it must be observed and noticed that other details are used to evaluate the extent of unreliability. Kazuo Ishiguro's presentation of the master-pupil paradigm is a key narrative device in his work. Ono's father is his first instructor, since it was his father's disapproval of his budding creative tendencies that fuelled his desire to become an artist in the future. Ono's connection with his father is the same as his relationship with Mori-San. Ono gently declined to reveal the artwork he had been withholding from Mori-San. The scene mirrors Ono's early disobedience against his father.

Masuji Ono's narrative demonstrates his unreliability as a storyteller in various ways. Because he employs an uncertain second-person 'you', it seems that he is unwilling to confess his sentiments of uneasiness about his past. He avoids discussing several pivotal events in his life because he cannot bring himself to speak about them. Ono regularly challenges the truth of his story, arguing that others do not see events in the same way he does. Ono's tone when addressing his audience indicates his desire to be perceived, or to perceive himself, as a wise instructor. Conversely, the absence of clarity regarding the identity of 'you' suggests that the listener may be perceived as a fictional entity created by Ono as a mechanism for coping. Rather than explicitly stating his conflicting emotions about the event he describes, Ono discusses his expectations regarding the listener's response to the circumstance he has recounted. Ono's narration suggests that a situation may be perceived differently by the listener, indicating the existence of alternative perspectives by extending the ambiguity in it.

The unreliability of Ono's narrative allows for a wide range of interpretations of his legacy. Ono may have been only a marginal painter whose influence on the

lives of others in his vicinity was minimal. Consequently, Ono may be consumed with contemplating his culpability or innocence to avoid addressing a truth that might be harder to face than guilt itself. Notwithstanding Ono's substantial contribution to the war effort, Setsuko's claim of its little impact may have been an attempt to assuage his conscience, since she feared that his remorse might lead him to suicide. The book explores both options, indicating that memories are often shaped and modified by later occurrences, and that the line between authentic self-perception and misleading self-delusion stays ambiguous until the narrative's conclusion.

The Remains of the Day is a first-person look back at events in Japanese history. It's also a story of lost love and the striving to attain it again.. Another thing that makes Ishiguro stand out is that he writes about how Britain's cultural marginalisation is deteriorating. In his 1989 novel *The Remains of the Day*, Kazuo Ishiguro skilfully utilises space to create a unique effect by quietly communicating the idea. By modifying the two fundamental elements of the story, *The Remains of the Day* highlights characteristics common to many post-World War II books, like fragmented identity, uncertainty, and an unreliable narrator. As the readers discover Stevens talking to his previous master, Lord Darlington, his father, and Miss Kenton, the narrative style of *The Remains of the Day* is contemplative and frequently references the past, placing it on the spectrum of unreliable narration.

Stevens's narration is unreliable as he often reads events to reflect his great responsibility and minimises or avoids confronting the moral and emotional challenges in history. Given his selective memory and incapacity to accept the truth about his relationships, especially with Miss Kenton, the unreliability and ambiguity are reinstated in his narration. Stevens strives to evade the emotional truth behind the logical explanations and justifications. The narration further describes his years serving Lord Darlington as it progresses; it is evident to witnesses that Stevens made moral compromises by supporting a pro-German politician before World War II. Stevens says he had a meaningful life because of his dedication to duty; nevertheless, his emotional distance has led to regrets and lost opportunities. Stevens's hesitation mirrors his shifting awareness of his emotions, especially with Miss Kenton. As he

describes their relationship, he reduces romantic feelings, even if the reader may detect his underlying love for her. Stevens's intentional emotional detachment makes his story unreliable, as he does not fully comprehend or convey his feelings until later.

The narrative style of *The Remains of the Day* is introspective, often referencing the past, as readers see Stevens reflecting on his former employer, Lord Darlington, his father, and Miss Kenton. The novel's narrative technique enables the recounting of experiences, creating a reflective space for Stevens to contemplate and integrate information from diverse sources regarding Lord Darlington's role in the German affair before World War II, thus clarifying past events and their future implications. Ultimately, Stevens' ethical stance challenges readers because of the considerable divergence between his moral convictions and those of the audience. This discrepancy persists until the end, adding a prime factor to induce ambiguity in the narration.

To summarise, former novels of Ishiguro, *A Pale View of the Hills*, *An Artist of the Floating World* and *The Remains of the Day*, which explore morality and the human intellect, have won him a prominent place in modern culture. In Ishiguro's works, the characters' unreliability as a method of finding consolation after a tragic past is a recurring topic that he clearly emphasises and consequently remains ambiguous in various instances. Ishiguro's narrative techniques effectively illustrate the protagonist's distressing experiences of being torn between their trauma-laden life in Japan and Britain. The narrative of the novel is continually revisited and reinterpreted to understand the depth of the protagonist's pain. There is a persistent struggle between the characters as the narration keeps going back and forth, trying to get over their repressed guilt and the trauma of the war. This narrative tension paves the way for ambiguity as all the protagonists constantly try to defend themselves.

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