

Narration and Memory in Kazuo Ishiguro's *An Artist of the Floating World* and *The Remains of the Day*

Špoljarić, Franka

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Sveučilišni prijediplomski studij Anglistike

Franka Špoljarić

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Narration and Memory in Kazuo Ishiguro's *An Artist of the Floating World* and *The Remains of the Day*

Završni rad

Student/ica:

Franka Špoljarić

Mentor/ica:

doc. dr. sc. Vesna Ukić Košta

Zadar, 2023.



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Zadar, 4. listopada 2023.

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1. Introduction

Kazuo Ishiguro is a highly acclaimed novelist and is widely considered one of the most distinguished contemporary writers. Born in 1954 in Japan, Ishiguro moved to England at a very young age due to his father's oceanographic work. Being Japanese in a predominately white community earned him stares from other children, leaving the author with the experience of a culture shock. Nonetheless, Ishiguro became an English resident, receiving a 'typical education' and, according to Tellini, what he considers a typical middle-class English upbringing regardless of his Japanese heritage and the use of Japanese in his household (1). Partly due to these reasons, Ishiguro considers himself a homeless and an international writer. According to Shaffer, these labels arose from the lack of a consistent audience while simultaneously thinking of himself as not quite English but not quite Japanese as well, since he did not resonate with either national history (2). As Tellini suggests, his bilingual upbringing enables him to create from different cultural perspectives, which later leads to movement within different linguistic universes (1).

Nonetheless, Ishiguro's writing is predominantly influenced by western writers rather than Japanese ones (Tellini 1). This is evident in aspects such as descriptions and psychological elements present in his characterization. Elaborate descriptions are used by Ishiguro to convey images of environments, such as inner and outer spaces while memory, alongside self-defence mechanisms, is the most prominent psychological element exhibited in his novels. The issue of memory plays an important role in the two novels that I am going to analyse in this paper: *An Artist of the Floating World* (1986) and *The Remains of the Day* (1989). *An Artist of the Floating World* centres around a painter by the name of Masuji Ono. The novel takes place in Japan, right after World War II. He is newly retired at the beginning of the narrative and is living a calm life with his two daughters, Noriko and Setsuko, and his grandson Ichiro. Ono's reflections

on life and artistic career are prompted by interactions with his daughters and the likes of his former students, friends, and mentors. Ono's artistic career took off during the years leading up to World War II when he belonged to a collective of painters that created wartime propaganda. His reputation was tainted when Japan was defeated and now he has to face his past in order to help his youngest daughter, Noriko, get married without his nationalistic actions causing further problems. As he looks back on his life and the 'floating world' of Japan he was once a part of, he enjoys the memory of his influence and high position in society, which he desperately wants to portray in the best possible light. On the other hand, *The Remains of the Day* mostly takes place in and around Darlington Hall, a mansion in the English countryside, in July of 1956 with flashbacks to the 1920s and the 1930s. Stevens travels across England to see a former co-worker, Miss Kenton, which gives him the chance to reflect on his history and face the decisions and sacrifices he made while working for Lord Darlington. Stevens reminisces about his time working as a butler when Lord Darlington was politically engaged with Nazi Germany. Oblivious to his employer's activities, Stevens dutifully carries out his responsibilities to uphold dignity, the main characteristic of a great butler. He frequently struggles to control his own feelings due to his commitment to his job, and Miss Kenton, a housekeeper at Darlington Hall, represents one of the most significant relationships in Stevens's life. Their professional relationship slowly becomes an unspoken romantic tension. However, due to his emotional restraint and inability to express his feelings, Stevens fails to respond to Miss Kenton's advancements, ultimately losing her to another man. As Stevens travels, he reflects on the nature of dignity, professionalism, and the sacrifices he has made to become a great butler. He also begins to realize the full extent of his own emotional repression and the cost of his blind loyalty to Lord Darlington.

Both of these novels were written in the first person and are narrated by the main protagonists, who recall their past lives and careers while hiding secrets from the readers.

According to Bareiß, these narrators often digress to unconnected or non-chronological flashbacks, switching from one narrative to another, ultimately resulting in an oral storytelling type of atmosphere (394). As Wall explains, Kazuo Ishiguro purposefully chose first-person narrators because he is intrigued by memory and how it is used to achieve the narrator's purpose of hiding from what they dislike concerning their past (18). Nonetheless, this type of memory is subjective and fragile, therefore making the truth of Ono's and Stevens's stories relative and the narrators untrustworthy.

The goal of this paper is to analyse how Ishiguro portrays the narrators and memories in the two selected novels, *An Artist of the Floating World* and *The Remains of the Day*. The paper will explore Ishiguro's characters as unreliable, authoritarian, and self-deceptive. Unreliability will be examined further through conversation, speech patterns and narrative comments while self-deception will be explored through historical and psychological contexts. Later, memory and its fragile core will be taken into consideration and analysed through the issues such as stream of consciousness, suggestibility, bias, and repression.

2. Narration in *An Artist of the Floating World* and *The Remains of the Day*

Fonioková observes that the lives these characters remember are painful ("Butler's suspicious dignity" 87). This makes the narrators question what they wish to disclose which affects the truth of their stories. According to critics Marcus, Wall, Bareiß, Furst, and Fonioková, Ishiguro's narrators can be perceived as unreliable, authoritarian, and self-deceiving. This will be analysed further by taking their relationships, childhoods, and defence mechanisms into consideration. I will start my analysis with unreliable narrators.

2.1. Unreliable narrators

Unreliable narrators are, in most cases, autodiegetic (Marcus 131). This refers to the narrating protagonists, who base the whole story on their own experiences and observations, making that story subjective and one-sided. As stated by Marcus, the narrator in *The Remains of the Day* is an autodiegetic filled with self-deceit (131). Fonioková also claims, that Stevens is the type of narrator who frequently engages in extended monologues centred around his own experiences and becomes fixated on himself and his story (“Butler’s suspicious dignity” 87). This means that the narration predominantly revolves around his own perspective and can be characterized as highly self-centred. The exhibited self-centeredness further establishes unreliability, and it is present in Ono’s narration in *The Artist of the Floating World* as well. Ono explains how it may be difficult to remain objective when referring to self-portraits: “I cannot recall any colleague who could paint a self-portrait with absolute honesty; however accurately one may fill in the surface details of one’s mirror reflection, the personality represented rarely comes near the truth as others would see it” (Ishiguro, *Artist* 67). This scene shows how Ono believes that he cannot objectively paint himself since he wants to exaggerate the good and hide the unappealing parts of his life. This can be applied further to characterize Ono’s narration as unreliable due to the fact that he is ‘painting’ the story of his life. Since he states that one cannot be objective while painting themselves, he calls the integrity of his own storytelling into question.

Even though these characters cannot be trusted, they do not intend to deceive the reader. They use different strategies to convince themselves of how a situation happened in order to continue believing they are moral people worthy of respect. By doing this, they push their self-deceptive narrative onto the readers, which ultimately leads to unreliability. Through this process, the narrators present the events in a way that best fits their perfect narrative, where

they are presented as the right-doers. The same unreliable narration results in an unreliable memory, which completely alters the narrator's view of what happened in his past. In the case of Stevens, he narrates his past leaving out the mistakes he made or the ones made by people he trusted or idolized. According to Fonioková, Ishiguro himself said that Stevens comments on things based on what he wants to avoid, making his life's truth present between the lines of his narration, and the same can be observed in Ono's case ("Butler's suspicious dignity" 89). This implies that both Ono and Stevens unconsciously misrepresent their life stories as a way to achieve self-justification. Stevens's unreliability heavily stems from his notion of dignity, which allows him to excuse his mistakes regarding his personal feelings and overall passivity. On the other hand, serving as a self-justification method, Ono displays an absence of grief toward his wife and son. By not paying attention to his sorrow, Ono distances himself from any feelings of regret or involvement in their deaths, justifying himself and reinforcing his belief that he is a man who tried his best to improve the status of his country and is now being wrongfully accused by the younger generation.

Wall argues that, as for most things in literature, there has to be motivation for the use of unreliability which encompasses both content and form (23). Ono's and Stevens's motivation for unreliability can be examined through conversations, speech patterns and commentary.

2.1.1. Conversation and speech patterns

Stevens's unreliability is mostly shown through his speech patterns in conversations, most of which he seems oblivious to. Stevens uses a formal style of speech, which can be observed in his use of 'one' when referring to himself. This particular switch takes place in situations where Stevens wants to distance himself from his past actions or, as suggested by Wall, erase some part of his identity (23). We can see his use of formal register when he talks to his father,

for example: “I realize that if one looks at the matter objectively, one has to concede that my father lacked various attributes one may normally expect in a great butler” (Ishiguro, *Remains* 34). Here, Stevens is seen admitting that his father was not the perfect butler he found him to be, and as a result, he distances himself from this revelation by using ‘one’ instead of ‘I’, showing the reader this truth is harder on him than he lets on.

Similarly, Stevens’s defensive tone further encourages unreliability. Through phrases such as “let me make it immediately clear” (5), “I must say” (119), and “I should point out” (Ishiguro, *Remains* 15) Stevens unconsciously tries to defend and explain his actions to the reader. According to Bareiß, this happens because both Ono and Stevens expect the reader to be like them since they cannot comprehend people thinking in discordance with them (404). Ono states that he finds it “hard to think of the world extending much beyond this city” (Ishiguro, *Artist* 199), showing that he believes the reader lives in the same unidentified Japanese city. On the other hand, Stevens envisions his reader as a butler, since his whole world is limited to just his professional life: “For the likes of you and me, there is little choice other than to leave our fate, ultimately, in the hands of those great gentlemen at the hub of this world who employ our services” (Ishiguro, *Remains* 257). Here, Stevens is seen referring to his reader as another much younger butler. As Wall suggests, he continues to act defensively in his speech and it seems that he is explaining his actions to himself in his early career days to preserve his dignity and uphold his position as a good butler (24). These defensive mechanisms, paired with his use of particular verbal markers, show Stevens’s preoccupation with certain events that he wants to clear up and justify, not only to the reader but to himself as well.

Speech patterns in *An Artist of the Floating World* are mostly based on avoiding the main points by implementing insinuations. When the oldest daughter, Setsuko, tries to imply that Ono’s wartime mistakes might interfere with the younger daughter Noriko’s wedding negotiations, she urges him to take responsibility and apologise for his past mistakes indirectly:

“I merely wished to say that it is perhaps wise if Father would take certain precautionary steps. To ensure misunderstandings do not arise” (Ishiguro, *Artist* 49). He is not aware that Setsuko sees his past as problematic and as a liability in the marriage negotiations, and by ignoring it, he leaves space for the reader to form an opinion. According to Fonioková, by doing this, many messages remain unspoken, and the reader has the freedom to interpret the gaps on their own since Ono is not fully sure of what other characters imply with their speech (“The selective narrator” 135). Furthermore, Ono’s narration mimics indirectness by touching upon many scenarios but never fully explaining some aspects he might deem negative. He mentions mistakes he made but never elaborates on them, as when he thought back to how his old colleague had been treated: “Certainly, what we did to Sasaki following his dispute with our teacher was quite unwarranted, and there seems little to be gained in my recalling such things here” (Ishiguro, *Artist* 142). It is clear that what happened with Sasaki was negative and something that Ono is not proud of. He is not comfortable sharing information regarding this particular event because it would make his efforts of presenting himself as noble more difficult. Nonetheless, the reader can sense why Ono is deliberately withholding information and can imagine a story that differs from what he considers relevant.

2.1.2. *Narrative comments*

The way Stevens narrates certain events in comparison to how he interprets them and comments on them is also a display of his unreliable character. For instance, the narrator does not mention emotions the other characters notice. This can be observed in the part of the novel where his father is dying and Mr Cardinal comments, “Stevens, are you alright? I say, Stevens, are you sure you’re all right there? Not feeling unwell, are you?” (Ishiguro, *Remains* 109). Stevens lets the reader believe that he is not at all shaken by his father’s ill state, while, through

the comments of other characters, it is evident that he very much is. As Wall suggests, Stevens's commentary does not correspond with the evidence presented in the scene he comments upon (25). The characteristic of his unreliability can once again be connected to dignity. Here, he uses it to deny unprofessional emotions, meaning that he shows almost no emotion, which can at times come across as disturbing. Stevens therefore completely sacrificed his personal needs and feelings in order to achieve what he believes to be the perfect butler.

In addition to not showing emotion, Stevens is clueless when it comes to dealing with them as well, specifically in the cases of love and grief. He is uncomfortable when faced with these emotions and is constantly seeking distractions in order to evade situations in which he has to confront them. When Stevens hears of Miss Kenton's aunt's passing, he acknowledges how she might feel intense bereavement, but instead of offering her his condolences, he criticizes her work, making the reader aware of his poor emotional intelligence. As with the day of his father's passing, which he looks upon as "a large sense of triumph" (Ishiguro, *Remains* 115), Stevens takes another sad moment of his life and presents it as a triumph of his dignity. This happens when Miss Kenton announces her engagement. Stevens congratulates her and moves on, only to receive comments that he looks "unwell" (Ishiguro, *Remains* 231). Stevens explains that he is just tired, denying his feelings towards Miss Kenton and refusing to accept that he is deeply hurt by her decision: "I had, after all, just come through an extremely trying evening, throughout which I had managed to preserve a 'dignity in keeping with my position' — and had done so, moreover, in a manner even my father might have been proud of" (Ishiguro, *Remains* 238). As Wall says, through these scenarios, it is evident how Stevens leaves out his feelings but points them out through the reports of the other characters around him (25). This may indicate that he is, to some degree, complacent in sharing his emotions. Nonetheless, he uses other characters in order to preserve his dignity since he does not directly acknowledge his personal feelings and imply that he did feel those emotions.

In Ono's case, unreliability is further fuelled by his metanarrative comments. For instance, Ono mentions the selective nature of memory, admitting that he might not properly recall every detail. Therefore, readers are prompted to explore the subjectivity of his narrative and the fallibility of memory by this self-awareness. It adds a level of complexity to the story and challenges viewers to doubt the narrator's objectivity. This can be seen when Ono explains that he does not fully remember details: "These, of course, may not have been the precise words I used that afternoon" (72), and "I am obliged to think back yet again to that encounter, to turn it over from yet another perspective" (Ishiguro, *Artist* 54). Through these narrative gaps, Ono shows he is unreliable and gives the reader a reason to independently determine what the truth is. Fonioková explains that as Ono remembers and narrates, his story does not correspond to what happened in his past due to his present mindset influencing the memories he is trying to evoke ("The selective narrator" 135). This would indicate that the metanarrative comments guide the reader into Ono's current, and biased, viewpoint and not to the one at the time of the action. Metanarrative comments interspersed throughout the novel also provide insight into the storytelling process. Ono often thinks about the point of sharing his life's experiences. He wonders if he is recounting his narrative to atone for his mistakes, to ask for forgiveness, or just to make sense of his history. These reflections do not only give his character more dimension, but they also prompt readers to think about the wider implications of storytelling as a tool for comprehending one's own life and the society they live in.

2.2. Authoritarian Narrators

According to Bareiß, both Ono and Stevens live in authoritarian systems, which shaped them into authoritarian narrators (394). Through Ono being an imperial propaganda artist in Japan and Stevens being a butler in the employ of a Nazi supporter, the relationship between

the system and the individual was examined within the books. When talking about authoritarian characteristics, Norris calls for questions of submission and obedience as pivotal for an authoritarian personality from which the likes of weakness, fear, self-determination, and the drive for power stem (qtd. in Bareiß 395). All of these attributes can be connected with childhood and growing up in an authoritarian family with distinct rules and roles regarding dominance, submission, and obedience. According to Bareiß, to confirm the narrators of Ishiguro's second and third novels as authoritarian narrators, their memories of childhood and relationships with their parents should be examined (396).

While Stevens does not mention his childhood in *The Remains of the Day*, he does provide information about his father, which goes along with the description of an authoritarian parent. Their relationship is strictly professional, and communication is limited to work-related topics. Nonetheless, Stevens idolizes his father and thinks of him as the perfect butler and the definition of dignity, even after his colleagues point out his frequent mistakes. Adorno et al. explain that this might stem from authoritarian and hostile parenting, causing children to glorify and idealize their parents, especially in the case of a patriarchal father (qtd. in Bareiß 396). Stevens dedicated his whole life to being a butler and consequently identified himself with submission, primarily because of his relationship with his father and later with Lord Darlington. According to Stevens, some people should lead and the others should follow since they cannot form adequate opinions. The representative of the first category would be Lord Darlington, a wealthy and influential English aristocrat who owns Darlington Hall where he hosts diplomatic gatherings and discussions to promote his views on international relations. Because of his political involvement, he is a leader to the latter, Stevens, who believes he can only achieve greatness by serving someone like his employer. Stevens thus associates his existence with Darlington and his actions, which is why he keeps defending him. By protecting Darlington from malicious rumours, which he sees as a threat to his dignity, he protects himself as well.

In *An Artist of the Floating World*, Ono digresses to his early memories of his patriarchal family and his status-driven authoritarian father. Looking upon Ono's artistic interests as socially undesirable, his father is strongly opposed to his passion and burns Ono's paintings in an attempt to discourage his son. Seeing Ono as a retired artist, it is clear that his father's threats did not work the way he intended them to. On the other hand, Bareiß argues that the strict childhood implemented by his father left Ono with issues regarding self-worth, mostly determined by other people's perceptions of him and his status (396). Throughout the narrative, Ono keeps reminding the reader of his highly successful career, showing his need to belong to the top of the hierarchy. As Ono leaves his home, he does not escape the authoritarian system but rather falls into another at Maori-san's villa where he is forced to adapt to other authoritarian father figures. Maori-san is a rich artist who invites young talents like Ono to live with him and study his painting techniques. In the villa, Ono cannot express himself artistically and has to follow the principles and styles of his superior. After meeting Matsuda, his next sensei, Ono conforms to fascist ideology, vowing to become better than the influences he believes are weakening his nation. After he becomes successful and gains the title of *sensei* himself, Ono becomes an authoritarian force. He starts enforcing aggression on his disloyal subordinates, as in the case of Kuroda, whom he reported for a lack of patriotism, meaning he was acting in disagreement with the Imperial idea. Bareiß observes that Ono went through many teachers and influences throughout his life, not because he wanted to escape submission but rather to find a more powerful authority (398). This brings up the question of loyalty. In this case, as opposed to Stevens' definition of blindly following his master, Ono's classification of loyalty does not correspond to obeying someone but being prepared to submit to the hierarchy.

2.3. *Self-deceptive narrators*

Due to the first-person narration, the readers have a greater insight into the character's self-deception, pre-empting their blame for the main character's mistakes. Nonetheless, the narrators in the novels under discussion here do not seemingly intend to manipulate or deceive the reader, but rather themselves. Stevens shows self-deception through relationships and conversations with Miss Kenton, Lord Darlington, and his father. He denies his love for Miss Kenton, stating that their relationship is professional in every regard, although, as the story progresses, more details pointing towards the contrary are revealed to the reader. Secondly, Stevens is blindly loyal to his former employer, Lord Darlington, which leads him to deny the rumours of his Nazi sympathies. Lastly, when it comes to his father, whom Stevens views as a perfect butler, it is evident that Stevens denies the physical and mental decline of his lifelong idol, defending him even after multiple sources point out the mistakes he was responsible for. It is evident that Stevens denies all elements of his life that would not portray him as an amazing and devoted butler. He denies his feelings towards Miss Kenton, hoping to distance himself from the possibility of marrying her and leaving his career as a butler because of his romantic feelings. Stevens also denies that Darlington was involved with the Nazis because it would look as he contributed to their harmful plans with his loyalty and service. And finally, Stevens refuses to accept his father's old age and overall deterioration due to his acknowledgment that it is happening to him.

On the other hand, Ono uses self-deception to justify his nationalist actions and pre-war mistakes to himself. When commenting on problems regarding his younger daughter Noriko's arranged marriage negotiation, Ono asks Matsuda, the man who persuaded him to serve the imperialist government, to "answer any queries [...] with delicacy. [...] Particularly, that is, with regards to the past" (94). Matsuda responded that he will have "only the best of things to

report of you from the past” (94), and shortly after: “I realize there are now those who would condemn the likes of you and me for the very things we were once proud to have achieved” (Ishiguro, *Artist* 94). It is evident that Ono seeks people who will confirm how noble he was, despite what the new majority would think. By doing this, Ono reassures himself of his good deeds and contribution to the nation while trying to persuade the readers of the same. Another way Ono deceives himself is by justifying the acts of others because he identifies with them on a certain level. This was the case with a songwriter called Naguchi who committed suicide due to guilt over promoting the war. Ono defends Naguchi, stating, “He wasn’t a bad man. He was just someone who worked very hard doing what he thought was for the best. He was very brave and honourable” (Ishiguro, *Artist* 155). Even after defending the man and associating him with honour, Ono admits he would not do the same, once again showing a lack of regret for his actions. Ono thus tries to persuade himself that people who contributed to the war can still be viewed as more than just villains.

In order to maintain their sense of self-worth and beliefs in the face of changing circumstances and potential regrets, both narrators engage in self-deception. The stories of Ono and Stevens provide an enticing examination of the complex ways in which people struggle with their previous actions and choices. Historical and psychological settings may be thus used to further examine the self-deception revealed in Ono and Stevens.

2.3.1. *Historical and psychological contexts*

Kazuo Ishiguro placed both *An Artist of the Floating World* and *The Remains of the Day* in historic contexts. As Wright suggests, Ishiguro’s novels are not directly concerned with history but rather structured by it (61). To evaluate Lord Darlington’s views on World War II in *The Remains of the Day*, the reader must use their knowledge of history. By questioning

Darlington's loyalties, Stevens's career is scrutinized as well because the two are connected by dignity. Stevens has based his whole career on Lord Darlington's life and morality as he believed he worked in a "distinguished household" (Ishiguro, *Remains* 133). Even after becoming well aware of the historical outcome and that Darlington was on the side of the Axis, Stevens defends him by calling him misguided in order to defend his own career and dignity: "many of Darlington's ideas will seem today rather odd—even, at times, unattractive. But surely it cannot be denied that there is an important element of truth [in his actions and beliefs]" (Ishiguro, *Remains* 209). Here, the reader cannot take Stevens as reliable since he is finding ways to twist history to reassure himself his work was moral.

Wall points out that one has to use psychological knowledge in order to understand Stevens's motives and actions as well (27). When Stevens hears of his father's frequent mistakes in the line of work, he states that Miss Kenton informed him of this matter. However, he does not regard her as reliable since she never treated his father with the respect Stevens found adequate. Later, he remembers that the news came from Lord Darlington, whom Stevens deems reliable and a real authority. Wall argues that by associating such harsh words about his father with comments made by Miss Kenton, Stevens found it easier to dismiss it as a real possibility, therefore deceiving himself once more (29). By acknowledging that the comment came from Lord Darlington, it seems as if he is accepting reality for what it is. In short, by using knowledge of history and psychology, it can be concluded that Stevens's motive to preserve face leads to self-deception in narration.

If we turn to Ono, the historical setting refers to before and during World War II. His past involvements are a constant threat to his younger daughter's marriage. As the story progresses it becomes clear that he was an Imperialist working towards Japan entering a war through his propaganda-spreading artwork. Here, Ishiguro shows how history has been manipulated in order to fuel Ono's self-deceit. Ono finds ways to conceal the full truth in order not to take

responsibility for his political acts condemned by the new post-war Japanese mindset. Nevertheless, Ono does not feel guilty but rather ashamed of his past, presenting himself as a noble man who found himself on the wrong side of history.

On the psychological level, Ono can be looked at from the perspective of projection, a psychological defence mechanism where people attribute their own feelings, thoughts, desires, and qualities onto others. The act of projecting entails taking elements from one's inner reality, frequently those that are uncomfortable or disagreeable, and assigning them to another person. Ono actively projects his thoughts to others in the search for validation, hoping they would confirm he was an honourable man. Due to this, Ono finds comfort in Mrs Kawakami's bar where he spent most of his time with his students and colleagues. While at the bar, Ono thinks back on his artistic success and the pre-war era, when he was at his professional peak. Presented through a nostalgic atmosphere, the bar is a place of escape where Ono can come to return to his high position in society and forget about his current problems. It is the embodiment of the 'floating world', a place where one can come to enjoy the pleasures of life and forget about reality, which is what Ono did throughout the years. Furthermore, as he speaks of other characters, he only implies different characteristics of himself, projecting his thoughts onto those characters. Ono regularly passes judgment and offers criticism to other characters based on his personal morals and standards. This frequently causes misconceptions and incorrect assessments of their intentions. Ono projects his traditional mindset onto his daughters, more specifically Noriko. He expects her to accept tradition and agree to an arranged marriage in order to uphold the family's reputation and dignity. Noriko, a symbol of the younger generation influenced by Western beliefs and ideals, does not, however, share her father's traditional customs and wants to marry for love. She has a more contemporary take on life and wants a love marriage. In addition, he makes assumptions about the motivations of other characters. He assumes that they have similar opinions and motivations as him. For instance, he assumes that

his former co-workers at Mrs Kawakami's bar also feel yearning for the past. Realizing that most people do not agree with him leads to misunderstandings and conflict since he does not receive the acceptance he seeks from them.

It can be argued that both narrators are nostalgic and yearn to feel as they did before. Stevens tries to recreate his past when he was working for Lord Darlington by persuading Miss Kenton to return. Ono, on the other hand, wishes to go back to his high position in society and by returning to Mrs Kawakami's bar he is able to bring back those 'old times'.

3. Memory in *An Artist of the Floating World* and *The Remains of the Day*

According to Furst, the concept of memory has been present in literature for quite some time, mostly related to a narrator recalling past events (533). Furst says inconsistencies presented in the narrative lead readers to hesitate over the trustworthiness of the narrators, ultimately resulting in unease on their part (533). Ishiguro successfully achieves unease by exploring memory and its fragility in both *The Remains of the Day* and *An Artist of the Floating World*.

Stevens frequently uses words such as 'recall' or 'remember', and he is for the most part confident in the time and veracity of what he is saying: "once, shortly after lunch, I recall" (100), "I certainly do recall her saying" (165). Later, he shows signs of uncertainty and admits to his memory lacking in certain situations: "I cannot remember with certainty" (173) and "I may be getting confused" (Ishiguro, *Remains* 173). Stevens shows that he is prone to making mistakes by mentioning the ones at his workplace and his journey to Miss Kenton when he runs out of gas. By seeing him capable of such actions, one can only apply that same unreliability to his memory and not fully trust the whole story. The same can be said for Ono. He too uses 'recall' and 'remember' seemingly confidently, while other times he clearly shows his lack of

authenticity when recalling a memory. He expresses his certainty through phrases such as “Once, for example, I remember” (138) and “Indeed I am reminded” (143), as well as his inability to remember correctly through expressions such as “I am not clear on the details” (134), “I suppose” (79), and “my memories of the evening are not as clear as they might be” (Ishiguro, *Artist* 116). Ono’s word choices do not always come across as reliable, consequently bringing into question the reliability of his memories as well. The unreliable memory of Ono and Stevens can be further examined in the context of the stream of consciousness, suggestibility, bias, and repression.

3.1. Stream of consciousness

The stream of consciousness is a literary technique that provides readers with the main character’s internal feelings and thoughts through a continuous flow, allowing the reader to see the world through their perspective. In the two novels, stream of consciousness is used to show the complexity of Ono and Stevens and the relationship between their identities and memories. While talking about a certain event, Stevens and Ono tend to quickly transition to a further memory awoken by a detail of their story. It seems that they show a lack of concentration while remembering and narrating. Some of the transitions are quite fast and unpredictable, leaving the reader confused before it all starts to fit into the bigger picture. Throughout the book, Stevens delves into the memories of the conference held at Darlington Hall in 1923. He recalls that night as a triumph due to his pride in perfectly polished silverware with which he helped impress influential people, names which indicate a foreign-policy meeting, on behalf of Lord Darlington. As he digresses more into the night, he reveals the problems he overcame to make the night a success. Firstly, having to help a French delegate, Mr. Dupont, with blisters, and secondly, his father’s death. Stevens showed more interest and dedication in his professional

duties, helping a guest and polishing silverware, than to his dying father, all for the sake of keeping professional and acting according to his notion of dignity: “[The condition of Stevens Sr] is most distressing. Nevertheless, I must now return downstairs” (Ishiguro, *Remains* 108).

Digressions are a constant in Ono’s memory as well. Going from one event to another without obvious reason or in no particular order, Ono reveals his memories and doubts regarding his past. Nonetheless, he has difficulty giving out and withholding information from the reader. By doing this, Ono raises suspicion, and by constantly digressing, he brings attention to himself and his own experiences. Regret and memory are two themes that keep coming up in Ono’s stream of consciousness. Reflecting on the past gives him new perspectives on both his own past and the larger cultural background of post-war Japan. Additionally, as Ono addresses his position as a wartime propagandist for the militaristic government, we sense a tangible sense of shame. Here. The readers are immersed in the historical and cultural context of societal developments, such as the tension between tradition and modernity and changing ideals in Japanese culture. In this regard, the novel’s use of the stream-of-consciousness style makes it an effective tool for examining the intricacy of reflection on both a personal and a cultural level.

3.2. Suggestibility and bias

According to Furst, suggestibility and bias, as opposed to the stream of consciousness, arbitrate the content of memory (541). Stevens portrays himself as someone fairly suggestible, possibly due to being surrounded by influential people he blindly follows and agrees with. His suggestibility is further shown through his description of what a great butler should be, the main criterion being dignity. Through aspiring to be a great butler, Stevens presents himself as a stereotype and rejects his personal feelings, causing Miss Kenton to ask the following question:

“Why, Mr. Stevens, why, why, why do you always have to pretend?” (Ishiguro, *Remains* 162). By acting as the ideal butler full of dignity, Stevens opts for a vocabulary of obsolete words such as ‘touring’ and ‘motoring’ while describing his journey. As Furst observes, he clearly shows bias toward the aristocrats, people he finds to be worthy of trust and decision-making for ordinary people like him, since he uses their vocabulary (542). In Stevens’s eyes, Darlington should be praised and respected to the highest degree. By exhibiting such behaviour, Stevens further establishes his bias and suggestibility on behalf of his employer, as can be seen in the dismissal of the two Jewish maids. Here, Darlington orders Stevens to fire the two women in order to satisfy the Germans. Stevens misinterprets Darlington’s motives and ties to the Axis, naively thinking Darlington had no prejudice or involvement in Jewish oppression. Due to his respectful and distanced professional manner established during his time with Lord Darlington, he has problems communicating with Mr. Farraday, the new owner of Darlington Hall, who is quite fond of banter. Farraday is a kind, friendly, and understanding American who has a casual and informal approach to running the estate.

On the other hand, Ono shows bias towards his past nationalist actions, the reputation, and the authority he held before the war. As he narrates, he selects events of his propaganda-spreading career while dismissing morality of those situations. His story celebrates the pre-war period, portraying it as the pinnacle of Japanese art and culture. Ono frequently indicates that he and his colleagues were well-meaning pawns of circumstance, even if he acknowledges some moral uncertainty. It is difficult to separate objective truths from his subjective perception of events, which is impacted by his emotions and experiences. This overall nostalgic tone is very much present in his conversation with his eldest daughter, where they discuss the best role models for his grandson, Ichiro. Ono believes children should idolize the likes of someone like Lord Yoshitsune, a Japanese military commander, while his daughter’s husband, Suichi, firmly believes “American heroes are the better models for children now” (Ishiguro, *Artist* 36). Here,

Suichi is the representative of the youth fond of Westernization and critical of Ono's patriotic generation nostalgic for the status and respect it once held and received.

3.3. *Repression*

Repression is a psychological defensive mechanism in which one pushes negative or undesirable memories, ideas, or emotions into the subconscious. This is one of the most important aspects of fragile memory in Stevens. His need to directly forget is fuelled by his approval of false situations and two extenuating factors affect his behaviour. The first one is his loyalty to Darlington, and the second is him being oblivious to Darlington's involvement with the Nazis. Due to Stevens's overly professional manner, he is convinced he cannot even think of questioning Darlington's actions. When faced with the truth that "Nazis are manoeuvring [Darlington] like a pawn" (Ishiguro, *Remains* 233), Stevens distances himself from even thinking about the implication and explains he has not "noticed any such development" (Ishiguro, *Remains* 234). Stevens shows minuscule evidence of shame in associating with his former employer since he denies working for him on multiple accounts. One would argue Stevens came to his senses, but due to his blocking, he still finds ways to defend Darlington and refer to it as loyalty.

As Furst explains, repression in Stevens's case resulted in him being both the 'victim' and the 'victimizer' (547). This means he is simultaneously deceiving himself as well as the other characters, most notably Miss Kenton. In his memories, encounters with Miss Kenton were always professional, even though the readers and Kenton might find them misleading. A great example are their evening cocoa meetings, which Stevens interprets as only business, even though their work has been done for the day. For everyone except Stevens, this seems like a friendly, even flirtatious meeting showing that Stevens continually represses his personal

feelings towards Miss Kenton. He is prone to blocking out her kindness and affection in the same way he denies seeing Darlington's malicious actions. When he received her letter that inspired him to go on the trip, he read it as though she was unhappy with her marriage and would like to return to Darlington Hall. Thinking it was a perfect way to restore the glory days of his workplace, he set out on the journey, convincing himself it was business-related and it would not impact his dignity. Upon rereading, he realizes his wishful thinking overpowered the truth of the letter, once again pointing to misattribution. By expecting Miss Kenton to return to Darlington Hall, he once again distances himself from her, even though they are not colleagues anymore. He seems to deny any personal relationship or friendship that she might want from him.

The relationship between Stevens and his father is very strained as well, once again due to his denial of personal feelings. What is more, his father holds himself to the same standards of dignity as Stevens, completely ruling out any sort of relationship except a purely professional one. When talking about, or when in direct conversation with his only parent, Stevens addressed him as 'Father' further establishing a strained relationship between the pair. Similar to Stevens, in *An Artist of the Floating World*, Setsuko uses 'Father' when talking directly to Ono, indicating a not-at-all personal relationship between parent and child. This can also indicate Ono's authority and his desire to be addressed with the utmost respect, even if it comes from his child.

The most severe example of repression in Ono's case refers to him ignoring his feelings towards his family, or more precisely, his wife and son. The two of them died, his son a soldier and his wife a victim of a bombing during the war to which Ono contributed, even if that contribution was minuscule. Due to his involvement and support of the movement which ended the lives of two people he truly loved, Ono cannot bring himself to grieve their deaths since it might lead him to self-blame and regret. By blocking this part of his life, Ono evades the

negative feelings that paint him as a man he would not consider as noble and as admirable as he wishes to be. In addition, Ono represses his regret regarding decisions which now influence his daughters' life. His militaristic past clearly poses a problem for the younger daughter's marriage negotiations, but Ono continues to idealize that part of his life. Along repressing guilt and regret, Ono is not able to take responsibility for his art and the damage it made. Ono puts the blame onto external factors tied to the war, and this perspective helps him maintain a sense of self-worth and dignity.

4. Conclusion

The novels examined in this paper follow Ono and Stevens, two men reminiscing about their glorious pasts and finding ways to conceal the mistakes within them. Ishiguro uses his characters, first-person narrators, to explore their memory and how it lacks reliability. Alongside the title of unreliability, the two narrators got attributed with the words 'authoritarian', referring to the system they grew up in and later adapted into their actions, and 'self-deceiving', to indicate how they operate in order to preserve a good reputation. The unreliability and self-deception found in Ono and Stevens have multiple layers through which they can be examined, including the discourse the characters engage in, their commentary on certain events, and contexts which require the reader's knowledge to determine the truth behind their respected stories. Inevitably, their approaches to narration influence and alter their memories, thus making those unreliable as well. In the cases of Ono and Stevens, memory involves missing information and is fragile at its core. Both narrators evade or alter scenes to make their memories fit with their ideas of dignity and nobility, helping them portray themselves as the best possible versions. In the end, Stevens's and Ono's memories are nothing more than a mirage. They work as a medium of self-justification, making Stevens believe he

was an admirable butler who deserved to be attributed with dignity, and Ono that he was an honourable painter serving his country in the way he thought was appropriate.

In conclusion, the narrators of Kazuo Ishiguro share many characteristics, the most noticeable being narration and memory. Throughout both novels, the narrator is the one telling the tale of their lives, going further and further back in time based on details that spark up new memories. By exhibiting untrustworthy behaviour within their narration, it can be concluded that the narrators have a lot to hide from the reader as well as themselves due to their need for self-justification and their rejection of negative feelings such as guilt and shame.

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6. NARRATION AND MEMORY IN KAZUO ISHIGURO'S AN ARTIST OF THE FLOATING WORLD AND THE REMAINS OF THE DAY: Summary and key words

This final paper deals with narration and memory in the selected novels of Kazuo Ishiguro: *An Artist of the Floating World* and *The Remains of the Day*. In this analysis, the narrators, Ono and Stevens, are looked at in terms of their unreliability, self-deception and what makes them authoritarian narrators. Their unreliability is examined through conversation, speech patterns, and narrative comments, while self-deception is explored within historical and psychological contexts. The analysis also delves into the fragile nature of memory, exploring aspects such as stream of consciousness, suggestibility, bias, and repression in Ishiguro's portrayal of memory in these novels.

Key words: Kazuo Ishiguro, *An Artist of the Floating World*, *The Remains of the Day*, narration, memory, unreliability

7. NARACIJA I SJEĆANJA U DJELIMA KAZUA ISHIGURA: UMJETNIK PLUTAJUĆEGA SVIJETA I NA KRAJU DANA: Sažetak i ključne riječi

Ovaj završni rad bavi se naracijom i sjećanjima u odabranim djelima Kazua Ishigura: *Umjetnik plutajućega svijeta* i *Na kraju dana*. U ovoj analizi, pripovjedači, Ono i Stevens, promatraju se kroz aspekte nepouzdanosti, samozavaravanja i onoga što ih čini autoritarnim pripovjedačima. Njihova se nepouzdanost ispituje kroz razgovor, govorne obrasce i narativne komentare, dok se samozavaravanje istražuje kroz povijesne i psihološke kontekste. Analiza se također bavi krhkom prirodom sjećanja, istražujući aspekte kao što su struja svijesti, sugestibilnost, pristranost i potiskivanje u Ishigurovom prikazu sjećanja u ovim romanima.

Ključne riječi: Kazuo Ishiguro, *Umjetnik plutajućega svijeta*, *Na kraju dana*, naracija, sjećanja, nepouzdanost