

# Memory and Loss in Kazuo Ishiguro's Works

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**Mikolčić, Nikolina**

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**Nikolina Mikolčić**

**Memory and Loss in Kazuo Ishiguro's Works**

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Zadar, 2024.

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Memory and Loss in Kazuo Ishiguro's Works

Diplomski rad

Student/ica:

Nikolina Mikočič

Mentor/ica:

doc.dr.sc. Vesna Ukić Košta

Zadar, 2024.



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Zadar, 2024.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Introduction</b> .....	1
<b>1. Collective Memory: A Myth or the Only True Memory?</b> .....	4
<b>2. Remembering: The Intimate Process of Reliving Memories</b> .....	8
<b>3. Theories of Memory by Sigmund Freud</b> .....	12
3.1. “The Psychological Mechanism of Forgetfulness” .....	12
3.2. <i>Psychopathology of Everyday Life</i> .....	14
3.2.1. “Childhood and Concealing Memories” .....	14
<b>4. Un/reliable Narrators, Memory and Recovering from Trauma in the Selected Novels</b> .....	16
4.1. <i>A Pale View of Hills</i> .....	17
4.2. <i>The Remains of the Day</i> .....	20
4.3. <i>When We Were Orphans</i> .....	22
4.4. <i>Never Let Me Go</i> .....	25
4.5. <i>The Buried Giant</i> .....	27
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	30
<b>WORKS CITED</b> .....	32
<b>SUMMARY</b> .....	34
<b>SAŽETAK</b> .....	35

## Introduction

Memory is an integral part of human cognition. Each individual has memories they cherish and often revisit. They strive to capture all the beautiful moments in life with their minds, cameras, and notes. However, as time passes, forgetfulness becomes inevitable. One can look fondly at old photographs or their children's drawings, but the circumstances surrounding those memories may not be remembered as vividly as they once were. Nevertheless, not all memories are beautiful; some provoke resentment or sadness, yet people tend to cling to those recollections, unable to let go. Kazuo Ishiguro, the Nobel prize-winning British author, articulates the issue of memory in all his novels, exploring its effects on individuals—both psychological and emotional. He seeks to discern whether memories of the past can mend broken hearts and identities.

Ishiguro challenges his protagonists to face the core of their recollections, urging them to dive into the old memories and find ways to escape the clutches of the past and live in the present. Moreover, every character in his books has suffered one or more losses during their lifetime, making acceptance of the past the only way for them to move forward. Therefore, the main objective of this MA paper is to analyse the themes of memory and loss in five of Ishiguro's novels and discover how these themes affect his protagonists and whether they manage to let go and live with no regrets. The following novels will be analysed in this paper: *A Pale View of Hills* (1982), *The Remains of the Day* (1989), *When We Were Orphans* (2000), *Never Let Me Go* (2005), and *The Buried Giant* (2015).

In the first part of my paper, I am going to explore collective memory and examine its connection to history and its plausibility compared to individual memory. The next section will provide more details about the theory of remembering and what it entails. The last theoretical part before the analysis will delve into theories of memory presented by Sigmund Freud, focusing on the erroneous nature of individual memories. The analysis will explore the themes

of narration, memory and loss. Firstly, the reliability—or unreliability—of the narrators will be explored. Additionally, each protagonist's memories will be questioned to determine whether their recollections can be trusted and how valuable they consider their memories. Lastly, I will examine how trauma influences each character and whether their remembrances can aid in accepting their losses and ultimately lead to healing.

Let us now introduce the selected novels. The psychological novel *A Pale View of Hills* is narrated by Etsuko, a middle-aged Japanese woman who moved to England with her second husband in her youth and is now a widow, living alone in the countryside. She retells the story of her past life in Nagasaki and subtly elaborates how difficult it was to live there during the post-war years. At the same time, she ponders about the recent loss of her eldest daughter to suicide, and explains how this tragedy affected her relationship with her other child. Etsuko's need to escape the present and retreat into past reminiscences emphasises her struggle to accept a reality marked by profound loneliness and a sense of alienation stemming from her racial background. The novel, set in Japan around the 1960s and England in the 1980s, demonstrates the challenges of fully adapting to a new life away from one's original home and the heartbreaking consequences that can arise.

Stevens, a loyal and diligent butler who prioritizes work above all else, is the protagonist of the historical novel *The Remains of the Day*. Set in 1956, the narrative follows the main character on a trip across the English countryside. Encouraged by his new employer to take some rest, Stevens embarks on a journey through various cities—Salisbury, Dorset, Devon, Somerset, Cornwall, and Weymouth—and, for almost a week, he is given a chance to reflect on his life and achievements. As a workaholic, he has always considered resting an unnecessary nuisance and strived to occupy himself with something, but now he has finally decided to unwind. Along the way, through his remembrances, he begins to understand that his relentless dedication to duty cost him meaningful relationships and, ultimately, a sense of who

he truly is. *The Remains of the Day* highlights the importance of pausing if only for a moment, to live fully and avoid future regrets or being bound to memories that cannot be changed.

In *When We Were Orphans*, Ishiguro introduces Christopher Banks, a skilled London detective, who seeks to uncover the mystery of his parents' disappearance, which occurred when he was still a child. The story spans 28 years, from July 1930 to November 1958, across London and Shanghai. Guided by his childhood memories, Christopher travels back to China to find answers to his traumatic experience and resolve the crime behind the falsified death of his family. Once in China, he discovers many things have changed since he was last there, and the visit to his old homeland reveals dark secrets he may not be prepared to face. This detective novel vividly demonstrates just how misleading childhood memories can be and their power to compel one to spend almost a lifetime pursuing a lie created by their own mind.

The narrative of the science-fiction novel *Never Let Me Go* shows a darker side of society and presents contemporary 1990s England in a twisted, dystopian manner through the culture of cloning. The protagonist, Kathy, is a clone herself and her insight into cloning unveils the tragic destiny of all the children from Hailsham who thought they were normal until they grew up and realised their 'abnormality'. It was due to their unnatural existence that they were separated from the rest of the world and, all along, their only purpose in life was death. Kathy's obsession with her memories might reflect her inability to accept that she is neither human nor unique, but simply a copy of someone who already exists and will eventually use her as a means of survival.

In Ishiguro's fantasy novel *The Buried Giant*, the protagonists are Axl and Beatrice, an elderly couple who live in medieval post-Arthurian England, in a small village shrouded in a dangerous mist that slowly steals people's memories. The couple is heartbroken due to the loss of their cherished shared experiences, yet they also find solace in one memory that is still alive in their hearts: the longing to reunite with their only son. Once Axl and Beatrice leave their



village to find their child, they meet intriguing individuals who join them on their adventure. Moreover, their relationship is constantly tested during the journey because they slowly start to remember painful memories, especially when asked an important question: “What are we willing to do for our loved ones?”

### **1. Collective Memory: A Myth or the Only True Memory?**

History is closely related to collective memory. This connection could be the reason why Ishiguro references historical events in two of his selected novels: in *A Pale View of Hills*, he describes how people struggled to recover after the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, while in *The Remains of the Day*, he addresses the presence of antisemitism among high-class families who supported Hitler’s doctrines. It has come to the attention of historians and memoriologists that both terms are inseparable and mostly appear together in a text, indicating that there must be a specific connection between the two. However, how accurate is it to use the term collective memory in a historical setting if one is aware of its unreliability since it is part of a subconscious process? Gedi and Elam provide a detailed analysis of the term through various theories, questioning its meaning, and trying to prove what collective memory entails and why it is associated with history.

The first step in analysing the notion of collective memory is to investigate how historians used to refer to it before the term became more widespread. According to the historian Jonathan Frankel, collective conscious and collective subconscious were the original historical terms. Based on his concept of “conscious-subconscious dichotomy”, the collective conscious refers to images that possibly stem from specific ideologies, whereas legends and myths form the collective subconscious (qtd. in Gedi and Elam 32). This claim is immediately criticized by Gedi and Elam who state that it may be confusing because, in a sense, myths and

legends, while possibly originating from one's subconsciousness, are mostly fixed "products" of one's consciousness (32). However, both agree that the mentioned dichotomy makes perfect sense in one aspect: it divides that which one cannot control—such as emotions or inherited traditions—and what is easily influenced by ideologies that can lead to change, which is the basis of historical knowledge.

On the other hand, Pierre Nora, a famous memoriologist, emphasizes the difference between "real memory" and historical memory"; he claims that memory, in general, is not an accurate tool for 'correct' history because of its unreliability (qtd. in Gedi and Elam 32). Because of the doubt that forms part of personal memory, historians must thoroughly investigate the truthfulness of past events using various verification procedures to collect precise information. Moreover, memory slowly transforms into history's adversary, challenging it as an independent, separate 'study' of identical importance. Nora places history and memory next to each other, but only to explain their differences: "Memory is by nature multiple and yet specific; collective, plural, and yet individual. History, on the other hand, belongs to everyone and to no one ... Memory is absolute, while history can only conceive the relative" (qtd. in Gedi and Elam 33).

What Nora genuinely wanted to point out is that historians ruined the so-called "authentic memory" with overanalyses; for him and other memoriologists, memory is alive, and it owes its existence to numerous factors, such as old customs, inherited beliefs and traditions that are the product of collective experience (qtd. in Gedi and Elam 34). To summarize, memory is collective for Nora, but classifying anything as collective poses a problem, and memory is no different. Why? Because memory is essentially personal for every individual. Ishiguro recognizes this, and that is why each of his protagonists—Etsuko, Stevens, Christopher, Kathy, Beatrice, and Axl—delves into their mind, quietly and privately analysing their recollections and presenting their 'stream of consciousness' to the reader. Interestingly,

Gedi and Elam claim that many believe a society can only persevere as long as individuals continue to share specific habits and it cannot survive “as a separate, distinct, single organism with a mind, or a will, or a memory of its own” (35).

Furthermore, according to Maurice Halbwachs’ theory, memory can only be “perceivable, verifiable and meaningful” if formed in a social environment, extraneously (qtd. in Gedi and Elam 36). He draws on Durkheim’s work, whose thesis argues that individual memories are impossible to perceive unless they ‘manifest’ in the collective consciousness of a society. Additionally, completely ignoring the notion of collective and personal recollections, which Durkheim upholds, Halbwachs only maintains collective recollections as part of his theory, elaborating that individual perceptions are similar to a dream-like state and are, as such, incoherent. This suggests that Ishiguro’s protagonists are either inventing or reshaping their remembrances, deliberately deceiving the reader, who cannot tell whether these recollections are products of imagination or more or less accurate memories.

For Halbwachs, an individual can only remember something if they rely on the memory of the whole society and not their consciousness; he does not provide information on how exactly collective recollections form, which is why his theory seems inconsistent and not clearly elaborated. However, he himself admits that the dichotomy between social and personal memory is non-existent because “ideas and images do not designate two elements ... of our states of consciousness, but rather two points of view” (qtd. in Gedi and Elam 37). Still, Halbwachs states that rationality is society’s most important characteristic, which actually allows individuals to retrieve their memories, that is, society affects and controls one’s recollections, so they correspond to its “rational needs” (qtd. in Gedi and Elam 39). In the end, society becomes responsible for all relevant changes in past events because of its ability to reconstruct them to its needs; history is thus no longer a reliable reflection of such events but solely a mirror image of society’s whims.

According to Gedi and Elam, what can be concluded from Halbwachs' theory is that collective memory can now be classified as a term used for both "real (factual) history...and real (personal) memory" because it has transformed into an interchangeable term despite it being mentioned as a separate term at the beginning (40). Moreover, history can be considered "as a fabricated narrative (once called "myth") either in the service of social-ideological needs or even expressing the creative whim of a particular historian". Nevertheless, Gedi and Elam emphasize that the only 'correct' way of employing collective memory is in a metaphorical sense, that is, collective memory is "some property attached to some generalized entity such as "society"" (42). Both authors support this claim stating that: "any definition of "memory" would revolve around the ability to retrieve some impression of some past experience or some past event that has had some impact on our minds" (43).

Based on Halbwachs' theory, an individual is unable to retrieve memories that are truly their own because all memories are influenced by stereotypes that one cannot avoid since they are part of a social group (Gedi and Elam 43-44). Any past event or personal experience is therefore not accurate because family affects one's thoughts and feelings—memories are solely a reflection of social manipulation. In this context, Kathy from *Never Let Me Go* can be seen as a protagonist who is socially manipulated, having spent almost her entire life living a lie. As an adult, she becomes aware that her existence and identity are fundamentally false and that a happy ending is unattainable for her. In conclusion, Gedi and Elam insist that collective memory is, in fact, a lie because:

the mechanism of collective memory and the mechanism of personal memory are one and the same and located in the same individual mind. "Collective memory" is but a misleading new name for the old familiar "myth" which can be identified, in its turn, with "collective" or "social" stereotypes. Indeed, collective memory is but a myth. (47)

As we are going to see in this paper, individual memory features prominently in Kazuo Ishiguro's novels. In *A Pale View of Hills*, *The Remains of the Day*, *When We Were Orphans*, *Never Let Me Go*, and *The Buried Giant*, all characters are, in a sense, 'defined' by their memories. They are all burdened by past recollections that either prevent them from moving forward in life or act as a driving force that motivates them to resolve regrets and painful memories from their past. Nevertheless, despite the crucial role of personal memory, its effects on other characters are also vital for the development of the story. Every interaction and remembrance about a certain occurrence allows the reader to delve deeper into the main character's mind and prompts them to try to understand the reason behind every grievance, but it also makes them wonder whether everything that we read about in these novels is reliable.

## **2. Remembering: The Intimate Process of Reliving Memories**

Reminiscing can be said to refer to quiet moments that we cannot completely share with others; we can merely offer descriptions. We do not have to learn how to conceal memories precisely because they have always been hidden in one's mind, away from everyone else, and their revelation is but a voluntary act by which the individual decides to expose their deepest thoughts. In this paper I will try to demonstrate that, since all of the protagonists in Ishiguro's novels are constantly reminiscing about past experiences, remembering is of utmost importance for the narrative, which is why this theory is vital for understanding the selected works.

However, according to Benjamin, the aforementioned approach to remembering is "radically at fault", which he will try to prove through the analysis of Hume's theory about remembering (312). Hume claims that one should possess a specific image in one's mind to recall something; that image is different from any other conception as it is part of one's "special kind of mental experience" (qtd. in Benjamin 312). Even though it is logical to consider

memory as a personal process since scientists cannot explain yet why and how remembering occurs, it is unfortunately the wrong basis for further theories of memory and remembering.

Focusing on a thorough analysis of the distinctive features of the so-called mental experiences to form a theory is an approach which only raises more questions and causes confusion. Two questions are of paramount importance here: How can we determine which mental images genuinely reflect our past experiences? and How can we be sure that, when trying to recall something, a specific image that comes to mind is a correct memory, not a fabricated thought? According to Frangiotti, it is Hume's theory of mind that offers answers to these questions because he separates the mind into two; for Hume, the mind is a combination of perceptions and ideas that are imitations of the former (278). To elaborate, if one wishes to comprehend the meaning of a specific concept, they need to be able to find its pair, that is, the impression that is being copied.

Moreover, all ideas are linked by: "resemblance, contiguity in time and place and causation" (Frangiotti 278-279). It is vital to remember that "impressions of sense, the ideas of memory and the ideas of imagination" are not the same due to their difference in "strength and vivacity" (Benjamin 313). An apparent miss in Hume's theory, according to Benjamin, is precisely the notion of vivacity because one's real memories can be much less vivid than fantasies and thoughts that are products of their imagination. According to this perspective, Etsuko from *A Pale View of Hills* and Christopher from *When We Were Orphans* perfectly exemplify how imagination can lead to the belief in memories that are either misremembered or invented. Christopher's childhood recollections were distorted because the adults around him withheld vital information, likely because they thought he would not grasp the severity of the real situation and might be emotionally harmed. On the other hand, Etsuko created fictitious personas for herself and her daughter Keiko to present her story to her daughter Niki in a way

that would be less painful for herself, and to avoid imposing her Japanese identity onto Niki, who had never lived in Japan.

The theory, in a sense, implies that if only one devoted enough attention to their thoughts, they might discern a crucial sensation that differentiates memories from imagined scenarios. Interestingly enough, familiarity was suggested as the main difference between the two, but Benjamin does not agree with this since it does nothing to really emphasize what Hume did wrong in terms of his theory as a whole. Benjamin states that “no first person statement that asserts an inner experience like the possession of an image, a certain sort of feeling or sensation, can be corrected by a third person” (314). When an individual decides to share their memories with others, they have the choice to believe them or think it a lie. It cannot be proven whether one is lying or telling the truth since memories cannot be physically shown to someone. Therefore, all narrators from the selected novels could be lying and we as readers cannot know whether we are being misled or not.

Another theory Benjamin introduces is one by C. D. Broad, the author of *The Mind and its Place in Nature*, in which he mentions that ‘memory’ is a word used in various senses and, therefore, the verb ‘to remember’ is no different. Depending on the type of recollection, the meaning of the verb ‘to remember’ changes; for Broad, “remembering is an act” and, depending on what one wishes to recall, they need to be aware of other meanings of the verb to properly explain the specific activities responsible for the act of remembering (qtd. in Benjamin 318). However, Benjamin disagrees with this statement, emphasizing that the mentioned explanation is confusing and could be considered as the first mistake in Broad’s theory. Why does Benjamin believe this theory to be faulty?

Because he does not consider remembering to be an act, claiming it is not possible. Nevertheless, he does not discard the entirety of Broad’s theory because, he admits, there is a difference in terms of remembering something from one’s past and, for example, how to recite

a poem. He claims that, while it is unnecessary for one to recall a specific information “by introspectable mental experiences”, it is still intriguing to ponder about how exactly one can “remember a perceptual experience without an experience analogous to the original one taking place” (Benjamin 319). Thus, he proposes a new term: ‘reliving’, which describes what happens in one’s mind when attempting to remember something. Given that every character in Ishiguro’s novels is entrenched in the past, constantly reminiscing and unable to fully experience the present, this concept is crucial as it illustrates their struggle to move on and live in the moment.

It is memory-image theory and Broad’s claim about remembering that tried to justify this process. Immediately, Benjamin criticizes the image-memory theory by stating that it is useless during the recollection of a non-visual experience since it is too narrow and therefore reliving is a much better option. As for remembering and reliving, it is easier to evaluate whether someone has really undergone the process of reliving while trying to remember something instead of verifying whether they have an image of something in their mind. However, some may claim that reliving is not necessarily important to remember something. If this is true, then how does one truly recall anything? Benjamin offers the following explanations: “First, the ability to image sensory experiences does vary widely from person to person, so the disagreement may well have a factual basis. Second, it is a genuine puzzle sometimes to know what is to count as an image” (320).

What must be acknowledged is that no one is taught how and when to recall something; it is a natural process to which one does not truly pay much attention. Furthermore, when a memory is deemed false, it is not rejected completely but ‘rebranded’ into a memory mishap, a dream, an invention of the imagination, an assumption. Oftentimes, one is corrected by others on some of their claims, but why does it happen at all? If one is remembering something, why does it have to be assessed as true or false? Because labelling a statement immediately evaluates



its truthfulness and, depending on the label, the statement is either taken as more or less truthful. For example, if anyone ‘rebrands’ a false memory into a guess, it is immediately known that, while the statement may be untrue, it may also be completely accurate, despite it being an assumption. Interestingly, both protagonists of *The Buried Giant*, Axl and Beatrice, are aware that their memories are erroneous due to the mist. They suffer because, despite their wish to remember their past, they are confined to memories that could potentially be both true and false.

Individuals have the right to call their recollections however they deem fit, so it is important to acknowledge that all the senses of the verb ‘to remember’ are personal, for they are part of a very intimate process which occurs in one’s mind. Therefore, personal thoughts and memories should not be used to explain theories and concepts because they are not objective and research valid. Nevertheless, such subjectivity and emotional influence on memories is fundamental for Ishiguro’s novels. As previously mentioned, all his characters are ‘prisoners’ of their recollections. They cannot fully enjoy the present moment due to an unresolved issue from the past, which unfortunately continue to affect their current lives. In each novel, the characters frequently focus on their past experiences, clearly illustrating their dependence on events that occurred long ago.

### **3. Theories of Memory by Sigmund Freud**

#### **3.1. “The Psychological Mechanism of Forgetfulness”**

Before he published his book, *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, Sigmund Freud authored an essay about memory loss and explained how it manifests itself in everyday conversation. The famous Austrian psychoanalyst publicized the essay “The Psychological

Mechanism of Forgetfulness” in 1898, aiming to elaborate in detail on how forgetting occurs and to simplify the complex processes taking place in the subconscious.

First of all, it is imperative to realise that memory loss can happen to anyone and at any moment. Freud explains that forgetfulness is most frequent when individuals are mentioning personal names in conversation. It is easy to forget someone’s name and fail to recall it when necessary, which results in irritation and an inability to stop trying to remember the needed information. At that moment, seeking help from the other person is a logical step, but they will probably be less preoccupied with it than the one asking for guidance. What follows the need for help is the plethora of random names that come to one’s mind, but what the individual is aware of is that all of the names they can remember are false, which, in turn, causes an even bigger turmoil in one’s mind. The smartest choice to proceed with, according to Freud, would be “‘not to think of it’ – that is, to divert from the task that part of the attention over which one has voluntary control” (“The Psychological Mechanism of Forgetfulness” 1). It is interesting to note how that specific step finally produces a desired outcome: one successfully recalls the name they desperately needed during the conversation and, instantly, they are compelled to share it loudly with their companion, who already forgot about the topic of their discussion.

For Freud, the conclusion is that memory is unfortunately not as easily accessed as one may believe—it is “‘subjected to restriction by a trend of the will, just as is any part of our activity directed to the external world” (“The Psychological Mechanism of Forgetfulness” 5). Therefore, repression of memory is not unique to a specific group in society but is common for every individual and, whether one is able to recall the necessary information or not, depends solely on their psychological condition and their curiosity for that which was momentarily forgotten. This theory is crucial for analysing Ishiguro’s novels because it encourages readers to question whether the protagonists are purposefully presenting only favourable aspects of

their memories to conceal their true nature or if they are genuinely trustworthy and revealing their authentic selves.

### 3.2. *Psychopathology of Everyday Life*

Published in 1901, *Psychopathology of Everyday Life* is considered Sigmund Freud's most famous work which he wrote after having worked with patients who suffered from illnesses such as hysteria and obsessive-compulsive disorder. During his research, he noticed there is a trivial difference in behaviour between mentally ill patients and normal, healthy individuals. After that realization, Freud was entirely devoted to studying everyday activities, focusing specifically on mistakes that arise during a familiar action that is repeated daily. The following sections will provide a more detailed analysis of specific chapters from the book that discuss certain topics relevant for this thesis.

#### 3.2.1. "Childhood and Concealing Memories"

The main question around which Sigmund Freud based this chapter is: "How far back into childhood do our memories reach?" ("Childhood and Concealing Memories" 61). He wanted to investigate how truthful childhood memories can be, considering many do not remember everything from childhood, and one's 'original' memories can intertwine with new, fabricated ones. This research idea is compelling because it is closely related to the novel *When We Were Orphans*, where the main character, Christopher Banks, relies entirely on his childhood memories that ultimately prove to be false. Furthermore, Freud introduced three types of memory, structuring them around the notion of concealment: retroactive (regressive) memory displacement, encroaching (interposing) concealing memory and contemporaneous (contiguous) memory. With each of these types he wished to showcase how memory

concealment changes from being a completely unconscious process (retroactive (regressive) memory displacement) to one which becomes slightly more conscious by being 'present' due to an old memory (encroaching (interposing) concealing memory) and, also, there is a possibility that memory may be displaced due to its impact on an individual and not only its subject matter (contemporaneous (contiguous) memory).

The focus of Freud's research was "infantile amnesia", through which he wanted to understand the loss of childhood memories which, according to him, are surely on a higher intellectual and emotional level ("Childhood and Concealing Memories" 62). He claims it is interesting to realise such memories cannot remain in one's mind as time passes because they are definitely important for the further development of every individual. Therefore, there must be some "particularly formed memory conditions" ("Childhood and Concealing Memories" 62) that prevent one from remembering their childhood memories despite their influence on one's future. According to Freud, even though some memories seem coherent, it can be proven that they are, in fact, not true; whether memories provoke confusion or comprehension, it is easy to conclude they are both incorrect. Thus, almost every childhood memory is probably fabricated, fragmented or a result of displacement, leading to a realisation that almost everything one believed to be true is no longer reliable. This is perfectly exemplified not only through Christopher's character but also Kathy's in *Never Let Me Go*, as it is only in her adulthood that she realises her idyllic childhood was merely a mirage, concealing the true nature of the school in which she grew up.

However, one does not forget their childhood due to faulty memory, but because 'something' from later years influenced the "memory capacity of our infantile experiences" ("Childhood and Concealing Memories" 63), which is why comprehending one's childhood is unusual for every individual. An intriguing similarity between adult and infantile memory is that both are visual, but not completely identical. When recalling something from childhood,

one can visualise themselves along with the experience they are remembering; on the other hand, when trying to remember something from adult years, one can only visualise the experience itself, and not their own self. To conclude: ““childhood reminiscences” of individuals altogether advance to the signification of “concealing memories,” and thereby form a noteworthy analogy to the childhood remberences as laid down in the legends and of nations” (“Childhood and Concealing Memories” 64).

#### **4. Un/reliable Narrators, Memory and Recovering from Trauma in the Selected Novels**

The first, essential feature that can be noticed while reading a book is the narrator. Whether that person is someone whose identity is never revealed or the main character themselves, it is an indispensable part of every tale. The narrator could be seen as the most important character in every book because they reveal intricate details about characters’ thoughts and emotions. Without them, whoever they might be, there would be no story, which is why their role is crucial when drafting a narrative. However, no matter the significance of the narrator, should a reader blindly accept the tale they are reading? Can they be certain that the narrator is not lying? In Kazuo Ishiguro’s novels that are under discussion in this paper—*A Pale View of Hills*, *The Remains of the Day*, *When We Were Orphans*, *Never Let Me Go*, and *The Buried Giant*—there is always first-person narration, which means that the main characters are telling the story.

However, while that is the case for the first four mentioned novels, *The Buried Giant* is the anomaly of the group. Why is that so? Because the narrator is someone whose identity remains a mystery until the very last chapter. In all novels, the characters range from women to men, and they are all at various stages in life. But whether they are old or young, a man or a woman, they all have one thing in common: they are weighed down by their memories. The

narrators/characters cannot stop themselves from revisiting old memories on a daily basis, making the reader wonder what is true and what is a fabrication of the mind. In addition, along with the unreliable narrator, other prominent themes in Ishiguro's novels are loss and trauma. Both are overwhelming and inevitable experiences that every individual must confront at some point in life. Whether it involves the death of a loved one, the end of a meaningful relationship, or the loss of something with sentimental value, each type of loss carries significant weight.

Trauma caused by loss can leave deep emotional scars, affecting mental health and making the healing process long and difficult. To recover, individuals must go through a period of reflection and seek support from their loved ones. In Kazuo Ishiguro's *A Pale View of Hills*, *The Remains of the Day*, *When We Were Orphans*, *Never Let Me Go*, and *The Buried Giant*, protagonists suffer from past trauma, struggling to heal and move forward. Therefore, this analysis aims to explore the veracity of the characters' memories and whether their coping mechanisms help them achieve the peace they seek.

#### 4.1. *A Pale View of Hills*

In this psychological novel, Etsuko does not equivocate about the unreliability of memory; instead, she openly acknowledges that it cannot be trusted: "Memory, I realise, can be an unreliable thing" (*A Pale View of Hills* 156). In her recollections of Nagasaki, she mentions a friend, Sachiko, whose situation is strikingly similar, if not identical, to her own. This immediately raises doubts about the reliability of her storytelling, as it is unclear whether Sachiko even exists - particularly because Etsuko struggles to form friendships, as reflected in her lack of friends in England. Despite Etsuko's wish to find happiness in England and forget the struggles she experienced in Japan, her life unexpectedly becomes worse. Her eldest daughter, Keiko, cannot adapt to her new surroundings and decides to take her own life. This

traumatic event occurs so suddenly that Etsuko struggles to accept her daughter's death and the reality that she will never see her again. Her initial reaction reflects the shock and disbelief she feels amid this heartbreaking tragedy.

Etsuko reveals that she is haunted by the thoughts of Keiko, and this demonstrates that she feels guilty for failing to make her daughter feel safe, loved, and protected. Her self-reproach 'bullies' her into accepting horrifying images of her dead daughter as a punishment she deserves, because she knew from the very beginning that Keiko never liked England or her new family. Furthermore, in the course of the novel, some facts indicate that Sachiko might be Etsuko's alter ego and Mariko, Sachiko's daughter, Keiko's alter ego. Why is this plausible? First, Etsuko states that she is pregnant with her first child when she befriends Sachiko, who already has a daughter. In addition, while Etsuko later marries an Englishman and moves to England, Sachiko has an American boyfriend named Frank, who promises to take her and her child to America to live together. Etsuko's 'memory' starts to crack and every slight mistake in narration is enough for the reader to start doubting the verity of Sachiko's and even Mariko's existence.

According to Etsuko, Mariko is a quiet but volatile child who rarely expresses her emotions openly, yet she makes it clear that she deeply hates Frank. Given these details, she could very well be Keiko, Etsuko's firstborn, who is not fond of her new family in England. Furthermore, there are a few instances where Etsuko speaks to Mariko about a random rope that gets in their way, which could foreshadow Keiko's tragic ending. This detail from Etsuko's memory indicates that her mental state is deteriorating and that she cannot accept Keiko's death. Her desperate attempt to make peace with the severe heartache of losing a child only proves that she cannot rid herself of the blame she placed on her shoulders. The complete resignation with the supposedly justifiable torture becomes obvious through the following words: "The horror of that image has never diminished, but it has long ceased to be a morbid

matter; as with a wound on one's own body, it is possible to develop an intimacy with the most disturbing of things” (*A Pale View of Hills* 55).

Etsuko’s unsettling acceptance of the most traumatic event in her life demonstrates the depth of her emotional and psychological wounds. Her alter-ego narrative is a painful experience for the reader, who realises she has always felt alone and disregarded. She might have invented the story of Sachiko and Mariko because she did not want to directly impose her Japanese identity and experience on her younger daughter Niki, who cannot fully understand how the past affects her mother. Etsuko’s inability to forget the past and live in the present with her remaining family proves that she cannot forgive herself for Keiko’s suicide. Unfortunately, she could not fulfil the promise she made to Keiko when she was still a little girl, and now the ghost of that promise haunts her, reminding her that she is the cause of her daughter’s unhappiness and unfortunate death. Therefore, it can be concluded that the narrator of *A Pale View of Hills*, Etsuko, is unreliable because she reveals parts of her story through another woman who likely never even existed, to protect herself.

She is afraid to dwell in the past as her real self, but cannot stop thinking about her experiences as a young mother in Japan either. Etsuko’s need to invent an imaginary friend might be her way of letting go of the past, but it could also be an indirect plea for her younger daughter to help her overcome the pain and loneliness she feels. Niki indirectly offers her mother the emotional support necessary for her to open up about her true feelings and attain “psychic relief” (Padhee 94), even if this occurs through the imagined lives of Sachiko and Mariko. Aware of her daughter’s kindness and compassion, Etsuko quickly realises Niki’s subtle message: that she is not to blame for Keiko’s suicide. Letting go of the pain and choosing to leave the past behind, while still holding on to the love for her eldest daughter, is the best path to healing a broken heart—and Etsuko is finally nearing it.



#### 4.2. *The Remains of the Day*

Another character aware of the fallibility of their memory is Stevens, the narrator of *The Remains of the Day*: “It is possible this is a case of hindsight colouring my memory” (*The Remains of the Day* 90). Once he leaves the house where he has worked for over thirty years, his mind is suddenly flooded with old memories: from his father’s passing to Lord Darlington housing possible Nazis to his disagreements with Miss Kenton. Stevens’ recollections do not present a straightforward story but a plethora of narratives that require close attention to understand how long ago the events occurred. He is retelling a lifetime of mixed memories, and his ‘formal’ approach might have affected their reliability due to his suppressed emotions. As a result, his loss is more subtle and complex, lacking the emotional and mental distress that Etsuko faces after Keiko’s death. While *A Pale View of Hills* immediately reveals the gravity of the loss surrounding the main characters and overwhelms the reader, *The Remains of the Day* forces its protagonist to grasp the complexity of his life choices.

Stevens’s self-imposed rejection of anything outside his professional obligations has left him completely isolated. Moreover, he prioritized his career to the point of sacrificing his happiness and well-being, which left him with a deep loneliness. Interestingly, his loss is more apparent to the reader than it is to him. It takes time for Stevens to realise the beautiful things he could have experienced in life had he not been so engrossed in his profession. He is completely emotionally detached from what he is narrating, which proves that he is mostly using his profession as an emotional armour, to protect himself from confronting his true emotions and the losses he suffered in life. One of the most prominent missed opportunities he mentions is his relationship with Miss Kenton. He has been in love with her for most of his life; however, he never had the courage or ‘time’ to open up to her when they were younger.

Now that he is older, telling her about his feelings would be futile. She cannot reciprocate his feelings because she is married. Their predicament simply cannot be changed;

they can only remain friends and nothing more, separated by late realizations, meaningless duty, and cowardice. Stevens' preoccupation with duty condemns him to a life of emptiness and loneliness. Only his work can fill the void in his heart due to the lack of personal relationships. Miss Kenton's thoughts convey perfectly that changing the past is impossible. She suggests that one should just accept their current situation: "One can't be forever dwelling on what might have been. One should realise one has as good as most, perhaps better, and be grateful" (*The Remains of the Day* 251). Unknowingly, her words resonate deeply with Stevens and cause a shift in his perspective. Impressed by her words, he finally acknowledges feelings of sorrow, heartache, and regret he had previously avoided confronting.

He also realizes that he needed to hear those words to comprehend the true meaning behind his reminiscences: to look back without regrets and to understand who he truly is. Another interesting point is that time may have not passed for Stevens as it did for others. In his obsession to achieve his 'dream', he might have overlooked that he, along with his surroundings, has also changed. This could be why he cannot help but relive the past, trying to understand what his life was genuinely like and how his behaviour may have affected those around him. However, what if everything Stevens presents as his memory is actually a lie? What if he was never the perfect butler and found solace in daydreaming and inventing the best version of himself? If this is taken to be true, Stevens is a very unreliable narrator. His focus in most memories is on his competence and professional growth as a butler, and not on personal relationships.

In his 'detachment,' while narrating certain recollections, he keeps emphasising what truly mattered to him in the past: working himself to perfection. Moreover, according to Fonioková, Stevens' storytelling demonstrates the typical signs of a narrator who is also the protagonist. He immerses himself in long, narcissistic soliloquies about himself and places himself at the centre of past events. On the other hand, the melancholic tone that permeates his

narration gradually awakens emotions of sadness and helplessness in the reader, as Stevens loses more than he gains in life and takes a long time to understand that. Only by reminiscing can he ask himself: “What is the point in worrying oneself too much about what one could or could not have done to control the course one’s life took?” (*The Remains of the Day* 257) and conclude that the only thing he can do is move forward. He finally accepts himself, his true feelings, and the lost opportunities, choosing not to dwell on the past but strive for a more fulfilling future.

#### 4.3. *When We Were Orphans*

Another example of an unreliable narrator is Christopher Banks, the protagonist of *When We Were Orphans*, mainly because of his dependence on childhood memories. Christopher, just like Etsuko and Stevens, questions his memory, and this emphasises his unreliability as a narrator: “A number of times recently I have found myself struggling to recall something that only two or three years ago I believed was ingrained in my mind for ever” (*When We Were Orphans* 67). He is clearly troubled by his fading memory, especially since he already does not remember correctly what he saw and heard as a child. Nevertheless, one cannot blame him for not knowing the truth about the past; children can be controlled and manipulated into believing whatever their loved ones tell them. His determination to resolve the pain he feels drives him to become a detective, devoting himself to confronting the past that torments him.

In addition to losing his family and becoming an orphan, Christopher is uprooted from the only home he has ever known and sent to live with his aunt in London. Adjusting to his unfamiliar environment proves extremely difficult for Christopher, as he finds himself alone in a foreign country, unfamiliar with the English culture, and feeling that he does not belong. The

sudden changes in his life leave him emotionally detached (Vinet, par. 10), preventing him from forming meaningful relationships with other boys at his boarding school. Christopher's behaviour reflects the emotional and psychological disruption caused by his loss, forcing him to grow up too quickly while provoking feelings of alienation and a fractured sense of identity—similar to Keiko's struggles in *A Pale View of Hills*. Although he was just a small child when his mother and father went missing, he believed it was his duty to protect them from their fate.

Because of this, he has lived in his childhood memories for most of his life, only coming to this realisation when he finally unveils the truth behind his parents' disappearance: ““In many ways, it's where I've continued to live all my life. It's only now I've started to make my journey from it”” (*When We Were Orphans* 277). This quote reveals that Christopher is finally ready to let go of the past, but he also understands that it will not happen overnight. He must be patient and allow himself to stop feeling trapped under the burdensome responsibilities he has imposed on himself. What ultimately helps Christopher heal from his obsession with the past is his meeting with his mother. However, she suffers mentally, which is evident in her inability to recognize her son, until he mentions a crucial detail from his childhood:

‘Mother,’ I said, ‘it's Puffin. *Puffin*.’

...

‘Supposing you discovered he'd tried his best, tried with everything he had to find you, even if in the end he couldn't. If you knew that, do you suppose...do you suppose you'd be able to forgive him?’

...

‘Forgive Puffin? Did you say forgive Puffin? Whatever for?’ (*When We Were Orphans* 305)

His nickname proves to be his most important recollection; for a moment, it ‘saves’ his mother and grounds her, bringing her the peace she deserves. This lovely family moment forces Christopher to set aside his trauma and live in the present, accepting the dark past that cannot be changed. He comes to understand that, despite his misguided belief that he could save his mother, nothing could change the deep bond they share. The challenge lies in recognizing that the profound love parents hold for their children is always in their hearts, and nothing can break that connection. Despite being an unreliable narrator in *When We Were Orphans*, Christopher Banks perfectly demonstrates how some memories can never be forgotten or fabricated because they are dear to one’s heart and remind them of someone they love deeply. It is also intriguing to uncover that the remembrances Christopher thought important were really a misinterpretation of his young mind, while those he classified as irrelevant turned out to be the very ones that brought him the necessary closure.

Moreover, Christopher’s outlook on the future is quite similar to that of Stevens because he also resigns himself to his destiny and chooses to move forward. While the emptiness he has felt throughout his life may never fully disappear, he can attempt to lessen its weight by focusing on the familial bond with his adoptive daughter Jennifer. At the end of the novel, Christopher comes to a conclusion that reflects his long-awaited acceptance of the past and his willingness to live in the present with his family: “But for those like us, our fate is to face the world as orphans, chasing through long years the shadows of vanished parents. There is nothing for it but to try and see through our missions to the end, as best we can, for until we do so, we will be permitted no calm” (*When We Were Orphans* 313).

#### 4.4. *Never Let Me Go*

After Stevens and Christopher, Ishiguro introduces another female storyteller in *Never Let me Go*, who begins her narration with a simple introduction: “My name is Kathy H. I'm 31 years old, and I've been a carer now for over eleven years” (3). She is the first narrator who directly introduces herself, which may indicate that making her identity known to the reader is important to her. However, the most vital information about Kathy is not her age or profession, but that she is an anomaly in ‘her’ society—she is a clone. Additionally, her chronological narration and detailed explanations make her seem like a reliable narrator. Is it possible that her memory is impeccable because she is not a real human being but a copy of one? Could one of her ‘gifts’ as a clone be the ability to remember everything she ever experienced, as that is the only thing no one can take away from her? Kathy’s opinion on memories and forgetfulness supports this claim: “The memories I value most, I don't see them ever fading. I lost Ruth, then I lost Tommy, but I won't lose my memories of them” (*Never Let Me Go* 280).

However, according to Currie (94), Kathy is yet another unreliable narrator because she openly admits her memory is not without faults: “This was all a long time ago so I might have some of it wrong” (*Never Let Me Go* 12). Interestingly, while reminiscing about Hailsham—the boarding school where the clones were raised and educated—Kathy’s reflections primarily revolve around her relationships with her best friends, Tommy and Ruth. Her thoughts reveal a profound love and willingness to please them, even at her own expense. When she loses Ruth and Tommy, she comes to a significant conclusion about the depth of her sadness: “I suppose I lost Hailsham too” (*Never Let Me Go* 280). Why does Kathy compare people she loves to a school that only strived to deceive innocent children? It is possible that she feels gratitude toward Hailsham for providing her with the opportunity to befriend Ruth and Tommy and to form strong bonds with others who are also clones like her. Nevertheless, even though

attending Hailsham was not necessarily the worst experience for the clones, it remains the root of all of Kathy's future traumas.

The first painful experience in her life manifests as an ever-growing sense of alienation and an inability to comprehend her own identity. Moreover, concerning the tragic loss of Tommy and Ruth, it is precisely their status as clones that causes their deaths. The notion that their organs are harvested one by one only underscores the unnecessary suffering they have to endure to sustain someone else. Kathy is not naive; she does not harbour illusions that Tommy and Ruth can escape their fate but still strives to provide them with comfort in their final moments. She experiences both the profound trauma of losing someone she loves deeply and the struggle to comprehend her own identity as a clone. Having spent her entire life with Ruth and Tommy, she is unable to fully accept the grief and loneliness that envelop her in the wake of their deaths. It is only by lingering in the past and revisiting cherished memories that she finds solace, though she admits that she never indulges in unrealistic fantasies for long. Instead, she allows herself to recall the happy moments she shared with them, finding comfort in memories of the time when they were still a part of her life.

In addition, this feeling of estrangement does not only apply to Kathy but also Keiko, Etsuko, and Christopher. Unfortunately, Keiko is the only character who is unable to advocate for herself in a judgmental society, and she ultimately chooses suicide to alleviate her pain. On the other hand, Etsuko and Christopher find ways to overcome their feelings of isolation and ambiguous identity and ultimately manage to discover their real selves. However, Kathy's situation is more complicated because, as a clone, she cannot escape her predestined future. She must live for, donate for, and ultimately die for someone else. Yet, avoiding this truth was the only way for Kathy to survive without feeling like an anomaly, despite being treated as one all her life. This might be why she cannot let go of the past and live in the present; she wishes

to feel human even though she is aware that she is a clone. Therefore, by clinging to old memories, she tries to convince herself that she is free and that her life has no limitations.

Eventually, she does accept her fate and resolves to live as fully as possible until it is time for her to begin her own donations: “Once I'm able to have a quieter life, in whichever centre they send me to, I'll have Hailsham with me, safely in my head, and that'll be something no one can take away” (*Never Let Me Go* 281). This thought indicates that, despite everything she has experienced over the years, she will never forget Hailsham, as it is an essential part of her identity. Therefore, she understands that the only thing she can do is accept her mortality, recognizing that her true purpose as a clone is to provide someone she does not know with the gift of life. It can be argued that despite being a copy of a human being, Kathy embodies humanity that is more beautiful and innocent than that of ‘normal’ people. Her compassion and desire to help others demonstrate that she has finally found peace within herself. Most importantly, her memories inspire her to grow stronger and braver each day, enabling her to confront the greedy world that has wronged her.

#### 4.5. *The Buried Giant*

The novel that stands out the most in this analysis is *The Buried Giant* because, unlike in the other works mentioned, the main characters do not narrate their experiences. At the beginning of the narrative, it is evident that someone else retells Axl and Beatrice's story. However, as the story progresses, it is easy to forget the unnamed, mysterious narrator because the focus shifts to the elderly couple and their journey to find their son. It should be immediately obvious that the narrator in this novel is not reliable because the characters are aware of their lost memories and the unreliability of those they can still access. However, since this is the only novel by Ishiguro where the narrator is not the main character but someone unknown, it



might be that everything retold is reliable. How is this possible? If one pays close attention to details in the mysterious storytelling, a specific connection between the beginning and ending of the novel becomes apparent.

At the beginning of the couple's tale, the pronoun 'I' is mentioned only a few times. It does not appear again until the very end when it is used throughout the entirety of the last chapter. Because of this, it is easy to overlook Ishiguro's use of third-person narration, which is not present in his other novels. What reinforces this theory is the story's ending. It introduces a completely new character: a young boatman who questions Beatrice and Axl's love to determine whether they will travel to the secret island together or separately. From the boatman's recounting of the final part of the story, it becomes clear that he is the enigmatic storyteller whose presence was hidden by third-person narration for most of the novel. Moreover, considering his 'profession', Charlwood suggests that it is impossible not to compare the young man to Charon; according to Greek mythology, he "ferries the newly deceased across the rivers of Styx and Acheron, and thus into Hades (the Underworld)" (35). This implication may signify that Axl and Beatrice have reached the end of their lives and will soon be guided to their final resting place.

Even though Ishiguro does not explicitly mention mythology, his casual use of specific mythological figures—such as the boatman—indicates that it probably inspired his ideas of forgetfulness and death in *The Buried Giant*. He explores the power of memory by focusing on the loss of memories and the desperation to remember as central themes. While memory loss may not seem like a terribly traumatic event, for every character in this novel, it is their purgatory. They struggle to grasp what and who they have forgotten, who they are, and whether their forgotten recollections are related to some evil deeds. The wizard Merlin's spell on the she-dragon Querig condemned the whole country to forgetfulness and, although this initially

appears to be a noble gesture, it results in profound suffering; people forget everything, which affects their mental state.

Furthermore, the narrator reveals that, as memories return, secrets resurface, substantially affecting relationships and stirring doubt and mistrust among friends and loved ones. Even though the characters wish to regain their lost past, especially the elderly couple, they fear the consequences of the knowledge they will have access to. Therefore, we can argue that Ishiguro's fantastic narrative articulates the following question: Does forgetting painful memories mean that we are going to be healed, or does it contribute to the growth of resentment and thirst for revenge? For much of the novel, the couple remains completely unaware of the profound losses that nearly tore them apart in the past. Characters in *The Buried Giant* also suffer from a loss of identity, similar to the protagonists in other novels under discussion in this paper. Beatrice and Axl cannot recall the essence of their personalities, how they met in the past or the nature of their relationship before their forgetfulness, which immediately casts a shadow on their bond as a married couple. By the end of the novel, the narrator reveals their marriage is marred with betrayal and mistrust, as well as the heart-wrenching loss of a child.

It is interesting that despite the loss of trust in their marriage in the past, Axl and Beatrice do not forget that they are spouses and that they have a child. Does this indicate a lingering love, or does it reveal a deeper hatred? Is their affection for each other stronger than the heartbreaking betrayal? Axl himself offers speculation on these questions: "Could it be our love would never have grown so strong down the years had the mist not robbed us the way it did? Perhaps it allowed old wounds to heal" (*The Buried Giant* 361). Their bond is beautifully elaborated in another quote: "God will know the slow tread of an old couple's love for each other, and understand how black shadows make part of its whole" (*The Buried Giant* 358). This insight perfectly explains how the dark and painful emotions stemming from betrayal eventually yielded to the strength of their love, helping them heal and become who they are

today. For Axl and Beatrice, love is the core of their identity; without it, their lives would be completely meaningless.

Sadly, just as they come to recognize how much they love and cherish each other, the novel culminates in yet another heartbreak - Beatrice dies. When Axl realises that she will pass away and he will be left alone, he begrudgingly accepts this lonely fate. His last words to her are a beautiful confession of his love: “Farewell, my one true love” (*The Buried Giant* 362). These words evoke deep sadness, reminding the reader that Axl is the one who loses the most. He is compelled to confront the bitter reality that their love has always been temporary, much like life itself, destined to drift away into the unknown.

## **Conclusion**

In this MA paper I have attempted to analyse issues of memory and loss in five selected novels written by Kazuo Ishiguro: *A Pale View of Hills*, *The Remains of the Day*, *When We Were Orphans*, *Never Let Me Go*, and *The Buried Giant*. The theories that I have applied in the analysis have been important for the exploration of the themes Ishiguro articulates in his works. Gedi and Elam conclude that collective memory is a myth because memories are personal for every individual and are part of their most private thoughts (47). Furthermore, Benjamin states that the notion of remembering should be considered as a moment of ‘reliving’, a natural process that guides one to the necessary recollection (319). On the other hand, Freud introduced the term forgetfulness as a normal, unavoidable occurrence that each individual has to experience. Moreover, during his study of childhood amnesia, he noticed that most of our childhood memories are probably fabricated and cannot be trusted (62).

In all the selected novels, the protagonists rely heavily on their memories, unable to stop reliving the past, which has ultimately led them to be unsure of the reliability of their

reminiscences. However, their memories also serve as a powerful source of healing from losses and traumas they have suffered. One of first issues I have explored is the reliability of the protagonists' memories. It has been concluded that all characters—Etsuko, Stevens, Christopher, Kathy, Axl, and Beatrice—are unreliable narrators, as they each admit to the fallibility of their recollections. However, since Axl and Beatrice are not the narrators of *The Buried Giant*, their story may be more reliable, as it is recounted through the lens of an unnamed narrator, whose perspective might be more objective than their own subjective memories. In *A Pale View of Hills*, Etsuko has shared her memories through alter ego personalities of Sachiko and Mariko because she has not fully accepted the reality of the tragic loss of her eldest daughter Keiko.

Stevens from *The Remains of the Day* has also emotionally detached himself from situations he describes as the narrator because he has always been more focused on duty and preservation of dignity than raw emotions. Furthermore, in *When We Were Orphans* and *Never Let Me Go*, Christopher and Kathy rely on their fabricated childhood memories for too long. It ultimately shatters their years-long beliefs about their identities and experiences. Finally, Axl and Beatrice from *The Buried Giant* are aware that their memories cannot be fully trusted due to the mist's influence, yet they still decide to rely on the fragments they have been able to retain in their minds. Nevertheless, despite the unreliability of each protagonist's recollections, it becomes clear how deeply they value their memories, which are essential to their identity and the sense of self.

This emphasis on memory has been particularly significant when examining the trauma and loss these characters experience. Regardless of how traumatic their pasts may be, they have managed to come to terms with it. Etsuko, Stevens, Christopher, Kathy, Axl, and Beatrice begin to heal when they realise no amount of regret or sadness will change their past or transform it into an idyllic version. Acceptance, no matter how painful, is the only way forward. In

conclusion, Ishiguro has masterfully dissected the concept of memory, revealing its complexities and deep impact on individuals. In his novels, memory is not only a recollection of the past; it serves as a ‘lens’ through which broader themes—such as identity, trauma, friendship, family, betrayal, love, forgiveness, and acceptance—are explored. Initially, these themes may seem subtle, but as readers delve deeper, they come to realise how central they are to Ishiguro’s storytelling. Ultimately, readers may find themselves relating to the characters more than expected, as Ishiguro’s portrayal of memory taps into universal human experiences.

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## SUMMARY

### *Memory and Loss in Kazuo Ishiguro's Works*

This MA thesis analyses themes of memory and loss in five selected novels of Kazuo Ishiguro: *Pale View of Hills*, *The Remains of the Day*, *When We Were Orphans*, *Never Let Me Go*, and *The Buried Giant*. Relying on theoretical framework focusing on memory and remembering, the thesis explores how memory functions and portrayals of its fragile nature in Ishiguro's novels. The analysis of the selected novels aims to demonstrate how unreliable memories can be and their profound impact on decision-making and healing after past trauma.

**Key words:** Kazuo Ishiguro, memory, loss, unreliable narrator, *A Pale View of Hills*, *The Remains of the Day*, *When We Were Orphans*, *Never Let Me Go*, *The Buried Giant*

**SAŽETAK*****Sjećanje i gubitak u djelima Kazua Ishigura***

Ovaj diplomski rad analizira teme sjećanja i gubitka kroz pet odabranih romana Kazua Ishigura: *Blijed pogled na bregove*, *Na kraju dana*, *Kad smo bili siročad*, *Nikad me ne ostavlja* i *Pokopani div*. Oslanjajući se na teorije o sjećanju i pamćenju, ovaj rad istražuje kako sjećanje funkcionira i prikazuje njegovu krhku prirodu u Ishigurovim romanima. Analiza odabranih romana nastoji prikazati nepouzdanost sjećanja te njihov snažan utjecaj na donošenje odluka i prebrođivanje trauma iz prošlosti.

**Ključne riječi:** Kazuo Ishiguro, sjećanje, gubitak, nepouzdan priповjedač, *Blijed pogled na bregove*, *Na kraju dana*, *Kad smo bili siročad*, *Nikad me ne ostavlja*, *Pokopani div*