

Ethics of Remembrance: Memory and Moral Responsibility in Kazuo Ishiguro's Works

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Abstract

Memory takes centre stage in the narrative world of Ishiguro's literature and is never a straightforward account of past experiences. On the contrary, in Ishiguro's literary world, memory is portrayed as a difficult, yet moral journey where characters confront themselves over past secrets, mistakes, and responsibilities. In the works of Ishiguro, we learn that memory is not a pristine lens through which one views an objective past, but a selective and ever-changing phenomenon shaped by emotion and suppression. In this work, the issue of morality connected with memory is analyzed within four novels: "Klara and the Sun," "A Pale View of Hills," "Never Let Me Go," and "The Remains of the Day." This work implies that the Ishiguro's characters not only become historians but also moral judges of their life choices. The use of the retrospective technique in their narration reveals the constant struggle between moral duty and self-justification. This study employs a comparative approach to illustrate how remembrance is less about nostalgic sentimentality than it is about self-scrutiny. The paper explains how Ishiguro elevates remembrance to an ethical necessity for dealing with the consequences of the past at both the personal and social level through his exploration of the link between memory and identity [1].

Keywords: Kazuo Ishiguro, Memory, Remembrance, Ethics, Moral Responsibility, Identity.

1. Introduction

One of the central themes in contemporary literature is the issue of the interaction between the human mind and the past. Apart from preserving one's individual experience, memory also has a great impact on identity, social relations, and moral consciousness. The author Kazuo Ishiguro chooses to take a moral point of view in analysing the psychology of memory which many other contemporary authors do not share. All his works suggest that memory and responsibility are closely connected because people cannot understand themselves without taking responsibility for their actions [1].

The storytelling style of Ishiguro is characterized by uncertainties, purposeful gaps, and broken memories in opposition to the straightforward story that tells an event in the order in which it occurred. Rarely do the narrators in his books reveal their certainty regarding the happenings. Instead, memories unfold slowly to expose many discrepancies between what the main characters believe at first and what they eventually have to accept. This style of storytelling makes the reader judge the accuracy of the memories presented in the book and the morality of the narrator's choices [1].

The hallmark of Ishiguro's prose is the fact that contemplation and recollection are always connected. More often than not, his heroes come back to those apparently insignificant situations that later take on moral significance. It is through the mundane conversations, missed turns, and hasty decisions taken without much thinking that the basis of their final confrontation with their guilt and moral responsibilities is created. Hence, memory comes to be depicted as a constant moral evaluation of oneself and not as an archeological search for facts [1].

This essay suggests that memory should not be seen as just a psychological function but rather as an ethical responsibility. The present research looks into the treatment of repentance, emotional hurt, and responsibility that the characters go through while constructing their personal history through the comparison of four major novels by the author. Moreover, the research shows that memories become really meaningful only when people have enough courage to face the truth instead of using the memories as justification for themselves. Ultimately, memory is described by Ishiguro as a continuous process of moral reflection that forms the conscience and identity of the person [1].

2. Literature Review

Memory has been recognized for a long time as one of the central thematic pillars in the works of Kazuo Ishiguro. According to the earliest criticism of Ishiguro's work, his narrators reconstruct history using their fragmented perceptions rather than objective facts [2]. This is an issue that makes memory in these texts flexible and dependent on psychological needs, thus creating difficulties in distinguishing fact from interpretation.

However, later studies took up the debate further by exploring the link between identity and memory. It was pointed out that Ishiguro's narrators derive their identity from the memory of their past experiences, not the present moment. Thus, by reflecting upon their memories, they change their identity, showing how memory is fluid, not fixed [3].

As for the more recent critical approaches, they emphasize the ethics of remembrance. Critics claim that in these novels, memories play a role far deeper than mere nostalgia, having an important relation to such concepts as empathy, responsibility, and ethics. The act of repressing memories is interpreted not only as a psychological act but also as an ethical one that affects relations with oneself and others [4].

Memory from the historical point of view is yet another area for academic investigation. As has been shown by critics, the memories in Ishiguro's novels often tend to reflect larger socio-historical trends, such as consequences of war, political changes, advances in technology, and cultural dislocation. Consequently, the individual experience gets easily integrated with the social experience, which proves that memory cannot be restricted to the individual [5].

Despite the contribution that the above-cited approaches have made to our understanding of Ishiguro's oeuvre, much of the currently published literature deals either with one concept only or with individual works of fiction in isolation from others. Few comparative analyses of the role of remembering as an unifying ethical issue are available. It seems therefore that a deeper study of the ethical aspect of memory within Ishiguro's complete oeuvre is required [5].

3. Research Gap

The most of literary criticism is associated with psychology-based perspectives or unreliable narration techniques, even though previous studies have demonstrated the importance of memory

for Ishiguro's works. However, there was not enough attention paid to the connection between moral obligation and remembering through the entire period of the author's life. Moreover, the combination of the ethics of memory used in such books as "The Remains of the Day," "Never Let Me Go," "A Pale View of Hills," and "Klara and the Sun" is unusual for one analysis [5].

Through the assertion that recollection is a deeply ethical process whereby characters reflect upon their past actions, accept blame for them, and reconstruct themselves, it becomes the aim of this research to plug this lacuna. In this paper, it will be demonstrated through the analysis of four major novels by Ishiguro that the author's approach to memory changes with time, but his ethics remain constant [6].

4. Objectives of the Study

The present study is guided by the following core objectives:

To study the representation of memory in the works by Kazuo Ishiguro [5].

To study the relationship between moral responsibility and recollection [5].

To understand the influence of memory on the moral character of a person [5].

To understand how the characters deal with sadness, silence, and shame by using their memories [5].

To compare and contrast *The Remains of the Day*, *Never Let Me Go*, *A Pale View of Hills*, and *Klara and the Sun* from the point of view of moral aspects of memory [5].

5. Research Questions

This research seeks to address several primary questions:

In the selected writings by Kazuo Ishiguro [5], how is memory portrayed?

Why can remembering be considered a moral responsibility [5]?

How can memory and forgetting affect an individual's sense of self and morality [5]?

How the memories of individuals are related to history and society at large [5]?

What elements in memory as practiced by Ishiguro are alike and dissimilar to those in the comparable texts [5]?

6. Research Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative, descriptive, and comparative research method. *The Remains of the Day* (1989), *Never Let Me Go* (2005), *A Pale View of Hills* (1982), and *Klara and the Sun* (2021) are among the several well-known books of Kazuo Ishiguro which this study is grounded upon a detailed textual analysis of. These specific books were selected because they represent various phases in the writer's career, but at the same time emphasize memory and moral responsibility [5].

The research is based mostly on careful reading of the texts, enhanced by academic criticism. In particular, character development, narratological techniques, symbolism, and themes will be analysed in order to demonstrate how memory affects moral decision-making. A comparative approach will be employed to emphasize repeated moral streams in the novels without separate analysis of each book [6].

Furthermore, the study makes use of information drawn from contemporary literary theory, memory studies, and ethics in the creation of a comprehensive interpretation of Ishiguro's work. The interdisciplinary approach allows one to have a deeper understanding of the connection between memory and ethics [6].

7. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical base for this work is grounded in the idea that memory, while being a psychological phenomenon, is also an ethical phenomenon. Modern theories of memory imply that memory is not merely replaying of past events but rather an extremely important tool of interpreting experiences and making judgments about one's actions in the past. This way, remembering is directly connected with accountability and ethics [6].

Also, theories on collective memory that postulate that wider social and historical contexts play an important role in personal experiences find a place in this research. Memories act as a vital connection between the private and public spheres because personal memories often reflect wider social realities [7].

Trauma theory provides another important critical framework with which to negotiate the fractured narratives of Ishiguro. Traumatic episodes seldom appear in a linear, sequential fashion, rather, they are expressed in hesitant, indirect, fragmented memories. It is through this narrative rhythm that the complex ethical nuances of the novels of Ishiguro are sustained [8].

Together, these approaches create a firm foundation upon which to view remembrance as an active process of moral self-examination instead of a literary tool. This allows this study to explore how Ishiguro's characters struggle with the burden of responsibility in remembering their pasts [8].

8. Ethics of Remembrance in The Remains of the Day

One of the most impressive accounts of the moral nature of remembering is contained in *The Remains of the Day* by Kazuo Ishiguro. The story is related by Stevens, an English butler who wanders through the countryside and meditates about his years of service at Darlington Hall. While the account initially appears to be a simple reminiscence about his professional career, it gradually turns out to be a moral inquiry into the life of Stevens himself. The reflections of the protagonist reveal the fact that remembering is a moral challenge to decisions which were considered immutable norms, rather than merely a way of retrieving history. Throughout the story, Stevens utilizes the process of remembrance as a way of looking into the moral and human consequences of absolute and unquestioned devotion [9].

The memories of Stevens are highly regulated and filtered. His narrative starts with him being the model of a perfect servant whose achievement is the ability to keep himself professionally composed. Nevertheless, with the increase in complexity of his thoughts, there appear certain discrepancies between his ideal image and the real situation. Remorse, repressed feelings, and lack of moral awareness are revealed through minor details [9]. In other words, Ishiguro manages to show that memory is not an absolute concept but, on the contrary, something dynamic that will change when a person begins to reflect upon his or her past in the light of ethics [9].

Personal responsibility is the key issue raised by the author. Stevens claims throughout the entire novel that he had only one job – to do everything he could to serve his master well, and there were no other questions to ask. Yet, as his memory grows, this shield slowly falls away [10]. The man is associated with political connections which eventually turn out to be morally dangerous because of his unwavering loyalty to his master [10]. Ishiguro shows us that an excessive devotion to the job description might take away one's moral responsibility [10].

Stevens's reminiscences contain yet another aspect of morality because of Stevens's connections with Miss Kenton. In the course of discharging his professional responsibilities, Stevens often disregards the intimacy that develops in the process of their meetings [10]. This recollection comes

back much later in life in the form of a sharp reminder of irrevocable loss rather than in the form of warm nostalgia [10]. Later, Stevens realizes that his greatest failures happened not because of some dramatic actions but rather because of daily instances in which he preferred emotional inactivity [10]. In this way, Ishiguro shows that remembering is the process of sorrow; thus, moral responsibility includes human connections along with civic ones [10].

This idea is emphasized by the structure of the novel. Stevens becomes self-aware through careful and reflective thinking, not through an exciting revelation [11]. Along with the narrator, the reader has to find out the moral implications of the occurrences that take place owing to his broken and unsure memories [11]. Such an approach compels the reader to learn how memory hides, changes, and finally reveals the painful truth, thus making it a moral act of reading [11]. The true value of memory is in being honest about one's mistakes and failures [11].

Finally, *The Remains of the Day* can be considered an example of memory being described as the constant act of self-moral examination. Even though Stevens cannot alter the course of history, his readiness to confront it allows him to realize the awful effects of moral laziness, emotional coldness, and blind devotion [11]. In opposition to the notion of self-protection, Ishiguro argues that the act of remembering requires complete honesty [11]. The book shows that memory can have a moral meaning only when individuals take responsibility for their previous life and do not resort to comforting illusions [11].

9. Ethics of Remembrance in *Never Let Me Go*

Kazuo Ishiguro broadens the moral scope of memory by placing it in a civilization that is geared towards controlling every aspect of life in *Never Let Me Go*. The novel focuses on how memory helps individuals retain their humanity and dignity despite the surrounding conditions unlike *The Remains of the Day*, where memory highlights the results of poor personal decisions [12]. The narrative, which is delivered by Kathy H., uses fragmented memories about her childhood days in Hailsham, relationship with Tommy and Ruth, and her eventual acceptance of her situation [12]. In the novel, memory acts as a moral activity affirming the value of existence in an antagonistic world [12].

Unlike protesting through noise, Kathy resorts to silent and contemplative storytelling. She looks back into apparently insignificant elements such as schoolyard games, idle chatter, collecting, and relationships [12]. Nevertheless, as the story unfolds, the memories gain increasing moral importance as they contain experiences that the external world tends to ignore [12]. According to Ishiguro, memories affirm lives that have been considered expendable [12]. To Kathy, memory becomes a silent protest against a world where people are reduced to mere biological material and not sentient individuals [12].

One of the elements of this moral philosophy is friendship. The thoughts of Kathy are continuously revolving around Ruth and Tommy, proving that it is experience, not solitude, which forms one's sense of self [13]. In cases where their relations are marked by conflicts, jealousy and misunderstandings, Kathy still perceives these relations with grace and not grudgingly [13]. By being ready to experience both joy and sorrow from these relationships, Kathy proves that true remembering is impossible without empathy [13]. Kathy tries to understand, rather than judge, the emotional limitations that have prompted such people to make mistake [13].

The association between memory and truth is also brought into question in the story. Throughout the story, Kathy learns to accept the truth of her destiny as a clone [13]. She reflects on how her point of view had been skewed because of the lack of knowledge she received at an early age instead of violently resisting [13]. It is Ishiguro who shows us that ethical maturity is usually achieved incrementally through memory rather than through epiphany [13]. The memories of Kathy reveal that humans usually understand the ethical importance of the event much later after it takes place, which explains the importance of memory in dealing with repressive social institutions and oneself [13].

Another essential aspect of ethics concerns the importance of the ordinary. It is deliberate on Ishiguro's part to emphasize ordinary occurrences, memories from childhood, and human connections rather than big events [14]. In doing so, these ordinary occurrences contradict an ideology that values people only for their usefulness [14]. Through the preservation of these occurrences in one's memory, Kathy proves that love, friendship, and common history have ethical relevance irrespective of recognition from authorities [14]. Hence, remembering acts as a bulwark against the erasure of human dignity by institutions [14].

In conclusion, *Never Let Me Go* reveals memory not as a way out of misery but as a celebration of humanity. Despite the fact that Kathy does not have any opportunity to change the predetermined course of her life, her memories capture the richness of a life that is being denied by the society [14]. Despite total destruction, the author reveals how remembering helps create moral significance, which takes into account such human qualities as connections, empathy, and experience [14]. The novel proves through the voice of the narrator that acknowledging one's own and other people's humanity is a crucial step towards morality [14].

10. Ethics of Remembrance in A Pale View of Hills

The novelist, through his first novel titled *A Pale View of Hills*, investigates the hidden tunnels of memory through the character Etsuko, an Asian woman living in post-war Britain but whose life is reflective of the period before the outbreak of the Second World War in Nagasaki [15]. In the novel, the role played by memory is investigated not as a form of a psychological mechanism for reconstructing history but as a shield for ingrained traumas and guilt [15]. The memories of Etsuko have become legendary because of their uncanny similarities and displacement, which makes it hard to separate her memories from those of Sachiko, her brutal friend in Japan [15]. According to Ishiguro, memory walking up against intolerable pain—like the suicide of Etsuko's daughter and the painful death of her first family—memory becomes a difficult balancing act between telling and self-protection [15].

Repressed responsibility is an important concept in relation to the ethical aspect of the novel. Etsuko manages to pass on to Sachiko her own maternal failings, choices, and guilt through narrative displacement [16].

The narrator realizes that Etsuko's narration is not entirely reliable as her memories start surfacing. Considering the clear similarities between Sachiko and herself, there is a chance that Sachiko acts as a projection for Etsuko to indirectly deal with her past trauma [16]. In an attempt to separate herself from feelings of responsibility and guilt, she projects her painful memories on another individual. This narrative ambiguity serves Ishiguro's purpose of demonstrating that the process of remembering is often distorted by the need to protect oneself from the unbearable emotions rather

than by the intention to deceive others. It turns out, however, that just remembering these events proves the impossibility of forgetting one's moral obligations [16].

Another aspect where the book examines the relationship between parenthood and memory is that of the death of Etsuko's older daughter. The suicide of Etsuko's older daughter, Keiko, has a huge influence on her reflections. Everything she remembers is colored by a feeling of grief and a maternal responsibility despite the fact that she talks little about her grief to others [17]. As she reflects on whether her choices had led to the isolation of her daughter, her memories of post-war Nagasaki, her first marriage, and her leaving Japan gain an ethical significance. According to Ishiguro, despite the unwillingness to speak out about one's guilt, people do so through memories [17].

The historical background of the novel also represents an important ethical issue. In the aftermath of the nuclear bombing, the memories of Nagasaki are described in terms of a moral landscape created through destruction, loss, and doubt instead of mere background information [17]. Personal recollections are inevitably connected to wider historical facts, and the recollections of Etsuko embody the psychological impact of national recovery from a devastating experience. Through linking personal recollection with communal memory, Ishiguro proves that ethics also include responsibilities connected to historical facts that affect people's lives [17].

This is reinforced through the fragmented style of the book. The story lacks any chronology since the events happen through interruptions, contradictions, and incomplete conversations [18]. This story is an example of how the process of traumatic remembering works where one cannot express themselves when they have experienced some unpleasant things. Therefore, the reader has to work on their own to make sense of the story, thus making the interpretation process ethical. Ishiguro asks his audience to realize that truth lies in silence [18].

Ultimately, *A Pale View of Hills* portrays memory as an arduous task of balancing self-interest, guilt, and the truth. In spite of Etsuko's reluctance to accept personal responsibility for her actions, her incessant dwelling on the past indicates the ethical component necessary in memory. According to Ishiguro, even though individuals have the ability to change or forget the painful memories, they cannot escape their inherent moral implications. The novel illustrates the fact that remembering is an ongoing effort of dealing with loss, assuming responsibility, and achieving emotional reconciliation through Etsuko's hesitant account of events [18].

11. Ethics of Remembrance in Klara and the Sun

Kazuo Ishiguro illustrates that memory and moral responsibility do not belong exclusively to people in *Klara and the Sun* by extending his analysis of memory beyond humanity and into artificial intelligence. Klara is an artificial companion who looks at the world around her with acute attention and learns about compassion, love, and sacrifice over time. Klara's memories are affected by hope and dedication, whereas the memories of other heroines have been affected by guilt. These memories suggest that true concern for others is what causes people to remember ethically [19].

Moral identity of Klara is dependent on her observations. She records with great precision all the emotions, conversations, and actions of people in her surrounding environment, specifically Josie and her family. It is through these memories that she is able to understand complex human relationships and make decisions to place the interests of other people above her own [19].

According to Ishiguro, memories are important because they drive compassionate action, not merely for their own sake as passive reminders of events in the past.

The willingness of Klara to sacrifice her life in order to make sure that Josie is happy is one of the main ethical issues in the novel. All her recollections confirm her conviction that it is necessary to be selfless in order to experience real love. Her decisions are dictated not by selfish interests but compassion despite her limited understanding of the world [20]. Ishiguro destroys the myth about morality being unique to humans by Klara. He proves that the ability to respect other people and build meaningful relationships with them owing to memories is what makes morality possible.

Issues pertaining to the human essence and technology are also discussed in this book. Through Klara's memories, readers are encouraged to rethink their notions of being human with artificial intelligence increasingly becoming an integral part of the society. She possesses emotions in her recollections that many human characters neglect, suggesting that memory and empathy are more essential than genetic heritage [20]. Ultimately, Klara and the Sun illustrates how memory becomes a moral power, which promotes sacrifice, empathy, and optimism. No matter whether it is the humans or the robots who remember, Ishiguro concludes that the process of remembrance gains its moral significance if it promotes human connections and encourages compassion [20].

12. Comparative Analysis and Discussion

A comparison of *The Remains of the Day*, *Never Let Me Go*, *A Pale View of Hills*, and *Klara and the Sun* shows that Kazuo Ishiguro's novels share the ethical idea of remembrance. All the novels have a theme where memory is presented as an activity wherein individuals reflect on their actions, associations, and responsibilities. However, while all the novels present different settings, narrators, and periods in history, the concept of memory is the same throughout Ishiguro's work. In his novels, memory is shown as a reflective activity that changes identities and ethical awareness [21]. Each of the four characters represents memory on a different level. Etsuko is struggling with pain and unrecognized guilt, Stevens is dealing with the consequences of blind allegiance and self-control, Kathy tries to preserve the dignity of those whose lives are at risk of being erased from society, and Klara converts memory into a sacrificial process. However, despite their differences, all four characters discover that true self-knowledge is only possible through confronting the hard truths [21].

The narrative techniques used by Ishiguro is another point of comparison. Memory is complex in its construction and is shown by the fragmented narratives, unreliable narrators, silences, and revelations in the novels. Through these narrative techniques, the author ensures that judgment of the characters' actions becomes an integral part of the act of reading [22]. Furthermore, personal memories link one's identity with the community's responsibility through engagement with social realities.

Thus, it can be argued from the comparative analysis that remembering is not just nostalgia but also a kind of morality that helps to be responsible and empathetic, and it helps with self-reflection as well. Memory is very crucial for the development of an ethical awareness in different time periods including futuristic, as it makes people realize the importance of their relationships with others as well as the repercussions of their actions [22].

13. Conclusion

Memory and its ethical considerations in four of the important novels of Kazuo Ishiguro including *The Remains of the Day*, *Never Let Me Go*, *A Pale View of Hills*, and *Klara and the Sun* have been examined in the present study. With the help of a comparative analysis, the study proves that memory holds great importance in the literary imagination of Ishiguro and is an important ethical practice and a psychological activity. His characters revisit the past in order to come to terms with their shame, evaluate their choices, keep strong connections, and reform themselves ethically [23]. In spite of the fact that the selected books are placed in different historical and cultural settings, the analysis proves that ethical duty is invariably influenced by the act of remembering. Etsuko suffers from unresolved grief and accountability; Kathy stresses the importance of being human through memory; Stevens comes to realize the consequences of thoughtless dedication; Klara demonstrates the quality of selflessness and empathy in her memories. All the aforementioned pieces of writing prove that memory acquires moral significance only when people are ready to confront challenging truths instead of resorting to forgetfulness. [23].

Furthermore, the fragmented nature of Ishiguro's narrative structures reinforces the concept that truth is seldom an absolute or complete one. The reader needs to interpret ethically alongside the narrator through hesitations, silences, conflicts, and realization. This literary device underscores the continued influence of the past on the present, and cements the relationship between memory and morality [24].

Finally, Kazuo Ishiguro draws the conclusion that memory is an important foundation of moral conscience. Through his works, he implies that interaction with memory, conscience, and empathy forms identities at the individual and collective levels. The author gives an eternal philosophical contemplation of the human essence, which states that knowledge about one's self depends on one's courage to remember. Only after transforming memory into a moral activity can one achieve this goal. This moral perspective of his works remains their key contribution to English literature today [24].

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