
**THE ENIGMA OF IDENTITY AND MEMORY: UNRAVELLING
KAZUO ISHIGURO'S LITERARY THREADS**

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Abstract:

Kazuo Ishiguro, a masterful weaver of narratives, defies easy categorisation. Born in Nagasaki, Japan, in 1954, he migrated to Britain at the tender age of five. His dual cultural heritage, Japanese roots intertwined with British sensibilities, has profoundly shaped his writing. Ishiguro's prose transcends borders, weaving intricate tales that resonate with readers across continents. His journey from Nagasaki to England mirrors the themes he explores: displacement, memory, and the search for identity. In this research article, we delve into the psychological depths of three of his works: "A Pale View of Hills," "The Remains of the Day," and "Never Let Me Go." These novels, though distinct in setting and narrative, share a common exploration of the human condition, revealing the fragility of selfhood and the haunting echoes of memory.

Keywords: Kazuo Ishiguro, identity, memory, psychological exploration, human condition

Introduction:

Kazuo Ishiguro's literary prowess is not merely a product of his imagination but a profound reflection of his own life experiences and cultural duality. Born in Japan and raised in Britain, Ishiguro's work is a testament to the complexities of identity and memory, themes that are deeply rooted in his own journey between two worlds. His narratives often unfold in the quiet interstices of life, where characters grapple with the weight of their past and the elusive nature of truth. Ishiguro's writing style is characterized by a delicate subtlety, a narrative restraint that belies the depth of emotion and introspection within his characters. This understated approach allows readers to immerse themselves in the psychological landscapes he paints, finding universal resonance in the personal struggles of his protagonists.

In Ishiguro's narratives, the exploration of identity and memory often takes

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center stage. His characters are frequently caught in a struggle to reconcile their past with their present, a journey that is as much about self-discovery as it is about the search for truth. The protagonists in his novels, such as Stevens in “The Remains of the Day” or Kathy in “Never Let Me Go”, are often haunted by their pasts, their memories serving as both a source of comfort and a reminder of their regrets and unfulfilled desires. This exploration of memory and identity is not just a narrative device, but a reflection of Ishiguro’s own experiences of cultural duality, having been born in Japan and raised in Britain.

His works also delve into the enigmatic nature of memory and how it shapes our identities. His characters often grapple with the reliability of their own memories, questioning the accuracy of their recollections and the narratives they’ve constructed about their lives. This theme is particularly evident in “A Pale View of Hills” and “An Artist of the Floating World”, where the protagonists’ memories are fragmented and unreliable, mirroring the human tendency to remember selectively and subjectively. This exploration of the enigma of memory serves to highlight the fluidity of identity, suggesting that our sense of self is a constantly evolving construct shaped by our memories and experiences.

Ishiguro’s literary prowess lies not just in his exploration of complex themes, but also in his distinctive narrative style. His prose is marked by a quiet subtlety and restraint, allowing the emotional depth of his characters to unfold gradually and impactfully. This understated approach, coupled with his skillful use of unreliable narrators, serves to draw readers into the psychological landscapes of his characters, encouraging them to engage with the narratives on a deeply personal level. Through his exploration of identity, memory, and the human condition, Ishiguro weaves intricate literary threads that resonate universally, making him one of the most celebrated authors of our time.

His novels, particularly “A Pale View of Hills,” “The Remains of the Day,” and “Never Let Me Go,” are intricate tapestries of human experience, exploring the interplay between personal history and broader societal expectations. His characters are often caught in the tides of change, their identities shaped and reshaped by the forces of history, culture, and memory. Through these stories, Ishiguro examines the fluidity of selfhood, challenging the notion of a fixed identity. His works invite contemplation on the ways in which our memories and the narratives we construct about ourselves inform our sense of identity. The subtlety of Ishiguro’s prose offers a mirror to the reader, reflecting the shared human quest for understanding and meaning amidst the ephemeral nature of life.

The thematic core of Ishiguro’s oeuvre is the quest for identity amidst the labyrinth of memory. His characters navigate the murky waters of recollection, often confronting the dissonance between remembered experiences and present realities. This exploration is not just a narrative device but a philosophical inquiry into the

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essence of being. Ishiguro's fiction transcends the boundaries of genre, blending elements of realism with speculative fiction to probe the depths of the human psyche. The recurring motifs of loss, longing, and the search for authenticity are woven into the fabric of his narratives, creating a rich, multidimensional space where readers can explore the enigma of memory and identity. Ishiguro's literary threads are not only a reflection of his own bicultural tapestry but also an invitation to unravel the complexities of our own stories.

Kazuo Ishiguro's prose is akin to a delicate dance, a waltz between the mundane and the profound. Unlike a boisterous orchestra, he doesn't shout; he whispers. Each sentence is meticulously constructed, every word chosen with care. His characters, whether Stevens the butler or Etsuko in Nagasaki, grapple with unspoken emotions. And so does his writing. The unsaid—the gaps between words, holds immense power. It's in these silences that readers find echoes of their own experiences. Ishiguro's restraint is his strength. He doesn't overexplain; he trusts readers to fill in the blanks. His narratives are like half-finished paintings, waiting for us to add our colours. The specificity of his details, the way a butler polishes silverware, the sound of footsteps on gravel, becomes universal. Through the particular, he invites us to explore the depths of our own consciousness. Imagining Ishiguro's sentences as notes on a piano. Each one resonates, creating a melody that lingers. His novels span diverse worlds, from post-war Nagasaki to the hallowed halls of an English manor, from dystopian institutions to ancient Japan. They do resonate universally through specificity. His characters' minutiae, the way Miss Kenton arranges flowers, Kathy's memories of Hailsham—become portals. We step through and find our own memories waiting. Ishiguro's genius lies in making the particular universal. His novels aren't just about them; they're about all of us, our longings, regrets, and quiet hopes.

Ishiguro once said, "For me, there's always been a big overlap between fiction and song." His style bears witness to this harmony. His intimate, first-person quality, like a singer performing to an audience, carries over from songs to novels. Each paragraph is a stanza, and the rhythm of his prose lingers. His characters hum their own tunes, the butler's loyalty, Kathy's acceptance of fate. And we, as readers, join the chorus. Ishiguro's novels aren't just stories; they're symphonies. They invite us to listen closely, to hear the echoes of our own lives in the spaces between the notes. In Ishiguro's world, memory is both a gift and a burden. His characters navigate the labyrinth of recollection, confronting dissonance between remembered experiences and present realities. Their struggles mirror our own, the elusive quest for authenticity, the search for meaning amidst fleeting memories.

With a gentle touch and nuanced subtlety, Ishiguro beckons us to delve into the depths of the human psyche. His narratives serve as reflective surfaces, echoing our collective desires, our anxieties, and our delicate sense of selfhood. As we

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navigate through his novels, we encounter the delicate nature of memory, the gravity of decisions, and the profound influence of identity. Ishiguro's literary tapestry unravels the intricacies of our personal narratives, prompting us to probe the hidden recesses of our consciousness. Amidst the tranquil spaces of Ishiguro's prose, we discover resonances of our own existence. His novels persist because they articulate the universal human experience - the mystery of memory, the rhythm of identity, and the silent symphony of existence.

Ishiguro's novels are not just stories; they are symphonies of existence. Each character, each narrative thread, contributes to a larger melody that speaks to the human condition. His characters, often ordinary individuals grappling with extraordinary circumstances, offer a poignant exploration of life's complexities. From the butler Stevens' struggle with duty and love in "The Remains of the Day" to Kathy's confrontation with mortality and loss in "Never Let Me Go", Ishiguro's novels underscore the profound and often painful realities of existence.

Identity, in Ishiguro's works, is not a static concept but a rhythm, a melody that changes and evolves over time. His characters often find themselves at the crossroads of past and present, their identities shaped by their memories and experiences. This exploration of identity is not just a narrative device, but a reflection of Ishiguro's own experiences of cultural duality. His characters' journeys echo his own journey between two worlds, offering a nuanced exploration of identity in a globalised world.

Memory, in Ishiguro's novels, is an enigma, a puzzle that his characters strive to piece together. His narratives often underscore the unreliability of memory, highlighting the subjective nature of our recollections. This exploration of memory serves to underscore the fluidity of identity, suggesting that our sense of self is a constantly evolving construct shaped by our memories and experiences. Through his exploration of the mystery of memory, Ishiguro invites us to reflect on our own memories, urging us to question the narratives we construct about our lives.

In "A Pale View of Hills," Ishiguro transports us to post-World War II Nagasaki, where Etsuko, a Japanese woman now living alone in England, grapples with the recent suicide of her daughter, Keiko. As she retreats into the past, we relive one particular hot summer, a season of both hope and despair, when Etsuko and her friends struggled to rebuild their lives after the war. The river's flow mirrors the ebb and flow of memory, revealing the complexities of motherhood, loss, and the lingering impact of historical events. Etsuko's narrative unfolds like a delicate origami, each fold revealing fragments of her past. Her memories are not linear; they ripple and intersect, much like the river that winds through Nagasaki. As she grapples with Keiko's suicide, we witness the fragility of memory, the way it clings to us, refusing to be neatly categorized. Ishiguro invites us to question: What shapes our identity? Is it the sum of our experiences, or the gaps in our recollections? Etsuko's journey becomes a mirror for our own musings on selfhood and the enigma of

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memory.

Within the novel's quiet moments lie profound truths. Etsuko's interactions with Sachiko, the neglectful mother, reveal the unspoken ache of motherhood. Sachiko's detachment from Mariko mirrors Etsuko's own struggles—both women navigating the complexities of love, loss, and longing. The gaps in their conversations echo louder than words, leaving us haunted by what remains unsaid. Ishiguro's prose is a masterstroke, painting emotions in the negative spaces, where silence speaks volumes. Nagasaki, scarred by war, becomes a character in itself. The city's ruins seep into Etsuko's memories, blurring the boundaries between past and present. The atomic shadows linger, whispering secrets to those who listen. Ishiguro deftly explores how historical events shape individual lives, the trauma that seeps into our bones, the way it taints our perceptions. Etsuko's journey becomes a microcosm of collective memory, a testament to resilience and survival amidst devastation.

As we delve into the intricate narrative of "A Pale View of Hills," we uncover connections that span generations. The void left by Keiko echoes through the ages, linking Etsuko's history to Niki's ambiguous future. The invisible ties, the decisions taken, the quietude maintained, bind us irrevocably to our origins. Ishiguro prompts us to realize that memory is not a straight line; it's a complex weave crafted by numerous hands. Perhaps, by following these threads, we discover comfort, a means to span the gulf between grief and optimism. Adding to this, Ishiguro's narrative subtly underscores the impact of choices and silences on our lives. These elements, often overlooked, shape our identities and our understanding of the world. The characters' journey through their past, their attempts to make sense of their memories, reflect our own struggles with understanding our histories. Ishiguro's narrative, thus, becomes a mirror reflecting our own experiences.

Additionally, the portrayal of memory as a mosaic implies a joint endeavour, a common past that goes beyond individual experiences. This perspective invites us to consider our own memories as part of a larger narrative, a shared human experience. It is in this shared experience that we find solace, a sense of belonging that helps us navigate our own uncertainties. The exploration of loss and hope in Ishiguro's narrative offers a poignant commentary on the human condition. The characters' experiences of loss, their search for hope, resonate with our own experiences. Through his narrative, Ishiguro invites us to confront our own losses, to seek hope amidst despair, and to find meaning in our experiences. His narrative, thus, serves as a testament to the resilience of the human spirit in the face of adversity.

In the poignant novel "The Remains of the Day", Ishiguro invites us into the world of Stevens, an English butler. Set against the backdrop of post-war England, Stevens embarks on a reflective road trip to revisit Miss Kenton, the former housekeeper of Darlington Hall. Through flashbacks, we witness Stevens' life during and just after World War II. His unwavering loyalty to Lord Darlington shapes his

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identity, while missed opportunities and suppressed emotions haunt him. The grandeur of elaborate dinner parties and the elegant personages who graced Darlington Hall reveal both the splendour and the underlying melancholy of a bygone era. It is a story primarily about regret: throughout his life, Stevens puts his absolute trust and devotion in a man who makes drastic mistakes. In the totality of his professional commitment, Stevens fails to pursue the one woman with whom he could have had a fulfilling and loving relationship.

Stevens, our unassuming butler, dons a mask of impeccable service. His attention to detail is legendary, yet beneath this facade lies a labyrinth of suppressed emotions. As he embarks on his road trip, retracing the past, we glimpse the cracks in his stoic demeanour. Stevens is an unreliable narrator, his memories biased and selective. Perhaps he deliberately mis-remembers, crafting a narrative that casts him in a better light. His loyalty to Lord Darlington becomes both armour and prison, a choice that shapes his very identity. But what remains hidden in the folds of his servitude? The enigma of memory, like Darlington's grand estate, holds secrets that Stevens guards fiercely.

Miss Kenton, the former housekeeper, haunts Stevens. Their relationship dances on the precipice of missed opportunities. Beneath the polished silverware and starched linens, their unspoken connection lingers. She is the woman he could have loved—a chance lost in the corridors of Darlington Hall. Their conversations, laden with subtext, echo louder than the clinking teacups. Ishiguro invites us to ponder: What if Stevens had dared to pursue love alongside duty? The remains of their unspoken words linger, like dust settling on forgotten memories.

In the aftermath of war, England is in the throes of transformation, the once formidable aristocracy now a fading echo of its former glory. Darlington Hall, a symbol of past privilege, stands as a mute observer to the changing times. A new class, wealthy and influential, emerges, while noble titles gradually lose their significance. Stevens, the steadfast butler, clings to the old ways, even as the world around him evolves. The remnants of a past era reverberate through the grandeur of dinner parties and whispered conversations. Yet, beneath the glittering chandeliers, a sense of regret lingers. Ishiguro crafts a narrative of dwindling nobility, a place where loyalty meets loss. The vestiges of a bygone era slip through Stevens' grasp, much like grains of sand in an hourglass. As Stevens reconnects with Miss Kenton, their meeting is akin to a subtle ballet. Unspoken words, unexpressed feelings. The road lies open before him, a symbol of life's untrodden paths. In moments of solitude, he grapples with the pain of what might have been. The remnants of his allegiance to Lord Darlington weigh heavy on his conscience, and the road murmurs a question: Is redemption still within reach? Ishiguro leaves us pondering a poignant query: Can we rewrite the chapters of our own history, or are we eternally tethered to the consequences of our choices?

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Ishiguro's narrative subtly underscores the impact of choices and silences on our lives. These elements, often overlooked, shape our identities and our understanding of the world. The characters' journey through their past, their attempts to make sense of their memories, reflect our own struggles with understanding our histories. Ishiguro's narrative, thus, becomes a mirror reflecting our own experiences. Furthermore, the concept of memory as a mosaic implies a joint endeavor, a common past that goes beyond individual experiences. This perspective invites us to consider our own memories as part of a larger narrative, a shared human experience. It is in this shared experience that we find solace, a sense of belonging that helps us navigate our own uncertainties. The exploration of loss and hope in Ishiguro's narrative offers a poignant commentary on the human condition. The characters' experiences of loss, their search for hope, resonate with our own experiences. Through his narrative, Ishiguro invites us to confront our own losses, to seek hope amidst despair, and to find meaning in our experiences. His narrative, thus, serves as a testament to the resilience of the human spirit in the face of adversity.

In the haunting dystopian novel "Never Let Me Go", Ishiguro transports us to an alternate England of the late 1990s. Here, ordinary citizens' lives are prolonged through a state-sanctioned program of human cloning. The clones, referred to as students, grow up in special institutions away from the outside world. As young adults, they begin to donate their vital organs. Kathy, our narrator, has been a carer for nearly twelve years, tending to those who have not yet begun the donation process. The clones continue to donate organs until they "complete," a euphemism for death after the donation of three or four organs. Kathy's nonlinear narration takes us through her memories of Hailsham, an elite boarding school where she grew up alongside her friends Ruth and Tommy. Their lives are intertwined by fate, and their shared experiences reveal the fragility of existence, the inevitability of loss, and the haunting echoes of their purpose.

At its core, "Never Let Me Go" grapples with the fragility of existence. The clones—Kathy, Tommy, and Ruth, live within the confines of Hailsham, a seemingly idyllic boarding school. Their lives are predetermined: they will grow up, become carers, and eventually donate their organs until they "complete." Yet, despite this grim fate, they experience emotions akin to "normal" humans—love, resentment, sadness, and joy. Ishiguro masterfully weaves their inner conflicts, revealing their struggle to maintain hope and find meaning in a world where their purpose is preordained.

The novel's title, "Never Let Me Go," encapsulates the characters' desperate plea to hold on. It's both a cry for connection and a demand for permanence. Kathy clings to her memories as a way of preserving what she has lost, the faces, the laughter, the fleeting moments. But these memories are fragmented, incomplete, much like the lives of the clones themselves. The title echoes through the corridors

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of Hailsham, resonating with the unspoken longing for something more, something beyond their predetermined fate.

Art becomes a powerful motif, a form of resistance against their grim reality. Madame collects the students' artwork, and Kathy and Tommy, driven by curiosity, seek to understand why. Their exploration leads them to question their purpose, to resist the inevitable. Tommy's temper tantrums reveal his sensitive nature—he grapples with the unfairness of their existence. Ruth, on the other hand, prefers denial, weaving fantasies to shield herself from the truth. The art they create becomes a silent rebellion, a testament to their humanity, even as they march toward their own demise. Kathy's nonlinear narration takes us back to Hailsham, where she, Ruth, and Tommy form an intricate triangle of emotions. Kathy secretly loves Tommy, and their bond transcends friendship. But Ruth, too, is part of this delicate web. Their love is unspoken, their desires suppressed. Ishiguro explores the ache of missed opportunities, the love that could have blossomed if not for their predetermined paths. Their shared memories, laughter in the dorms, whispered secrets, linger like shadows, haunting them as they face their inevitable fate.

Beyond the personal struggles, "Never Let Me Go" raises profound ethical questions. The clones exist solely for organ donation, their lives commodified. Ishiguro compels us to confront the morality of scientific advancement—how far should we go in playing "the role of God"? The chilling reality of Hailsham forces us to examine our own humanity, empathy, and the value we place on life. As Kathy tends to her fellow donors, we witness the resilience of the human spirit, even in the face of a predetermined end. Their search for connection, their defiance, and their art become a poignant testament to the indomitable human will. As Kathy's memories weave through time, we realize that the echoes of Hailsham, the unfulfilled love, and the moral quandaries linger. Ishiguro leaves us with a haunting question: Can hope survive in a world where destiny is etched in our very cells? "Never Let Me Go" is a symphony of longing, a plea for permanence, and a reminder that even in the face of inevitability, our humanity persists.

Ishiguro's novels transcend mere storytelling; they become mirrors reflecting our own struggles with identity and memory. As readers, we navigate the labyrinthine corridors of the human psyche, seeking solace in the delicate threads that bind us to our past and shape our future. In these narratives, we find not only the characters' reflections but also our own, inviting us to ponder the complexities of existence and the indelible imprints of memory. Its significance in the contemporary world: In today's fast-paced, interconnected society, Ishiguro's exploration of memory and selfhood remains relevant. As technology accelerates, we grapple with questions of identity, authenticity, and the impact of our choices. His novels serve as cautionary tales, urging us to pause, reflect, and consider the echoes of our own lives. In a world where memory is digitized and identity is fluid, Ishiguro's timeless themes resonate,

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a reminder that beneath the illusion of connection lies an abyss waiting to be explored.

In these narratives, we find not only the characters' reflections but also our own. Ishiguro invites us to ponder the complexities of existence and the indelible imprints of memory. His significance in the contemporary world lies in his ability to capture the essence of our fast-paced, interconnected society. As technology accelerates, we grapple with questions of identity, authenticity, and the impact of our choices. His novels serve as cautionary tales, urging us to pause, reflect, and consider the echoes of our own lives. In a world where memory is digitized and identity is fluid, Ishiguro's timeless themes resonate a reminder that beneath the illusion of connection lies an abyss waiting to be explored.

The remarkable commonality across Ishiguro's trio of novels - "The Remains of the Day," "A Pale View of Hills," and "Never Let Me Go" - is their exploration of the unspoken. Whether it's Stevens' restrained emotions, Etsuko's memories shrouded in silence, or Kathy's plea to "never let me go," the unvoiced profoundly shapes their existence. We, too, carry within us unspoken emotions, opportunities missed, and concealed desires. Ishiguro's characters reflect our own emotional terrain, encouraging us to untangle our complexities and face our vulnerabilities. Their shared experiences expose the fragility of life, the certainty of loss, and the lingering echoes of their purpose. These novels serve as a melody of yearning, a call for continuity, and a reminder that even in the face of the inevitable, our humanity endures.

Adding to this, Ishiguro's novels serve as a mirror, reflecting not just the characters' internal struggles, but also our own. They remind us that our lives, too, are shaped by what remains unsaid - the feelings we suppress, the memories we hide, the opportunities we let slip away. His characters' journeys become our own, their struggles resonate with us, and their silent pleas echo in our hearts. In the silence of their words, in the subtlety of their actions, we find a reflection of our own lives. We are reminded that, like them, we are shaped by our memories, our choices, and our unspoken emotions. Ishiguro's novels are not just stories; they are reflections of life itself. They remind us of the fragility of existence, the inevitability of loss, and the enduring power of human spirit. They serve as a testament to our shared humanity, a reminder that even in the face of the inevitable, we can find strength in our vulnerabilities, hope in our losses, and meaning in our struggles. Through his characters, Ishiguro invites us to confront our own fears, to embrace our own vulnerabilities, and to find solace in our shared human experience. His novels, thus, serve as a poignant reminder of the power of the unspoken, the strength of the human spirit, and the enduring resonance of our shared human experience.

In the quietude of Ishiguro's narratives, we find echoes of our own lives—the unspoken, the unresolved, and the fragile threads that bind us. His characters grapple with memory and identity, much like the land of Kashmir itself, a place

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etched with the scars of history, where valleys resonate with the footsteps of those who came before. Through these novels, we glimpse the universal human condition—a shared tapestry woven across borders, transcending time. Literature becomes our bridge, spanning chasms of conflict and longing. As we explore the enigma of memory, we join a global conversation, the one that invites reflection on our shared humanity. Ishiguro's mirrors reveal not only his characters' vulnerabilities but also our own. Love, loss, and the unspoken find their echoes here, urging us to confront our inner landscapes. And so, dear reader, delve deeper into this research; let these literary threads guide you toward a richer understanding of existence, one that defies boundaries and embraces memory's tender touch.

In the labyrinth of Ishiguro's novels, identity emerges as both a puzzle and a mirror. His characters, like us, grapple with the enigma of selfhood, the threads of memory, woven and unwoven. As we journey through their narratives, we too unravel our own stories, tracing the delicate filaments that connect past to present. Ishiguro's novels thus invites us to confront the unspoken, to recognise our shared vulnerabilities. In this dance of memory and forgetting, we find echoes of our own humanity, a reflection that transcends borders, inviting us to weave our own narratives into the fabric of existence.

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