

Abstract

This thesis examines the narrative characteristic of “what is left unsaid” in the early works of Kazuo Ishiguro and explores how this narrative strategy is closely connected to the formation and maintenance of identity. In Ishiguro’s fiction, narrators typically recount their past through retrospective narration; however, these recollections consistently avoid directly articulating decisive or traumatic events. Rather than offering a coherent or complete account of the past, the narrators delay disclosure, remain silent at critical moments, or replace personal experiences with symbolic episodes and stories involving other characters. This thesis argues that such narrative techniques function not merely as stylistic devices but as psychological and ethical strategies through which narrators preserve their sense of self while evading direct confrontation with unbearable memories.

Chapter One focuses on *A Pale View of Hills* and analyzes the disjunction of memory and the use of doubles in the narration of Etsuko. Etsuko’s recollections of postwar Nagasaki are fragmented and marked by ambiguity, frequently shifting attention away from her own experiences. This chapter argues that the figures of Sachiko and her daughter Mariko can be read as doubles that mirror Etsuko’s relationship with her own daughter, Keiko. Unable to confront her decision to leave Japan with Keiko and the possibility that this displacement contributed to her daughter’s subsequent suicide, Etsuko constructs an alternative maternal narrative through which painful emotions can be displaced. Through this narrative strategy, guilt, regret, and responsibility are indirectly expressed without being explicitly acknowledged, allowing the narrator to sustain a fragile coherence of self. This chapter conducts close readings of recurring symbolic motifs, including the rope, the mysterious woman who kills her child, the killing of kittens, and the series of child murders that appear in the background of the narrative. These motifs do not function as isolated images but as

interconnected signs that gesture toward an unspoken traumatic past. Rather than resolving meaning, they create a network of implication that points to what cannot be directly narrated. The chapter also briefly considers the 2025 film adaptation of *A Pale View of Hills* as one interpretive attempt to visualize the novel's implicit structure of doubling, highlighting how cinematic representation renders visible narrative relationships that remain submerged or ambiguous in the original text.

Chapter Two analyzes *An Artist of the Floating World*, focusing on war responsibility in postwar Japan and the problem of the unreliable narrator. Masuji Ono recounts his career as a painter while gradually revealing, and simultaneously obscuring, his involvement in wartime nationalism and ideological propaganda. Through narrative delay, ambiguity, repetition, and revision, Ono reshapes his memories in response to shifting postwar values and social expectations. By examining motifs such as the house he inhabits and the recurring smell of burning, this chapter demonstrates that Ono's narrative is sustained by silence and self-justification rather than by factual accuracy or moral transparency.

Ono's inability to confront his past is shown to stem not simply from remorse or shame, but from a deeper fear that acknowledging responsibility would dismantle the identity he has constructed in response to youthful trauma and historical circumstance. His narration reflects not only individual self-deception but also the instability of collective memory in postwar Japan, suggesting that personal identity is inseparable from broader historical, political, and cultural narratives that condition what can be remembered and spoken.

Chapter Three synthesizes these analyses and reconceptualizes identity in Ishiguro's works as something constructed through selective acts of remembering and forgetting—through continuous choices about what to articulate and what to leave unsaid. Both Etsuko and Ono occupy an unstable middle ground in which they neither fully reject nor fully accept their

pasts, instead repeatedly reshaping their narratives in order to endure the present. This instability, rather than narrative resolution or confession, forms the core of Ishiguro's exploration of human consciousness and reveals the ethical dimensions of identity as it is shaped through memory, silence, and narration.