



**THE COMPLEXITIES OF THE HUMAN PSYCHE AND SOCIAL
CHALLENGES FACED BY UNRELIABLE NARRATORS IN KAZUO
ISHIGURO'S NOVELS**

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Abstract:

Kazuo Ishiguro is known for his masterful use of unreliable narrators in his novels, creating characters whose perspectives and recollections are distorted or incomplete. This paper will explore the social issues and problems that arise from Ishiguro's use of unreliable narrators, examining the ways in which they impact the relationships between characters, the portrayal of historical events, and the construction of personal identity. Through a close reading of three of Ishiguro's novels, "The Remains of the Day," "Never Let Me Go," and "When We Were Orphans," this paper will argue that Ishiguro's use of unreliable narrators reveals the limitations of memory, truth, and self-deception, highlighting the complexity of human relationships and social structures. This paper also examines the psychological problems faced by the unreliable narrators in Kazuo Ishiguro's novels. Through a close analysis of three of his most notable works, "Never Let Me Go," "The Remains of the Day," and "When We Were Orphans," this paper explores the psychological challenges that Ishiguro's narrators face, including memory distortion, self-deception, struggles with personal identity, and social isolation. Ultimately, this paper argues that Ishiguro's use of unreliable narrators reveals the limitations of human perception and understanding, and highlights the importance of empathy, critical thinking, and self-reflection in navigating the complexities of the world.

Keywords: Unreliable narrators, Kazuo Ishiguro, Memory distortion, Self-deception, Personal identity and social issues



Kazuo Ishiguro's novels often feature unreliable narrators, characters whose perspectives and recollections are distorted or incomplete. These narrators create a sense of uncertainty and tension within the narrative, as readers are forced to question the reliability of the story being told. However, beyond the narrative technique, Ishiguro's use of unreliable narrators also highlights the social issues and problems that arise when characters are unable to accurately perceive reality. Through a close reading of three of Ishiguro's novels, this paper will explore the social issues and problems that emerge from his use of unreliable narrators, and argue that these issues reveal the limitations of memory, truth, and self-deception. He is well known for his use of unreliable narrators, characters whose memories, perceptions, and beliefs are shown to be incomplete, distorted, or otherwise unreliable. These narrators create tension and uncertainty within the narrative, leading readers to question the truth of the events being described. However, beyond their role in the narrative, these unreliable narrators also reveal the psychological problems faced by their characters, highlighting the limitations of human perception and understanding.

The Impact on Relationships Ishiguro's use of unreliable narrators has a significant impact on the relationships between characters in his novels. In "The Remains of the Day," the butler Stevens is an unreliable narrator, as he tells himself that his loyalty to his employer is more important than his personal life. This causes him to miss out on romantic relationships and personal connections, and ultimately leads to a sense of loneliness and regret. Similarly, in "Never Let Me Go," the protagonist Kathy's unreliable memories of her childhood and her relationships with her friends cause her to question the truth of her experiences, leading to a sense of disconnection from those around her. Through these examples, this section will argue that Ishiguro's use of unreliable narrators reveals the ways in which the limitations of memory and self-deception can impact personal relationships, and create social isolation.

The Portrayal of Historical Events Ishiguro's use of unreliable narrators also has an impact on the portrayal of historical events within his novels. In "The Remains of the Day," Stevens' loyalty to his employer blinds him to the reality of the political events leading up to World War II, and he is unable to acknowledge the atrocities committed by the Nazi regime. Similarly, in "When We Were Orphans," the protagonist's memories of his childhood in Shanghai are distorted by his desire to be a hero, and he is unable to acknowledge the



complexity of the political situation in China. Through these examples, this section will argue that Ishiguro's use of unreliable narrators reveals the ways in which personal bias and self-interest can impact the portrayal of historical events, creating a distorted view of reality.

Ishiguro's use of unreliable narrators has an impact on the construction of personal identity within his novels. In "Never Let Me Go," the characters are clones created for the purpose of organ donation, and their identities are constructed by their purpose in life. The protagonist Kathy's unreliable memories and limited understanding of her situation create a sense of uncertainty about her own identity, and lead to a questioning of the ethics of the society in which she lives. Similarly, in "When We Were Orphans," the protagonist's unreliable memories of his childhood in Shanghai and his desire to be a hero impact his construction of personal identity, leading to a sense of disillusionment when he realizes the truth about his past. Through these examples, this section will argue that Ishiguro's use of unreliable narrators reveals the ways in which personal experiences and memories can shape personal identity, and the potential for these constructions to be based on incomplete or distorted information.

One of the most significant psychological problems faced by the narrators in Ishiguro's novels is memory distortion. In "Never Let Me Go," the narrator Kathy's memories of her childhood and her relationships with her friends are shown to be unreliable, causing her to question the truth of her experiences. Similarly, in "The Unconsoled," the protagonist's memories of his past are jumbled and disorganized, creating a sense of confusion and disorientation. These memory distortions can result from traumatic experiences, personal biases, or self-deception, highlighting the limitations of memory as a tool for understanding reality.

Another psychological problem faced by the narrators is self-deception. Many of Ishiguro's narrators are shown to be deluding themselves in some way, either about their own actions, motivations, or relationships with others. In "The Remains of the Day," the butler Stevens tells himself that his loyalty to his employer is more important than his personal life, leading to a sense of loneliness and regret. Similarly, in "When We Were Orphans," the protagonist's desire to be a hero blinds him to the truth of his own past and the complexity of the political situation in China. These forms of self-deception can create a sense of disillusionment and



isolation, highlighting the potential dangers of relying too heavily on one's own beliefs and perceptions.

Many of Ishiguro's narrators also struggle to connect with others, either due to their own psychological problems or the limitations of their social context. In "The Remains of the Day," Stevens' loyalty to his employer causes him to miss out on personal relationships, leading to a sense of loneliness and regret. Similarly, in "Never Let Me Go," the characters' limited understanding of their own situation and the purpose of their lives creates a sense of disconnection from those around them. These struggles to connect with others highlight the importance of empathy and understanding in building meaningful relationships, and the potential consequences of social isolation.

The narrators in Ishiguro's novels mostly faces challenges in constructing and understanding their own personal identities. In many cases, their memories and experiences are incomplete or distorted, leading to a sense of uncertainty or confusion about their own identities. In "When We Were Orphans," the protagonist's unreliable memories of his childhood in Shanghai impact his construction of personal identity, leading to a sense of disillusionment when he realizes the truth about his past. Similarly, in "Never Let Me Go," the characters'

Another viewpoint on the social issues created by the unreliable narrators in Kazuo Ishiguro's novels is that they highlight the importance of examining multiple perspectives and challenging dominant narratives. The narrators' distorted perceptions and biases can serve as a cautionary tale against the dangers of relying solely on a single perspective or narrative. In this sense, the social issues created by the unreliable narrators can be seen as a call to action for readers to question their own assumptions and biases, and to seek out multiple perspectives in order to gain a fuller understanding of complex social issues.

Additionally, the social issues created by the unreliable narrators in Kazuo Ishiguro's novels can be seen as an invitation for readers to engage in acts of empathy and compassion. By exploring the psychological challenges faced by the narrators, readers are invited to empathize with their struggles and to recognize the ways in which social structures can impact individual psychology. This recognition can serve as a starting point for building more



empathetic and compassionate communities, in which individuals are able to better understand and support each other's struggles.

By understanding the psychological problems faced by the unreliable narrators in Ishiguro's novels, is very relevant in the contemporary world. The challenges that these narrators face are not unique to fiction, but rather reflect common psychological struggles that people face in their daily lives. For example, memory distortion is a common problem that people experience due to the fallibility of human memory. Self-deception is also a common issue that can lead to negative outcomes such as missed opportunities, regret, and social isolation. Inability to connect with others and struggles with personal identity are also relevant in contemporary society, as people increasingly face challenges in building meaningful relationships and understanding their own identities in a rapidly changing world.

Moreover, the use of unreliable narrators in Ishiguro's novels raises important questions about the nature of truth and the limitations of human understanding. In today's world, where misinformation and fake news are rampant, understanding the limits of human perception and the potential for biases and distortions is crucial for critical thinking and decision-making. The psychological struggles faced by Ishiguro's narrators also highlight the importance of empathy and understanding in building meaningful relationships, both on an individual and societal level. To be precise, understanding the psychological problems faced by Ishiguro's narrators can provide insights into the complexities of the human psyche and the challenges of navigating the world. By acknowledging the limitations of human understanding and the potential for biases and distortions, individuals can develop critical thinking skills and empathy, which are essential for building meaningful relationships and making informed decisions in today's world.

He has created a unique style that highlights the social issues faced by his characters, and in particular, his narrators. Ishiguro's works are marked by a deep exploration of the psychological and social conflicts that his characters face, with a focus on the inner turmoil that drives their actions and shapes their relationships. This essay will explore why Ishiguro chooses to portray social issues in his works through the lens of his unreliable narrators.



One reason why Ishiguro chooses to portray social issues through his narrators is because of the unique perspective they bring to his works. By creating characters whose perspectives and recollections are distorted or incomplete, Ishiguro is able to highlight the limitations of memory and truth. This is particularly effective in exploring social issues, as it allows Ishiguro to challenge dominant narratives and explore multiple perspectives on complex issues. In this way, his works can be seen as an invitation for readers to engage in critical thinking and to question their own assumptions and biases.

Moreover, Ishiguro's focus on the inner social conflicts of his narrators allows him to explore the complexities of human relationships and social structures. His narrators often struggle with issues such as personal identity, social isolation, and the impact of historical events on their lives. Through their struggles, Ishiguro is able to highlight the ways in which social structures can impact individual psychology, and vice versa. This provides readers with a deeper understanding of the interplay between individual and societal forces, and encourages them to consider the ways in which they can work towards building more just and equitable societies.

Another reason why Ishiguro chooses to portray social issues through his narrators is because of the emotional impact this has on readers. By creating characters who are flawed and complex, he invites readers to empathize with their struggles and to recognize the ways in which their own experiences are shaped by societal forces. This emotional connection can be a powerful motivator for readers to engage in acts of empathy and compassion, and to work towards building more equitable communities.

In conclusion, Kazuo Ishiguro's focus on the social issues faced by his narrators is a deliberate choice that allows him to explore the complexities of human relationships and social structures. By creating unreliable narrators, he is able to challenge dominant narratives and encourage critical thinking. His works provide readers with a deeper understanding of the interplay between individual and societal forces, and encourage them to work towards building more just and equitable societies. Additionally, by focusing on the emotional struggles of his characters, Ishiguro invites readers to engage in acts of empathy and compassion, creating a powerful connection between the reader and the text.



It is difficult to say for certain whether Kazuo Ishiguro's own nature directly reflects in his characters facing social issues and problems. However, it is clear that Ishiguro draws inspiration from his own experiences and observations of the world around him, and it is likely that his own values and perspectives influence the themes and issues he chooses to explore in his writing.

In interviews, Ishiguro has spoken about the influence of his childhood and adolescence, growing up in a Japanese family in England and facing challenges with identity and belonging. He has also discussed his interest in history and the way that personal narratives intersect with larger social and political events. These personal experiences and interests likely shape the themes and issues he explores in his writing, including the social issues and problems faced by his narrators.

Furthermore, Ishiguro's writing often delves into complex psychological and emotional territory, exploring the ways in which individuals navigate the world around them and make sense of their own experiences. This focus on internal struggles and conflicts may also be influenced by Ishiguro's own perspectives and values, as well as his interest in human psychology and behaviour. Ultimately, while it is impossible to say for certain whether Ishiguro's own nature directly reflects in his characters, it is clear that his personal experiences, interests, and values influence the themes and issues he explores in his writing, including the social issues and problems faced by his narrators.

Kazuo Ishiguro is interested in exploring social issues and problems through his narrators and characters in his novels for several reasons. Firstly, he sees literature as a powerful tool for understanding and examining complex social and political issues. By creating characters who are facing difficult social challenges and exploring their experiences in depth, Ishiguro is able to shed light on important issues that might otherwise go unnoticed or unexamined. Ishiguro is interested in the complexities of human relationships and the ways in which social structures and power dynamics impact personal experiences. By exploring the social issues and problems faced by his narrators, he is able to delve into the intricacies of human interaction and examine the ways in which individuals are shaped by their social contexts. Ishiguro's interest in social issues and problems is connected to his larger interest in the human condition and the search for meaning and identity. By exploring the experiences of his



narrators as they grapple with social challenges, Ishiguro is able to examine questions of identity, purpose, and morality in a complex and nuanced way.

The social issues created by the unreliable narrators in Kazuo Ishiguro's novels can be seen as an invitation for readers to engage in critical thinking, empathy, and compassion. Through their distorted perceptions and struggles with personal identity, the narrators highlight the importance of examining multiple perspectives and challenging dominant narratives, while also offering a glimpse into the complex interplay between individual psychology and social structures.

Through a close reading of three of Ishiguro's novels, this paper has explored the social issues and problems that arise from his use of unreliable narrators. By highlighting the limitations of memory, truth, and self-deception, Ishiguro's use of unreliable narrators reveals the complexity of human relationships and social structures. The impact of unreliable narrators on relationships, the portrayal of historical events, and the construction of personal identity all demonstrate the potential for these limitations to create social issues and problems, highlighting the importance of critical thinking and self-reflection in navigating the complexities of the world. Ishiguro's interest in exploring social issues and problems through his narrators and characters in his novels is driven by his belief in the power of literature to engage with complex social and political issues, his fascination with the complexities of human relationships and power dynamics, and his larger interest in exploring the human condition and the search for meaning and identity.

The exploration of unreliable narrators in his novels is thus a powerful tool for shedding light on the social issues and challenges that individuals face. Through his use of memory distortion, self-deception, struggles with personal identity, and social isolation, Ishiguro masterfully highlights the complexities of the human psyche and the limitations of human perception and understanding. His narrators confront difficult social issues such as class, race, gender, and power dynamics, providing a window into the personal experiences and relationships shaped by these social structures.



Vidhyayana - ISSN 2454-8596

An International Multidisciplinary Peer-Reviewed E-Journal

www.vidhyayanaejournal.org

Indexed in: Crossref, ROAD & Google Scholar

By focusing on the inner conflicts and struggles of his narrators, Ishiguro invites readers to examine their own experiences and perspectives, and to develop empathy and critical thinking skills. His novels challenge readers to consider the impact of social structures on personal experiences and relationships, and to explore the psychological challenges faced by individuals navigating these complexities. Ultimately, Ishiguro's works offer a profound commentary on the human condition, emphasizing the importance of self-reflection and empathy in understanding and navigating the complexities of the world. In Ishiguro's works, the unreliable narrator becomes a powerful symbol of the human struggle to understand ourselves and our place in society, reminding us of the importance of self-reflection, empathy, and critical thinking in navigating the complexities of the human psyche and the social world.



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