

Post-Imperial Identity and Narrative Form in *The Remains of the Day* by Kazuo Ishiguro

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ABSTRACT

Kazuo Ishiguro's opus is dominated by unreliable memory, which is permeated with a sense of nostalgia, a sentimental yearning for a past period or a return to a place, involving the retrieval and selection of memories. The Remains of the Day (1989) is an English butler Stevens's evocation of service years between wars at Darlington Hall, but it suffuses the poignancy of disillusionment and nostalgia for the old empire. The settings of historic moments in vicissitudes provide different social frameworks of collective memory in which anachronistic characters bittersweetly long for the idealised past. A textual analysis of landscape descriptions and cultural customs will examine how Stevens's individual memory is constructed within a social framework of nostalgia, despite the emotional restraint, rigid social hierarchy, and arduous labour that characterised the past. This paper examines Stevens's nostalgia for the old British Empire through collective memory by Maurice Halbwachs and cultural memory of Englishness through cultural memory by Jan Assmann in The Remains of the Day despite emotional constraints and rigid hierarchy. Halbwachs exemplifies the collective contextualisation of individual memory and embarks on the idealisation of the past with nostalgia and memory reconstruction. Assmann develops Halbwachs's collective memory into cultural memory that attaches to substances and practices to preserve the past beyond temporal limitation. This paper shows that nostalgia transfigures Stevens's memory into idealised memory due to the dysfunction of constraints within the past social framework, while cultural memory provides a prescribed cultural script internalised into Stevens's memory. It also exhibits Ishiguro's sympathy for ordinary figures in historical fluctuations.

Keywords: collective memory; cultural memory; Kazuo Ishiguro; nostalgia; The Remains of the Day

INTRODUCTION

The contemporary Japanese-British novelist, Kazuo Ishiguro (b. 1954), approaches trauma literature by focusing on the wasted life and the misguided belief in community through profound explorations of the collision between individual memory and collective memory. He takes the unreliable nature of memory to characterise figures who recreate the past and make it palatable. It is his writing pattern that the pathetic fallacies are perceived by ordinary people living through historical transformations. His confession admits the scheme:

I'm interested in people who, in all sincerity, work very hard and perhaps courageously in their lifetimes toward something, fully believing that they're contributing to something good, only to find that the social climate has done a topsy-turvy on them by the time they've reached the ends of their lives. The very things they thought they could be proud of have now become things they have to be ashamed of.

(Mason & Ishiguro, 1989, p. 339)

Herein, he has delivered a strong interest in illusory memory, misguided belief, and conflicts between individual and community that are absorbed in the writing techniques of nostalgia, narrative and unreliable memory. He sets up dual structures of individual memory and collective memory, remembering and forgetting, and longing and loss, both inscribed in nostalgia at historical crossroads, to defend his emotionally weak characters who fail to realise the social force.

According to Charlwood (2022), Ishiguro's character Geoffrey Saunders from *The Unconsoled* (1995) offers the pattern of his characterisation: "in snapshot form, the crisis trajectory of many an Ishiguro character: 'the golden boy' who later falls, often due to a changed context" (p. 1049). As McCombe (2002) puts it: the pattern whereby the historical event connects to a personal struggle operates in Ishiguro's fiction (p. 78). Although critics have attributed the individual tragedy to social transformation and historical events, this study regards the hardship of locating themselves in different social frameworks as the origin of the tragedy. The social framework of memory exerts tensions on the individual memory to adjust to the current society, whereas the individual memory is at the confluence of the old and the new social frameworks. Here, it is argued that Ishiguro designates the power of the social framework and multi-dimensionally dual structures for unravelling the smallness of individual figures and their courage in the fluctuations of historical and cultural conflicts. The collective memory and its social framework are incorporated in the historical vicissitudes, but the individual narrative obstructs the readers' view of the framework. Unlike the collective portrayals of clones in *Never Let Me Go* (2005) and the exploration of ethnicity in *The Buried Giant* (2015), Stevens is portrayed as an individual figure, thereby emphasising his personal struggle.

Ishiguro, in his Nobel Prize lecture, states his writing intention: "Do I have something left that might help to provide perspective, to bring emotional layers to the arguments, fights and wars that will come as societies struggle to adjust to huge changes?" (Nobel Prize, 2017) Nostalgia differs from memory in the emotional dimension. Since ancient times, nostalgia has been ubiquitous in both the past and modern times, as seen in historical dramas and classical music, and it is a compound of painful and reassuring affections. Nostalgia in *The Remains of the Day* (1989) (henceforth *The Remains*) engages the dual dimensions of the idealisation of past episodes but simultaneously aggregates the sense of disillusionment after the reminiscences. Ishiguro configures the sorrowful dimension of nostalgia to invite the audience to consider the aftermath of disillusionment and the use of memory. Memory has dual facets of remembering and forgetting. Wong (2005) explains that remembering introduces more problems than solutions in *The Remains*, as "Stevens's declared enlightenment is a false one and promises nothing in the way of a spiritual consolation" (p. 52). Instead, remembering juxtaposes disillusionment and regret, exemplified by Stevens's near-sobbing after reviewing the past. Significantly, nostalgia has the double-edged nature of blending longing and loss. The attributes of nostalgia, resulting in unreliable memory, characterise a sympathetic man who is a victim of both the blending of cultural memory and his professional dedication and the transition of social frameworks.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Ishiguro's novel exerts great emotional force on the public with his ambition to explore universal nostalgia and unreliable memory in times of crisis. Memory crises in a drastically changing world are particularly appealing to "international" Ishiguro, who lives in a time of mass political polarisation, environmental pollution, and humanity's depravity. The replacement of ideological hegemony leaves people baffled, as if they were "the lost generation." Groes and Dominic (2022) summarise Ishiguro's works as directly related to crimes of atomic bombs in *A Pale View of Hills* (Ishiguro, 2009) and *An Artist of the Floating World* (1986), pandemic health emergencies in *When We Were Orphans* (2000), ethical issues regarding intelligence in *Never Let Me Go* (2005), seemingly idyllic fantasy in *The Buried Giant* (2015), and polluted nature in *Klara and the Sun* (2021). His varieties of contemporary disorder evoke a sense of nostalgia for the old years and unreliable memory that idealises the past.

His universality in *The Remains* targets a perennial recurrence in politics. The setting of this fiction happens to be at the crossroads when an individual's generation uncomfortably aligns with changing or changed circumstances. The nonlinear timeline and the flashbacks, the memories chosen from specific historical moments, and the fragmented reminiscences together delineate the protagonist's psychological traumas. The international gathering at Darlington Hall in 1923 that depicts a more lenient approach to Germany triggers Britain's diminished status in its imperial role. *The Remains* preserves mid-century Anglo-American tensions through Mr Farraday's bantering with Stevens, the notion of restraint in the comparison between American and British landscapes, Stevens' German-made car being replaced by a Ford, and several metaphors. The historic moments seemingly pass away, but a single moment even influences the latest regional conflicts and the international order; in this case, the appeasement policy leading to superpower rearrangement. A variety of political crises remain predominant in modern times when Stevens's individual tragedy and his contemporary generations perform. In the seventy years following World War II (WWII) (1939-1945), we have witnessed numerous conflicts and terrorist attacks, including the Korean War in 1950, the Gulf War in 1990, the 9/11 attacks in 2001 and the Iraq War in 2003, that pertain to identity issues (Chua et al., 2016; Fakhruddin & Bahar, 2022; Fakhruddin et al., 2023; Salih et al., 2018).

Despite censored and unconscious memory, such as the partial obliteration in education and the propaganda of favourable sections, the authority does not successfully manage remembering and forgetting but instead exacerbates the detachment from society and psychological traumas in silence. The contradiction between authorised collective memory under the current social framework and individual memory within the old social framework often bewilders the mass of common people so that they resort to nostalgia. Violence is ongoing with uncertainties. The French philosopher Paul Ricoeur advocates "difficult forgiveness" as a way of mediating between appropriate forgetting to release and remembering the injustice to achieve reconciliation and healing. The prerequisite of "difficult forgiveness" is to acknowledge the past, which works similarly to Sigmund Freud's emphasis on identifying the loss in the transition from pathological melancholia to normal mourning. Stevens, representing numerous ordinary people among historical vicissitudes and political disputes, is encouraged to overcome melancholic psychology and move forward while still remembering the traumatic events in the force of healing.

METHODOLOGY

COLLECTIVE MEMORY BY MAURICE HALBWACHS

Nostalgia is rooted in collective and cultural memory, both of which contribute to the reconstruction of the past. This study begins with the broader concept of nostalgia to examine the idealisation of Stevens's memories within Maurice Halbwachs's social framework, while also exploring the subtle influence of Jan Assmann's concept of cultural memory on the formation and reconstruction of individual memory. The social framework is the principal concept of collective memory, left by Maurice Halbwachs (1877-1945), the French philosopher and sociologist, for "our recollections depend on those of all our fellows and on the great frameworks of the memory of the society". This exploration of the social framework determines the reconstructive attribute, as the inaccurate testimony of spectators is constructed into a remembrance, and "only those recollections subsist that in every period society, working within its present-day frameworks, can reconstruct" (Halbwachs, 1992, p. 189). People are not isolated living in society, and, through language, norms and conventions, they participate in a new social framework and reassess the past: "[i]t is in society that people normally acquire their memories. It is also in society that they recall, recognise, and localise their memories" (Halbwachs, 1992, p. 38).

Russell (2006) observes that memory was considered a personal faculty before Halbwachs, but there were many implicit references to collective memory that depend on what is remembered collectively, rather than on the groups that remember, before Halbwachs (793). The tension between individual memory and collective memory has been one of the central controversies in memory studies since Halbwachs' binary distinction between collective memory and individual memory. Ricœur (2004) criticises Halbwachs's dichotomy, and a cultural historian, Jan Assmann (1938-2024), who co-conceptualised the theory of cultural memory with his wife, suggests that he "goes so far as to make the collective group the subject of memory" (2011, p. 22). Connerton (2012) contends that the subject of memory is individuals rather than collective groups but accepts Halbwachs's social framework of collective memory. The conflation of collective and individual memories, or the latter's relegation to insignificance within Halbwachs's conceptualisation, has prompted a discussion by scholar Anna Green, whose study focuses on memory and oral history. According to Green (2004), there are certain "dominant cultural scripts or unconscious psychic templates" of individual memory, according to oral historians, so memory has become detached from the individual. Significantly, Green appeals to reassert the value of individual remembering and the capacity of the conscious self to contest and critique cultural scripts or discourses. On the other hand, Kenny (1999) investigates case studies about social processes in which personal experience migrates into collective memory, and collective memory is instantiated through autobiographical recollection. The analogy of the "hourglass" metaphorically represents the dynamics between collective memory and individual memory, and the feasibility of invertible top-down approaches to memory studies, which is explained as follows: "the study of collective memory resides at the intersection of these two worlds, where individuals and the social context in which they live collide to form an ensemble of representations and memories shared by a group" (Cordonnier et al., 2022, p. 2).

According to Halbwachs (1980), "[e]very collective memory requires the support of a group delimited in space and time" (p. 84). These memories are embedded in the collective memory of the period when class distinctions were rigid and unquestioned. The spatial framework for Halbwachs is not only physical locations but also intangible bases such as positions in production, contract obligations, and religion. The spatial frame, especially when remembered as

home, provides an anchorage, as Assmann (2011) writes: "what the house is to the family, village, and land, the farmer; what cities are to town-dwellers, the countryside is to rural communities" (p. 24). These physical landmarks anchor and preserve the collective memory of a certain group. French historian Pierre Nora, in Nora and Kritzman (1996), who coined the term "sites of memory", argues a similar argument that such sites function as repositories of collective memory in order to prolong a sense of historical continuity.

CULTURAL MEMORY BY JAN ASSMANN

Assmann believes that Halbwachs's framework is too limited in scope because it does not account for the broader, more institutionalised ways in which memory is preserved. He categorises collective memory into "communicative memory", dependent on daily communications, and "cultural memory", which subsumes the realm of traditions beyond temporal boundaries. Communicative memory operates in the way of Halbwachs's testimony and spectators: "[t]he communicative memory comprises memories related to the recent past. These are what the individual shares with his contemporaries... Once those who embodied it have died, it gives way to a new memory" (Assmann, 2011, p. 36). The major differences between Assmann's two forms of memory are temporal extension and maintenance: "[c]ommunicative memory is characterised by its proximity to the everyday, ... Cultural memory has a fixed point; its horizon does not change with the passing of time" (Assmann & Czaplicka, 1995, p. 128). Here, cultural memory is featured through symbolic figures and fateful events to which memory attaches itself and is a matter of institutionalised mnemotechnics. It is preserved longer than communicative memory through the attachment to memory figures such as rituals, dances, myths and paintings.

DISCUSSION

The dysfunction of the constraints of the past social framework within the current framework explains Stevens's nostalgia for imperial Britain, although he is constrained by hierarchy in the name of "professionalism" and "dignity". The pathological nostalgia is achieved through the technique of an unreliable narrator who escapes from narrating the miserable facets of the old social framework. It is deliberately forgotten as Wall observes Stevens's frequent substitution of "I" with "one" to indicate dual identities and uses discourse to highlight the defensive tone of Stevens's narrative (Wall, 1994). For instance, "I should point out," "Let me now posit this," and "Let me make clear," among other similar utterances, indicate a physically inferior butler like the younger Stevens, who never truly exists (Ishiguro, 1990, p. 14, 18, 42, 113, 138, 171). The defensive tone suppresses the miserable memory of the hierarchical system, and the fragmented subjectivity in the unreliable narratives is separated into an inferior butler to suffer these. Wall (1994) finds that the discrepancy between scene and commentary consolidates the unreliability, allowing him to escape from the constraints when he does not offer condolences to Miss Kenton. Stevens's monologue attests to humanity and the nature of human emotion: "By this point, I had been preoccupied for some hours with the matter of Miss Kenton's sorrow, having given particular thought to the question of what I might best do or say to ease her burden" (Ishiguro, 1990, p. 177). However, the following scene is his charge of Miss Kenton for her management failure. Long-term emotional restraints contribute to Stevens's inability to express himself, and "the frequent small laughs that he reports during his narration of this scene (and others where he similarly feels some awkwardness) indicate a degree of discomfort with the situation" (Wall, 1994, p. 26). The

consciousness of the felt constraints tortures the individual, but his nostalgia for the old days, with so much suffering in idealisation, is such that he cannot feel.

The Darlington Hall taken over by Mr Farraday supports Stevens's liberation from the burden of "dignity", but he proudly chooses to recollect the time of dignity and hierarchy constraints. Much of the power and prestige claimed by the Hayes Society authority in defining a butler is that "in the view of the Society... 'the most crucial criterion is that the applicant be possessed of a dignity in keeping with his position'" (Ishiguro, 1990, p. 33). The dignity of a butler is detailed through his father's two instances of professionally hiding his feelings and prioritising the master's needs. Nevertheless, Stevens's interpretation delivers a repressive analogy:

For such persons, being a butler is like playing some pantomime role; a small push, a slight stumble, and the I will drop off to reveal the actor underneath. The great butlers are great by virtue of their ability to inhabit their professional role and inhabit it to the utmost; they will not be shaken out by external events, however surprising, alarming or vexing. They wear their professionalism as a decent gentleman will wear his suit: he will not let ruffians or circumstance tear it off him in the public gaze; he will discard it when, and only when, he wills to do so, and this will invariably be when he is entirely alone. It is, as I say, a matter of 'dignity.'

(Ishiguro, 1990, p. 42)

The analogy of a pantomime role strikingly claims the responsibility of a butler—to keep dumbly obedient and emotionally restrict oneself under the pressure of "dignity" all the time. A man taking a breath of basic emotional desires is prohibited, whereas Stevens appraises the butler's dignity with nostalgia in the script of the collective cultural memory of greatness: "It is with such men as it is with the English landscape seen at its best as I did this morning: when one encounters them, one simply knows one is in the presence of greatness (Ishiguro, 1990, p. 44). Besides the scene of criticising Miss Kenton after thinking about comforting her, Stevens' suppressed cry after his father's death shows his excuse of "[t]he strains of a hard day", which constrains himself in the burden of dignity (Ishiguro, 1990, p. 105). The embellishment of dignity constraints under Lord Darlington and even the craving for the old days full of constraints are explained through the social framework.

The idealised individual memory that the past society is better than the present world preserves nostalgia. He is released from professionalism and dignity during the six-day motoring trip suggested by his current American employer, Mr Farraday, and even learns bantering skills. Yet he recollects the service years at Darlington Hall with a sense of nostalgia as if there was a narratee. Halbwachs (1992) argues that the embellishment results from incongruity in many respects between the constraints of yesterday and those of today, and the most painful aspects of past society are often forgotten because constraints are only felt when in effect, and a past constraint is no longer in operation. The introduction of Halbwachs's "framework" reasonably explains memory and forgetting. The "framework" tells people what is important and what is worthy of being remembered and concerns contemporary values. What is forgotten is not applicable to the current "framework", and what is remembered is institutionalised within the current interests. The indifferent restraints of "The Hayes Society" in the name of dignity crumble alongside the corruption of British traditional values, and they have little effect in American values-dominated times. His nostalgia is evoked on the premise that he cannot feel the constraints of dignity in a world where new values have arisen, but the confidential regret and depression are found everywhere in the narratives.

This reconstruction happens within the contemporary framework, reinterpreting new meanings for past experiences based on current social context. This is reflected in various social frameworks through the shifting reputation of Darlington Hall and Lord Darlington, revealing how the former sense of greatness and pride in Stevens's personal memory is replaced by a sense of regret or disillusionment about having served Lord Darlington in the current social context. Stevens recollects that the construction was filled with distinguished visitors, and there were great gatherings of high class, whereas the house became so quiet after the war, and trepidation overwhelms the woman at the reception after hearing the address "Darlington Hall." The comparative reputation reflects that the social framework selects what is remembered and reinterprets the past. The British people do not remember that Lord Darlington preserved British aristocratic traditions of dignity and decency through the appeasement policy but, instead, he is to blame for the decline of the empire.

An individual commentary on transformation in the past and at present is reflected in Stevens's confession: "It occurs to me in recalling these words that, of course, many of Lord Darlington's ideas will seem today rather odd—even, at times, unattractive" after Harry Smith's long speech and a "misguided idealism which beset significant sections of our generation throughout the twenties and thirties" (Ishiguro, 1990, p. 199). However, in the earlier years, he claims the justification for all Lord Darlington's actions is a desire to see "justice in this world," regardless of the complications in the lordship's course over subsequent years (Ishiguro, 1990, p. 73). It is unjustified to dismiss Jewish housemaids merely out of Lord's political position, but he did not think it was odd before. The hierarchy system as the collective memory is inherited in imperial Britain, leading to Stevens's unquestionable blindness. The sudden realisation of Lord's oddity comes from the new social framework in which the old social framework cannot operate with the collapse of the empire.

The aristocratic dignity and decency of the old empire as the past norm and convention sympathise with the Nazi, whereas the consequence of British decline and the attack of American values bring about a new social framework that weakens the effects of the old framework. Although it is Stevens' individual opinion, it represents that the individual succumbs to fitting in with the current social framework. Ishiguro conveys his intention to the abyss of individual memory in the transition from the old social framework to the new because Stevens attempts to resist the force of collective memory.

Interestingly, Ishiguro does not examine the belonging of memory but emphasises the deformation of individual memory that constantly receives the force exerted by the social framework of collective memory in the form of collective identity. Individual memory, here, is deprived of its validity if collective memory refuses to recognise it. More importantly, individual memory experiences the processes of distortion in the new social framework and modification to adapt to it, which Ishiguro captures. Although *The Remains* exemplifies Halbwachs's downplaying of individual memory, Ishiguro impartially suffuses personal characters with individual memory through the lens of nostalgia, creating a spectrum of individual memory and collective memory.

According to Halbwachs (1980), "[e]very collective memory requires the support of a group delimited in space and time" (p. 84). The memory of Darlington Hall is tied to the aristocracy and the grandeur of the estate, signifying high status and prestige. These memories are embedded in the collective memory of the period when class distinctions were rigid and unquestioned. Stevens reflects on his time during this era with a sense of duty and pride, which is part of his collective memory shaped by the values of the time. The spatial framework for

Halbwachs is not only physical locations but also intangible bases such as positions in production, contract obligations, and religion. The spatial frame, especially when remembered as home, provides an anchorage, as Assmann (2011) writes: "what the house is to the family, village, and land, the farmer; what cities are to town-dwellers, the countryside is to rural communities" (p. 24). These physical landmarks anchor and preserve the collective memory of a certain group. French historian Pierre Nora, in Nora and Kritzman (1996), who coined the term "sites of memory", argues a similar argument that such sites function as repositories of collective memory in order to prolong a sense of historical continuity. In the novel, Darlington Hall supports Stevens's memory of Englishness and his conception of dignity, inherited from his father and the Hayes Society, and the rural areas support his memory of "greatness" inherited from the hierarchy system. Darlington Hall, an unhomely home, and the landscape beyond it, extending beyond previous boundaries, elicit Stevens' mental landscapes for English "greatness" and dignity. In the guise of individual narrative, collective memory of "greatness" in the old empire of Britain is sustained in the geographical dimension.

Ishiguro eulogises the constructive influence of nostalgia and equates nostalgia with idealism, in which the characters imagine a better world. Although they long for a time of hardships and even bereavements, the past remains attractive to recollect. Ishiguro (2008) identifies himself "as somebody who has grown up in an idealistic time in the late 60s and early 70s" (p. 100). His contemporaries in the 1960s, confronting British decline after WWII, resemble the period of his first fiction, when characters lived in a time when prevalent idealism was common. He projects nostalgia and idealism among his contemporaries onto the fictional roles to convey the universal instinct of nostalgia and idealism after emotional wounds.

Ishiguro reinterprets nostalgia not as a heroic return but as an existential reflection in modernism. In particular, "Nostos" in Homer's *Odyssey* addresses the hero's longing for home after the Trojan War and the challenges during the return journey. In the novel, Ishiguro's character, Stevens, likewise recollects past experiences to emotionally come home and find emotional closure after spiritual challenges. Since nostalgia has dual Greek implications of "nostos" (return home) and "algia" (pain), it embodies both a longing for a lost origin and the sorrow attached to its irretrievability. This duality in Stevens's nostalgia journey encourages him to reconstruct a connection that can never be reclaimed, so his trauma "denotes the negative inability to deal effectively with a past event" (Legg, 2004, p. 103). Here, Ishiguro stresses existential reflection through the problematic engagements of the past in nostalgia and trauma but, at the same time, affirms the inspiring force of nostalgia as "Eden-memory" in an interview with Shaffer (2001). He configures nostalgia for his characters as if they were epic heroes to encourage their perseverance and resilience in self-realisation. His positive declarations explain his recurrent theme of nostalgia: "[n]ostalgia is the emotional equivalent or intellectual cousin of idealism. It's something that anchors us emotionally to a sense that things should and can be repaired. We can feel our way towards a better world" (Shaffer & Ishiguro, 2001, p.7). This statement provides a strong affiliation and even equivalence between nostalgia and idealism.

The force of nostalgia is investigated in two dimensions. Boym argues that nostalgia, like memory, has individual and collective scripts: "restorative nostalgia" that guards truth and tradition in nationalist revivals engages in the anti-modern myth of history; reflective nostalgia, which is about individual and cultural memories, concerns the imperfection of memory (2001). These two contradictory tendencies produce "not merely an individual anxiety but a public threat that reveals the contradictions of modernity and acquires a greater political importance" (Boym, 2001, p. 5). Political ambition and a national ethos are interrelated with nostalgia. In this context,

The Remains articulates a vision of nationhood couched in terms of restoration through imagery and language resembling that employed by British postwar politicians (Su, 2002). The restorative nostalgia for collective nationalism in a political dimension interferes with modern national identity. Nevertheless, Ishiguro defends nostalgia in the individual strand as he does for individual memory in the interview with Shaffer (2001): “I accept why nostalgia has a bad name in general, at least on a political and historical level. But the pure emotion of nostalgia is actually quite a valuable thing that we all feel at times” (7). Here, Ishiguro delivers nostalgia as the characters' inability to free themselves from the weight of history to move on, but his ethics of empathy protect nostalgia as a positive emotion.

Nostalgia is targeted to restore a utopian world in Ishiguro's *When We Were Orphans* and *Never Let Me Go*, pertaining to childhood memories of a protective environment that no longer exists or never existed (Teo, 2014). Ishiguro authenticates his concern for early memories of a shelter and considers nostalgia as “an urge to reshape the world, heal the world, to make it the way we once thought it was as children” (Ishiguro, 2008, p. 187). In *The Remains*, Stevens is burdened by the past and plagued by memories, “traumatised by how the people he deems as dignified and carries this torch of English ‘stiff upper lip’ image finally succumbs to their peril” (Yusoff & Bahar, 2019, p. 175). Consequently, he resorts to a biological father and a symbolised father, Lord Darlington, to depend on, and they provide a primal shelter for his misled belief because characters “have built their sense of the ideal upon a parent or parent figure” (Shaffer & Ishiguro, 2001, p. 8). Darlington Hall in *The Remains* is a depository of British Empire traditions—the hierarchy system and constrained emotions for dignity. The protective utopian world in early “childhood” memory is overturned to become a regressively flawed world where Stevens suffers from these traditions that Halbwachs conceives as collective memory. Stevens's nostalgia for British greatness and traditions is transformed into his ideal for mythological Englishness in collective memory and for parental protection to escape from guilt.

THE SOCIAL FRAMEWORK IN CULTURAL MEMORY

The social framework in cultural memory prescribes the practice of traditional Englishness for Stevens and his memory of imperial greatness despite its collapse. In the novel, the cultural memory of Englishness is attached to traditions of dignity and hierarchy, and the ideal mythologies that are diachronically transmitted. Lord Darlington insists on the “tradition” of dignity: the discredit to defeated Germany, “a complete break with the traditions of this country,” and despises the French as barbarous (Ishiguro, 1990, p. 71, 87). Another remarkable sign of the dignity tradition is the excessive restraint characteristic of an English butler. According to the Hayes Society by Ishiguro (1990), “the most crucial criterion is that the applicant be possessed of a dignity in keeping with his position” (33). Only an English butler deserves the identity of a butler for their emotional control, while butlers in other countries are merely “manservants”. The symbolised identity of a butler preserves English cultural memory for the British national community, which has incorporated this tradition into collective memory. The role setting of a butler permeates the English tradition of emotional restraint in the name of dignity: “It is sometimes said that butlers only truly exist in England. Other countries, whatever title is actually used, have only manservants” (Ishiguro, 1990, p. 43). The identity of a butler distinguishes British people from non-English people because cultural memory binds the community sharing the cultural memory and figures of collective identity. Assmann and Czaplicka (1995) argue that cultural memory is a form of collective memory in the sense that it is shared by a number of people and that it conveys to these people a collective, that is, cultural identity. In describing the landscape

and its satisfying beauty, Stevens remarks on the presence of greatness that is superior to African and American sights, again setting the boundary between English identity of greatness and others' plain identity.

Stevens describes the British landscape as best "summed up by the term greatness," reflecting a tradition of hierarchical values in British cultural memory (Ishiguro, 1990, p. 28). The English countryside as a spatial reference for cultural memory incarnates British aristocracy into Stevens's individual memory, providing a spiritual shelter to rationalise his moral failure. It is conventional for Ishiguro to conceal the provisional evasion within the surrounding portrayals. For example, Nan and Pakri (2024) examine how the wilderness functions as an "antidote" and "tranquilliser" to deal with patriarchy and postwar traumatic reminiscences in *A Pale View of Hills* (p. 35). Like nostalgia that fixes on the past for emotional protection, escapism merely leaves the trauma there. Berberich (2016) comments that the perception of 'Englishness' is heavily determined by nostalgia that contributes to the portrayal of a historic, calm, mythical England (p. 23). It is unconventional to describe a landscape with the term "greatness", but Stevens's unique perspective illustrates how the notion of Englishness evokes an image of England having all its picturesque landscapes, a traditional aristocracy and grand estates. He connects the idea of Great Britain with the concept of being a "great" butler". His sense of personal significance is rooted in his social rank, determining how he perceives greatness. As a consequence, as explained by Su (2005), Stevens's personal meaning of what "great" is "endorses class stratification" (132). The British cultural memory preserved through practices of greatness and aristocracy is internalised into his individual memory of a national script of empire and the comprehension of dignity and duty. The personal value overlaps with the empire traditions and individual memory roots in cultural memory, which characterise the pathetic small figure and indicate the exertion of social framework and cultural memory.

Stevens's impression of the countryside comes from a collection of guidebooks, including Mrs Jane Symon's *The Wonder of England*, for he was rarely released from service to have holidays; "[i]n other words, his impressions have more to do with the mythical idea of England than they have to do with the England he knows from direct experience. This portrait of England in his mind becomes little more than a performance of an identity or myth (Teo, 2014). The ideal greatness of Great Britain in mythologies, along with English traditions of dignity and hierarchy, integrates cultural memory into the inconspicuous character, Stevens. In the invasion of imperial aristocratic autocracy by modern democracy, represented by America, the Victorian tradition as British national culture defunctions. The fall of the empire is not only the fall of a political system and social order but also the concealment of a cultural class and the decline of traditions. As Sarkar and Fareen put it: "forgetting and remembering remains a very complex task in cultural memory itself, as it dwells on private and discursive, collective and individual levels, connecting memory with a biopolitical entity (2024, p. 113). In Stevens's self-defensive recollection narrative, Ishiguro achieves critical thinking about cultural memory, the disparity between individual memory and collective memory, and reflects the humanity of literature by justifying nostalgia, idealised memory and the moral failure of ordinary characters.

CONCLUSION

The Remains of the Day is composed of Stevens's individual memories that are structured in the social framework of collective memory and cultural memory to reflect the wretchedness of ordinary people in the difficulty of locating themselves. This study argues that personal tragedy is inseparable from the transformation of the social framework, and, in consideration of the positive force of nostalgia and the equivalence between nostalgia and idealisation by Ishiguro, this study examines Stevens's nostalgia within the social framework and the rationale for Stevens's wrongdoings to defend him from guilt and regret.

The concept of collective memory by Halbwachs underlines the social framework and the reconstructive attribute of memory, and the concept of cultural memory by Assmann possesses the notion of cultural heritage to preserve collective memory. Both concepts have a reference to space. The symbolic Darlington Hall, as the place to hold the decisive conference, gathered nobles in honour, whereas the collective memory of its reputation has turned bad in the current social framework. Besides Darlington Hall, the British landscape and the travel book documenting English mythology preserve the cultural memory of "greatness." Also, the tradition of aristocracy contributes to the hierarchy system and the group of butlers as a byproduct. The unconditional obedience to the employer and the emotional restraints suppress Stevens' moral judgments and ability to express himself. Despite these restraints, Stevens remains in the reminiscences of his service years in reconstructively idealised memory because the constraints of the old empire cannot be felt in the current social framework.

More importantly, Ishiguro skillfully juxtaposes the destructive and the constructive force of nostalgia to deliver a lesson of memory. The excessive fixation on the past prevents Stevens from dealing with moral failures and traumas, while the constructive force of nostalgia, which functions as a shelter, temporarily protects the wretched figure from the experience of loss. His question about how to deal with nostalgia refers to the contention between moving forward and the addiction to the memory of "the old better days". Here, nostalgia filters and selects the memory into idealisation at Stevens's will to escape from the sense of regret, but it is a pathological nostalgia that fails to identify the impossibility. The current social framework of collective memory forces Stevens to fit into it and realise the impossibility of reentering the old one.

Ishiguro also explores its dimension of healing force and equates nostalgia with idealisation that encourages people to live with hopes in times of crisis. The modern era has witnessed the deluge of memory crises and traumas. Small figures, like Stevens, are shown to be burdened with the contention between remembering and forgetting, and the unequal values between collective memory and individual memory. The irresolution at the end encourages individual characters to transition from idealistic nostalgia to reality, from melancholia to mourning and from traumatic events to recovery. For further research, the mechanisms of memory in Ishiguro's fiction can be explored through various forms, including age-related forgetting, self-deception, and enforced forgetting. However, the role and significance of nostalgia across these different processes of remembering and forgetting remain insufficiently examined.

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