



KAZUO ISHIGURO'S USE OF UNRELIABLE NARRATION IN THE NOVEL WHEN WE WERE ORPHANS

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Abstract

This paper tries to find the unreliable narration of Kazuo Ishiguro in his novel When We Were Orphans. Ishiguro creates an interest himself in writing about Japan after moving to England. Most of his characters were accepting their past and unyielding with their future. Kazuo Ishiguro's fifth novel, published in 2000, is named When We Were Orphans. This paper gives the definition of the unreliable narrator and proves that Christopher Banks is an unreliable narrator.

Especially it details the techniques used by Ishiguro while creating an unreliable character. It points out the narrator's past and how his past makes him an unreliable narrator. Finally, this paper ends with the conclusion part with concise points about the ruling of this paper.

Keywords: Unreliable narration, Past, Identity and Memory.

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Kazuo Ishiguro, who was born in Japan, was a Nobel Prize-winning British novelist, short story writer and screen play writer. In the English-speaking world, he is the well-known contemporary writer of fiction. His family shifted to England at his fifth year, and his father was recruited at the National Institute of Oceanography. On the other hand, Ishiguro left Japan when he was five years old. His works exhibit no similarity to Japanese culture and tradition, and he has said categorically that his Japanese parents raised him in a Japanese-speaking family.

Kazuo Ishiguro's fifth novel, published in 2000, is named When We Were Orphans. The expository part of the story revolves around the Englishman named

Christopher Banks, who was an English businessman, the story of the novel sets in England. He was the narrator, and the main character of the novel became a detective with the help of his friend Akira to search for his disappeared parents. Still, he has explored his inner world, and it's clearly visible in the lives of his characters with rare inventiveness. But in this novel, he returns to this terrain in an outstandingly obvious story. All of Ishiguro's novels are set in two countries, moving around two cultures and playing the gap between realities and imagination, which means the inner world and the real world. Christopher Banks was born in early-twentieth-century Shanghai, which means pre-world war II Shanghai.



Pathetically he became an orphan at nine when his parents vanished under mysterious circumstances. He went to England and grew up to become a renowned detective.

The title of the novel *When We Were Orphans* pointed out the soaring imagination, inevitable past and longing for the native. The narration is a form of an event which was gushing into the mind of the individual. Sometimes it builds strong impossible to change. Basically, literary works are narrated using the first person, second person and third person. So it often makes confuse the readers, and other than the first-person narrative, another two are not highly concentrated. There is a way of narration that is well built and told with a mixed history of the past.

The chronology of the past is well-established by Ishiguro in his novels. Almost all of his novels are narrated in the first person. At this juncture, we have to remember the words of David Lodge, which were all about the first person unreliable narration is a gap between appearance and reality. In this way, the narrator purposefully leaves some evidence or information to the readers to find the truth behind the chronology of the past. It may be the additional information which was narrated unconsciously by the first-person narration. Through long passages or monologues, the narrator reveals his positive side and intentionally or unintentionally omits his other side, which means his negative side. This was clear in his novel *The Remains of the Day* protagonist Stevens, who was the unreliable narrator, warns the unintentional memory as "It is possible this is a case of hindsight colouring my memory, but I have a distinct feeling that it was at that moment I first sensed something odd, something duplicitous perhaps, about this apparently charming American gentleman. But if my own suspicions were aroused at that moment, Lord Darling ton evidently did not share them." (90)

This unintentional memory has the
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power to access the colourful memory of the narrator's past and which makes the things pleasant happenings. It tries to portray the narrator as the main character. Here we noted the concept of pleasant happenings of the past because all pastness doesn't have happy memories.

In *When We Were Orphans*, the past is depicted through the detailed narration of history, especially the two histories of the Sino-Japanese war and opium wars. In 1954 Ishiguro and his family moved to England from Japan and planned to stay some years in England. But Ishiguro permanently stayed in England, and this is also experienced in his writings. His novels and the narrator faced the effects of cultural hybridity. With a bicultural upbringing, he is often considered a homeless writer. Banks faced the same issue, and it created psychological blurriness in his mind. And it is critical to note Banks' family issues in this context. The disappearance of his parents makes him a man who searches for an identity. Obviously, there is always a mental blurriness and unreliability to his narration.

Wayne. C. Booth, who coined the phrase "unreliable narrator" in the book *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961). Various kinds of unreliable narrators emerge, when the concept of an unreliable narrator is explained clearly, various kinds emerge. Untrustworthy narrators were categorised by William Riggan as *The Picaro*, *the Madman*, *the Clown*, *the Naif*, and *the Liar*. *The Picaro* is a narrator who is known for exaggeration, but who is also a crazy with mental defence systems. In contrast to the *Liar*, who was a mature narrator, the clown usually does not accept an immature narrator.

One of the findings of the unreliable narrator is he was a narrator but narrates as the main character of the novel. Banks is a detective who created a fantasy world in the fourth part of Ishiguro's fragmented way of writing. Here he proved himself a hero with Akira and played childish detective games with her. But she remembers, Important. Very important. Nostalgic. When we



nostalgic, we remember. A world better than this world we discover when we grow. We remember and wish good world come back again. So very important. Just now, I had dream. I was boy. Mother, father, close to me. In our house (Ishiguro 310).

The narrator's unreliability doesn't exist in the gap between the implied author and the narrator, but it exists between the mind of the narrator and others in the text. Though Banks is a revolver in the story, he doesn't show any heroic activities. Christopher Henke noted in one of his essays "Remembering Selves, Constructing Selves" that memory was not an easy process that happened in daily life, but it is storage of events in a 'storage room'. Eventually, memory creates from the past, but it is constructed based on the present cognitive structure. His words are,

Studies in autobiographical memory have shown that individuals develop particular 'self-schemata' with which memories are rendered consistent with their own identity concept. The ensuing autobiographical stories [...] are the result of a continual 'self-creation' of the ego, which also affects the self-justifying 'inner story' that individuals tell themselves about themselves. (Henke, 80)

The mind of an unreliable narrator should be abnormal. Because they didn't have the cognitive capability of mind-reading, the implied author tries to represent the real cognitive world of real life. Banks tries to recreate his childhood world. Technically, Ishiguro divides this novel into seven parts, and each part is titled with the date, which reveals the level of the narrative present. For example, the first part set on 24th July 1930, starts with the words like;

It was the summer of 1923, the summer I came down from Cambridge, when despite my aunt's wishes that I return to Shropshire, I decided my future lay in the capital and took up a small flat at Number 14b Bedford Gardens in Kensington. I remember it now as the most wonderful of summers. (2)

However, when Ishiguro altered this

viewpoint, major events in the form of memory developed, and the concept of nostalgia was established. In nostalgia, we have to mention the two temporal experiences they are present and past temporal experiences. First, the narrator couldn't bestable with past memory with the 'present self'. The second temporal experience is the notion of the past, which is experienced as childhood memories of Banks in Shanghai.

Three of the seven parts of the narration are set in London in 1930s, when the narrator was a young adult. But the past events included in this novel as the childhood memory of Banks in Shanghai. So that the first three parts of the novel depict the present temporal experience of the unreliable narrator. Then the plot slowly moves and is interwoven with the emotional state of the past memory. Banks' self-protecting and leading memories are inaccurate and incomplete at the same time, contradicting the other's memory. In this case, the colonel's memory about his past and their irritated behaviour of Banks describes as

Gradually, from behind his cheerful anecdotes, there was emerging a picture of myself on that voyage to which I took expectation. His repeated insinuation was that I had gone about the ship withdrawn and moody, likely to burst into tears at the slightest thing. According to my own, quite clear memory, I adapted very ably to the changed realities of my circumstances. I remember very well that, far from being miserable on that voyage, I was positively excited about life aboard the ship, as well as by the prospect of the future that lay before me. (7)

We remember that Nunning had discovered the cognitive distance between the reader and the text. According to him, a reader only judges a narrator as reliable or unreliable based on his world knowledge. Thus Ishiguro characters are unreliable because all of their narration indicate their needs for self-identity creation and self-protection. While describing



his unreliable narrator Banks, Ishiguro expresses his pity towards him and writes The traditional unreliable narrator is that sort of narrator through whom you can almost measure the distance between craziness and the proper world out there. Chris top her Banks is perhaps not quite that sort of conventional unreliable narrator in the sense that it's not very clear what's going on out there.....I wanted to actually have the world of the book distorted, adopting the logic of the narrator, in paintings, you often see that Expressionist art... is sometimes distorted to reflect the emotion of the artist who is looking at the world... I'm then able to explore people's inner world much more thoroughly and with much more subtlety. (96)

At the end of the novel, Ishiguro usually reveals some assonance in the narrator's life that lies in Banks' life. He finally finds his parents, and all his problems are solved. Thus, Ishiguro rewrites the past and makes Banks' life access information about his history through his unreliable narration. So this article concluded that the unreliable narrator of Banks in *When We Were Orphans* narrates himself as the main character, using the other character to find his own identity and reclaim their past.

British Cultures, volume 10, 2003, pp. 80.

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