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**KAZUO ISHIGURO ROMANLARINDA  
MANİPÜLATİF ANLATICILAR**

***THE MISDIRECTING NARRATORS  
IN KAZUO ISHIGURO'S NOVELS***

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**Öz**

Her yazarın kurgusunda uyguladığı farklı teknikler vardır. Bu bağlamda romanın anlatıcısı kurgunun temel bileşenlerinden biridir. Bir hikâyede birçok farklı anlatım tekniği uygulanabilir. Kazuo Ishiguro'nun da kurgusunda kendine özgü bir üslubu vardır. Bu yönüyle dünya çapında ilgi çekmeyi başarmıştır. Romanlarında genellikle birinci şahıs anlatıcısı kullanır. Kullandığı anlatıcılar hikâyelerin ana karakterleridir ve öznel bir anlatım sergileme eğilimindedirler, yani bir başka deyişle güvenilir anlatıcılardır. Ishiguro'nun anlatıcıları sadece güvenilir değil, aynı zamanda okuyucuyu yanlış yönlendirme eğilimi sergilerler. Okuyucuyu yanıltmak için farklı yöntemler kullanırlar. Bu çalışmanın amacı, Ishiguro'nun ilk altı romanında anlatıcıların yanlış yönlendirici yaklaşımlarına odaklanmaktır. Anlatıcılar, olayları kendi istekleri doğrultuda göstermek için çeşitli taktikler uygularlar. Olaylar sırasında gerçekliği manipüle etmek için bazı ortak teknikler sergilerler. Okuyucunun dikkatini başka yöne çekerek konunun özünü gizlemeye çalışırlar. Bu çalışma anlatıcıların yanıltıcı teknikleri uygulayışını Ishiguro'nun romanlarında öne çıkan bazı olay ve durumlar ile örneklendirip ele almıştır. Ishiguro'nun yayımlanan ilk altı romanında bir karşılaştırma yapmak suretiyle yanıltıcı anlatıcılara değinilmiştir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Anlatı, Anlatıcı, Yanlış Yönlendirme, Manipülasyon.

### **Abstract**

All writers apply different techniques when composing a fiction. Narration is one of the essential components of fiction. There are many different applications of narration in a story. Kazuo Ishiguro has a quite idiosyncratic style in narration. He uses first person narrator in his fiction. The narrators are main characters of the stories and they tend to perform a subjective narration, namely they are unreliable narrators. Ishiguro's idiosyncratic narrators are not only unreliable, they are also misdirecting. They display different attitudes to mislead the reader. The aim of this study is to focus on misdirecting approaches of narrators in the first six novels of Ishiguro. The narrators in these novels perform various tactics to illustrate the events according to their desire. They exhibit some common techniques to manipulate the reality in the course of events. They conceal the essence of the matter by distracting the attention to other things. These approaches are exemplified in the text by giving some prominent illustrations from the novels respectively. In this context a comparison has been applied to the first six novels of Ishiguro.

**Keywords:** Narration, Narrator, Misdirecting, Manipulation.

### **Introduction**

In composition of a fiction certain elements need to come together. In this respect one of the essential components of fiction is narration. There are many different narration techniques to compose a story. Bringing narration to a successful conclusion becomes a significant factor to upraise the fiction. Every peculiar writer has a distinctive literary style. Kazuo Ishiguro is one of those peculiar writers. Ishiguro has gained worldwide attention with his success in literature. There are certain determining factors in his literary prominence. His narration technique is one of the particular reasons that distinguishes his exceptionality. Ishiguro prefers to use the first person narrator in his novels. The narrators are main characters of the stories and they tend to perform a subjective narration, namely they are unreliable. "*The subjective narrator is an unreliable narrator who spends most of the story trying to convince the reader of something*" (Prudchenko). This definition is not completely encompassing the narrators of Ishiguro. Ishiguro's idiosyncratic narrators are not only unreliable, they are also misdirecting. They display different attitudes to mislead the reader. In this respect it is Ishiguro's narration technique that widely attracts attention.

Narration is a widespread subject to be worked out. All components of narration and related titles are not going to be discussed as a subject matter in this article. The aim of this study is to focus on misdirecting approaches of narrators in six novels of Ishiguro. The narrators perform various tactics to illustrate the events according to their desire. They conceal the essence of the matter by distracting the

attention to other things. These approaches will be exemplified below by giving some prominent illustrations from novels of Ishiguro respectively.

### **Discussion**

*A Pale View of Hills*, published in 1982, is Ishiguro's first novel. It can be suggested that the 'pale' in the title refers to the elusiveness of the story. This obscurity is caused by narrator's demeanour. The narrator, Etsuko, is the protagonist of the novel as well. The novel presents different scenes and times from Etsuko's life span. The novel is fictionalized in different time slices. The first period focuses on Etsuko's life in Japan. After the dissolution of her first marriage, Etsuko moves to England with her second husband. The second time slice is about her life in England. Etsuko's narration gives hints about her discomfort with her past life. When giving name to her second daughter from the second marriage, she prefers an English name, Niki. A Japanese name will be reminiscent of the past. That is something undesired by Etsuko (Ishiguro, 2012; 7). Etsuko's first daughter, Keiko, from her former marriage has committed suicide lately. Moving to England has been a depressing act for Keiko. She somehow could not adopt the new life in England. Her psychological state deteriorated day by day and eventually she put an end to her life. This biting process has a significant penetration on the formation of Etsuko's narration. Etsuko does not clearly express any responsibility for her daughter's suicide. However, some traces of guilty conscience can be caught between the lines.

First of all, Etsuko is reluctant to face her past life. Her life in Japan is basically given through illustration of other characters' lives. Etsuko narrates a story about a woman and her daughter, Sachiko and Mariko, through flashbacks. Sachiko is a widow with a daughter. Sachiko displays a complicated life. She is at the point of marrying an American and heading for America. Because she is not satisfied with her life in Japan. Her illusion is her belief to achieve happiness by migrating to America. In this context she does not hesitate to make selfish choices. She is not a responsible mother and she is not concerned about her daughter at all. Despite the child murder rumours in the vicinity, Sachiko lets Mariko to play in the woods alone. However she pretends to be an ideal mother. Sachiko states that her purpose in leaving Japan is seeking happiness for Mariko because Mariko's bliss is her greatest aim. Actually, Mariko is reluctant to leave Japan, but her choices and desires are ignored by Sachiko. Sachiko's speech contradicts with her actions. She makes nothing of her mistakes. "But

*why can't you understand that I've nothing to hide, I've nothing to be ashamed of*" (71). She seems to be far away from understanding the march of events.

It is striking that Sachiko's story shows too much similarity with Etsuko's life. According to Etsuko's narration both of them experience similar events. However by the end of the story something unusual happens. When Etsuko narrates a final memory about Sachiko and Mariko she states that; "*Keiko was happy that day. We rode on the cable-cars*" (182). Actually Etsuko is talking about Mariko but somehow she mentions her daughter's name, Keiko. At the time of this event Keiko is not born yet. This is where the truth is revealed. It turns up that the story about Sachiko and Mariko is a fabricated by Etsuko. Etsuko is unwilling to face the reality. That's why she narrates a fabricated story about her past. Ishiguro explains, "*it's really Etsuko talking about herself, the meanings that Etsuko imputes to the life of Sachiko are obviously the meanings that are relevant to Etsuko's own life. Whatever the facts were about what happened to Sachiko and her daughter, they are of interest to Etsuko now because she can use them to talk about herself*" (Mason, 2008; 5). All these factors suggest that there are too much pain in Etsuko's past. It is unbearable to look the past directly (Swaim, 2008; 97). She only looks back through a fabricated story.

Ishiguro's second novel *An Artist of the Floating World* was published in 1986. The phrase "the floating world" in the title refers to cultural and societal changes, because the novel covers a period of several decades. However; it can also be linked to the changes in narrator's life and his approach to the changes. The narrator of this novel, Masuji Ono, is the protagonist as it was in the first novel. Ono is a retired painter. This novel also represents different time periods of the main character. Unreliability is again one of the prominent features of the narrator. Ono's life from childhood to maturity is narrated through flashbacks. Ono goes through certain changes during the course of his narration.

Ishiguro defines Ono as; "*an artist who never really saw beyond his small world*" (Gallix, 2008; 150). Ono views the life through his small world and narrates the events accordingly. Ono tries to mislead the reader about certain events. In order to exemplify the misleading, some instances can be given as follow. Ono has two daughters. Noriko, who lives with Ono, is unmarried. Noriko is meeting with possible future husband candidates. One of the meetings, which took place the previous year, failed without any sensible reason. Ono attributes the failure to some irrelevant situations. He states that; "*The*

*Miyakes, from what I saw of them, were just the proud, honest sort who would feel uncomfortable at the thought of their son marrying above his station*" (Ishiguro, 2007; 18). Here we witness the misdirection in narration. Not only Ono, the older daughter Setsuko is also well aware of the underlying fact in the failure of the marriage meeting. However; Ono is unwilling to expose the main reason. Because it has something to do with his background and it seems painful for him to face such things. When Setsuko makes reference to the underlying reason about the failure of the meeting, Ono still exhibits an uninterested approach. However, Ono develops a different type of behaviour later. It can be result of getting old and becoming more mature, he finds it essential to admit some of the mistakes he committed during his youth. At earlier times of his artistry Ono meets Chishu Matsuda. Ono is affected from Matsuda's political views and he changes his artistic approach and he follows a different art movement, thus he becomes a supporter of the military expansionism of Japan. However as Japan loses the war the nationalists are regarded responsible for death of numerous soldiers. The warmongers become subject of social pressure. The trouble in Noriko's marriage-meeting is result of Ono's onetime political views. Eventually Ono comes to terms with his responsibility about the failure of his daughter's marriage process.

Yet there are other subjects which are manipulated in the course of Ono's narration. Ono masquerades himself as a worldwide artist but he prefers to appear as a modest person. That's why he chooses one of his pupils, Kuroda, to narrate his grandeur; "*I have suspected for some time that Sensei was unaware of the high regard in which he is held by people in this city. Indeed, as the instance he has just related amply illustrates, his reputation has now spread beyond the world of art, to all walks of life*" (Ishiguro, 2007; 24). Actually Ono is a local artist and later on it becomes clear that his statements about his artistic fame are incorrect. In another occasion Ono attributes the following sentence to Dr Saito; "*A great honour to have an artist of your stature in our neighbourhood*" (Ishiguro, 2007; 178). However, Setsuko's statement; "*Dr Saito was never so familiar with Father's career*" (Ishiguro, 2007; 177) contradicts with Ono's claim. The misdirecting narrative in *An Artist of the Floating World* cannot be limited with the examples given above. The given instances are just adequate to display the misleading characteristic of the narrator.

*The Remains of the Day*, published in 1989, is Ishiguro's third novel. Unlike the first two novels in *The Remains of the Day* the characters and the settings are non-Japanese. The novel projects time slices in life span of Stevens who is a dedicated butler. The exaltation

of ordinary subjects is an indispensable technique in Ishiguro's writing. This technique reaches the peak in this novel. The narrator, Stevens, aggrandizes his profession beyond the limits of logic. He acts upon the requirements of his job. His only aim has been becoming the perfect and cool butler. He has made lots of sacrifices for this cause. His obsession with his job made him miss once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for happiness.

Stevens' narration gives hints about his personality. His reference to every minor detail indicates his punctilious character. Diving into small details more than adequate leads to deviations in topic integrity. Incidental topics are narrated as notable events. The Hayes Society can be given as an example to exaltation of an ordinary subject. It is a union of elite butlers. It has an influential impact in London and surrounding. It has only a few members. Despite the limited number of members it is a powerful society. This narration does not make sense. The society consists of butlers and it has just a few members. Yet it has an uncontrollable sanction power. Its power is considered as pernicious that's why authorities seek to terminate the society. The source of this power is unclear. It is a fact that being a butler is considered as a low class job. However, the illustrated picture of the society is a powerful one. This status appears to be quite ironical. It leads to look with suspicion to Stevens' narration.

Stevens' obsession with his job leads him to exaggerate the events connected with his profession. In this respect his subjective approach in narration tends to be misdirecting. His accuracy becomes a matter of debate. The following example will make this argument more precise; Stevens narrates a memory about a conflict that took place long ago between him and Miss Kenton. However, his feelings towards Miss Kenton do not let him to attribute this unseemly incident to her. Therefore he states that; "*But now that I think further about it, I am not sure Miss Kenton spoke quite so boldly that day...In fact, now that I come to think of it, I have a feeling it may have been Lord Darlington himself who made that particular remark..*" (Ishiguro, 2007; 66). The general view of the story suggests that the person in question is Miss Kenton. However, narrator moves away from the objectivity and misdirects the reader about the true face of events. His feelings toward Miss Kenton make him to manipulate the narration. In another occasion Stevens does not fail to lie when he considers necessary. One of the guests asks him about his previous employer; "*Mrs Wakefield had said: 'But tell me, Stevens, what was this Lord Darlington like? Presumably you must have worked for him.' 'I didn't, madam, no.'*" (Ishiguro, 2007; 129). He does not wish to become an

instrument in confirming the rumours about Lord Darlington. For the sake of the honour of his deceased employer he prefers to lie.

Another example of the devious narration of Stevens is about his daily coffee breaks with Miss Kenton. According to Stevens the meetings are about maintaining the household on the whole (Ishiguro, 2007; 151). However, as soon as Miss Kenton gets engaged to someone else the meetings are cancelled out by Stevens. His reaction to Miss Kenton's engagement indicates that the only motivation behind the meetings is not job based. Stevens has feelings to Miss Kenton but his obsession with his job does not let him to admit. In another occasion Miss Kenton overtakes Stevens when he is reading a love novel. Stevens attempts to hide the novel. When he becomes sure she saw him he makes an excuse about reading the novel. He states that his aim was improving his vocabulary (Ishiguro, 2007; 170). The examples given above are indicators of the misdirecting narration of Stevens in *The Remains of the Day*.

The following novel, *The Unconsoled*, was first published in 1995. For this novel Shaffer suggests that; "*Ishiguro shifts from a Jamesian to a Kafkaesque prose style*" (2008; 91). This claim is based on the surrealistic elements used in the novel. The time and space lose their meaning in certain places. The logical links between characters and events get weird in some occasions. To name a few of the weirdness in the novel it would be better to start with the narrator. Ryder, a worldwide famous pianist, visits an unknown country in Central Europe to give a concert. The crucial point is that he has lost his memory and he is not aware of the reason for his visit. To put it simply the story is narrated by a character that has lost his memory.

Ishiguro uses first person narrator for this novel. However, as the occasion arises the narration slips into third person omniscient. Ryder narrates events that occur somewhere else as if he is there. In some occasions he narrates the thoughts of some characters (Ishiguro, 2009; 62-3). In this respect the narration technique of *The Unconsoled* is unusual. The absent-minded narrator is not aware of the reason for his visit to the city in question. He does not reveal his memory problem to people around him. He lets himself to drift with the tide. He comes to realize the reason for his arrival from surrounding people's talking. He is supposed to give a concert. However this concert is not an ordinary one. The fate and future of the city depend upon the success of this concert. This is one of the points which grows away from logic. The relation between the concert and its vital importance for the future of the city remains a mystery. This subject is not clarified throughout the story. As the story draws to end it becomes clear that the great



expectations reckoned on Ryder come to nothing. The piano concert somehow does not occur.

The memory status of narrator gives cause for prudent approach to his narration. His attitude in narration may be a manoeuvre of manipulation. The events that take place in the course of story support this claim. After Ryder checks in the hotel he becomes acquainted with the old bellman, Gustav. During their short trip from reception desk to the room time dilation occurs. The bellman talks to the worldwide famous pianist about his job, his family problems in detail. He asks Ryder to talk to his daughter, Sophie, on his behalf because as a father he has not communicated with his daughter for years. The weirdness of the situation is indisputable. In this respect Petry states that *The Unconsoled* is the most postmodern novel when compared to the first three novels (1999). As the story progresses the weirdness in narration becomes more complicated. Ryder's meeting with Sophie leads to unexpected consequences. As his memory refreshes he finds out that Sophie is not a stranger. It becomes clear that they had a mutual past. Moreover they have a son named Boris. It becomes difficult to foresee what is coming next. There is vagueness in the atmosphere of the story and Ryder's narration. The route of the narration is stated quite unpredictable. This unpredictability seems to be caused by the misdirecting approach of the narrator. The narration of the story as a whole supports this idea.

The fifth novel of Ishiguro, *When We Were Orphans*, was published in 2000. In this novel Ishiguro gets closer to detective story. Yet it is not quite possible to qualify the novel as a complete detective novel. It may be more appropriate to entitle it as a postmodern detective novel. The narrator of the story is a famous detective Christopher Banks. Christopher narrates his own story. He used to maintain a happy childhood with his family in Shanghai. When his parents got lost mysteriously, he was sent back to England to live with his relatives. As Christopher grows up he becomes a famous detective. Now his primary aim is to go to Shanghai and to open the closed case about his disappeared parents.

Same as in the previous novels Christopher's narration is troublesome as well. When narrating some old reminiscences he states that he has some trouble with his memory. "*I do not recall much of what we talked about that day*" (Ishiguro; 2002; 12) and in another occasion he says that; "...my recollection of it of it is not as detailed. In fact, I cannot remember at all what came before and after this particular moment" (Ishiguro; 2002; 14). Ishiguro's narrators' excuses about their memory become a common feature of narrators. This situation indicates



a misdirecting behaviour. In order to avoid mentioning certain subjects they allege excuses about their memory.

A similar case to *The Unconsoled* recurs in *When We Were Orphans*. In both novels the narrators are illustrated as heroes. However the expectation attributed to Christopher is bigger than the Ryder's. His arrival to Shanghai leads to great expectations in Shanghai. At the moment of his visit to Shanghai, China and Japan are in state of war. Here the narration grows away from logic one more time. The aim of Christopher's trip is solving his parent's case. However the solution of the case is identified with the end of the war. This identification seems to be quite weird. There is not any direct relation between two situations. It can be result of narrator's subjective and manipulative approach. Actually the missing parent case has nothing to do with the war between two countries. But the narrator displays the scene according to his own motivations. "*The Chinese would have to surrender sooner or later, so why did they not do so now? To which several voices objected that the conclusion was not nearly so cut and dried. Things were changing day by day, and there were many factors each impinging on the others. 'And besides,' someone asked loudly, hasn't Mr. Banks turned up?'*" (Ishiguro, 2002; 169). It is not possible to constitute a logical bond between two events. However; as it is seen Christopher takes people's expectation for granted. He finds it necessary to make a statement; "*Ladies and gentlemen. I can well see the situation here has grown rather trying. And I have no wish to raise false expectations at such a time. But let me say that I would not be here now if I were not optimistic about my chances bringing this case, in the very future, to a happy conclusion. In fact, ladies and gentlemen, I would say I am more than optimistic. I beg then for your patience over this coming week or so. After that, well, let us see what we have achieved'*" (Ishiguro, 2002; 170). The narrator's effort to glorify himself raises a paranoid atmosphere. However as the story progresses all expectations come to nothing. Narrator's attempts in misdirecting the course of events fail.

The last novel to be viewed in scope of this study is *Never Let Me Go*, which was published in 2005. This novel has drawn widespread interest due to its unusual structure. The story takes place in 1990s of England. However, it bears no relation with actual time and setting. Ishiguro states that; "*Kafka is an obvious model once you move away from straight social or psychological realism'*" (Jaggi, 2008; 113). In this story there are traces of Kafkaesque novel.

*Never Let Me Go* is a dystopia dealing with human cloning. It mostly narrates the story of students of Hailsham. Hailsham is a

boarding school of clones. The narrator of the story, Kathy, is also a graduate of this school. As a requirement of the donation program students start to donate their organs when they become young adults. After donation of several organs the death becomes inevitable. They are well aware of this bitter end. Some of the clones become 'carers' to look after the clones until their donation process is over. The narrator, Kathy, is also one of the carers. But she is supposed to leave carer position soon. In other words she will go through the donation process as her final mission. However, Kathy avoids defining the reality about the clone students and the donation program. In this respect Kathy's narration is unreliable as well. She does not give an objective view of events. She prefers to conceal the grim reality about their existence. Similar to previous narrators she uses the weakness of memory as an excuse. It is a manoeuvre to avoid mentioning the undesired subjects. The narrator misdirects the reader by giving her memory as an excuse. She is an unreliable narrator about her own feelings as well. She painstakingly avoids giving hints about his feelings for Tommy.

### **Conclusion**

Ishiguro has an idiosyncratic technique in narration. First of all the unreliability is an apparent point in all narrators. One of the prominent features of the unreliable narrators is their misdirecting attitude in narration. In this study the misdirecting approach of narrators in the first six novels of Ishiguro has been referred briefly. The narrators apply some common techniques to manipulate the reality in the course of events. Addressing the reader is one of the attention grabbing common specialties of Ishiguro's narrators. The narrators aim to establish the trust of reader by addressing them directly. In some occasions the narrators try to make the reader a partner in the story. Thus it becomes smoother to manipulate the story.

One of the efficient misdirecting elements of narrators is giving the weakness of their memory as an excuse. Narrators apply the weakness of memory in necessary occasions to conceal the undesired realities. It mainly occurs in cases where they are reluctant to face their past directly. The weakness of the memory dominates *The Unconsoled*. In this novel the narrator, Ryder, has lost his memory completely. The story starts at an unknown city where the narrator does not remember anything at all. The story gains meaning with the statements of secondary characters.

Ishiguro states that his narrators use the language of self-deception to protect themselves (Mason, 2008; 5). This technique peaks up in *A Pale View of Hills*. The narrator, Etsuko, fabricates a whole

story to conceal her own story. Because she is not psychologically ready to face her regretful past. Only after a slip of the tongue the reader can understand that the fabricated story is her real story. To sum up almost all narrators of Ishiguro apply various manoeuvres to manipulate and misdirect the reader.

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