

Causes and Implications of Etsuko's Pidgin Identity in *A Pale View of Hills*

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ABSTRACT

*The paper proposes a theoretical analysis of *A Pale View of Hills*, using a psycho-literary approach to the themes of Japaneseness-Englishness, displacement, and the hybrid individual as they emerge from Kazuo Ishiguro's novel. Etsuko's pidgin identity results from the main character's existential migration, which, in turn, stems from her experiencing and witnessing gender inequality, domestic abuse, and war trauma along with the gaping rift between generations. In line with Freud and Jung's oneiric theories, the paper investigates Etsuko's post-traumatic stress disorder in order to explain why the protagonist fails to face the suicide of her elder daughter, Keiko, whose avoidant-insecure behaviour might have worsened after her forced uprooting and immigration to England. Although the middle-aged expatriate Etsuko is willing to find new motivation for living, based on the unusual habit of the subconscious to get used to repetitive traumas, her pidgin identity, impossible to recalibrate, may affect her ability to heal.*

Keywords: Displacement, Pidgin identity, Memory and recollection, Trauma, Post-traumatic stress disorder, Gender inequalities, The generation gap, Migration, Shadow, Attachment theory, Dream psychoanalysis, A pale view of hills, Kazuo Ishiguro

INTRODUCTION

The therapeutic nature of Kazuo Ishiguro's emotional writing skills, as well as his bicultural background, has enabled the British writer of Japanese origin to convey, in a Nobel Prize-winning fashion, the relativity of recollection in an ever-changing world, with shifty values, imperfect childhoods, and intricate interconnections that engulf the vast phenomenology of gender and migration. The main Ishigurian themes and techniques – time, memory, identity, displacement, historiography, trauma, post-traumatic stress disorder, behavioural and linguistic modelling – are thus used to transcend imagological boundaries in the author's conscious

attempt to prove that all national matrices can complement each other so long as it is human values that underlie collective identities.

Sincerity is the only pathway to inner healing, which will automatically reorganize the environment according to a healthier mindset. No type of psychotherapy will work unless one decides to clean the dirt under the carpet, as it were. Ishiguro's characters can create cathartic *emotion-scapes* within mental dioramas so that, seeing deception in others, readers can correct their own so long as they are trying to remain true to themselves no matter how hurtful that is. One such therapeutic example is Etsuko from Ishiguro's debut novel.

Pidgin Identity

A Pale View of Hills can be regarded either as an English novel with Japanese touches or the other way around since Britain and Japan intermingle masterfully in similar amounts of imagery, style, and context. The present is set in England in the late 1970s or early 1980s. The past takes place in Nagasaki, Japan, around 1945. However, World War II is only alluded to, so the novel can hardly be interpreted as a historiographic metafiction¹.

The story is told by a middle-aged Japanese mother who settled in England, and who seems to have experienced the blessing and curse of all types of human interrelation: family–love–work–friendship. The themes underlying the plot layers are all related to the ramifications of determinism and causality: (1) why bad things happen to good people (Keiko's tragic fate; the atomic bomb in Nagasaki); (2) the healing power of conscience (Etsuko's attempt to come to terms with her daughter's suicide); (3) past-self regression as catharsis (Etsuko's retelling her traumatic past); (4) the failure to bridge the generation gap (Ogata-san's faulty relation with his son Jiro; Etsuko's with her daughters Keiko and Niki; Sachiko's with her daughter Mariko).

Just as the term *pidgin* refers to a hybrid language that has blended together simple elements from two different tongues, so too *pidgin identity* could denote the inexorable mixture of two identities as a result of existential migration (Madison, 2006, p. 238). Etsuko's voluntary displacement has irreversibly led to her pidgin identity – a shallow layer of Britishness gilding her dark *Japaneseness*. Her resolution to leave her homeland and become a foreigner may have a war-related cause yet her past self in retrospection indirectly conveys her desperate need for belonging at the time. As a voluntary migrant, Etsuko manages to establish a safer home outside the geographic boundaries of her slow-healing country. The first time she has seen her new country, she feels fulfilled, “thinking how so truly like England everything looked.

¹The term was coined by Canadian literary theorist Linda Hutcheon, referring to the literary works with parts of historical fiction (1988).

All these fields, and the house too" (p. 67); as such, the experience of her foreignness, as well as her pidgin identity, would make her return to Nagasaki one day like another migration (Hayes, 2008, pp. 2-13) rather than like identity recalibration.

From the beginning of the novel, the protagonist's pidgin identity transpires through the deceptive overlapping of her past and present instead of a chronological disclosure of events. Settled in England for more than two decades, Etsuko now lives alone in Southern England after the death of her second husband, a British journalist who, in her opinion, failed to understand the Japanese "despite all the impressive articles he wrote about Japan" (Ishiguro, 1990, p. 90). Niki, Etsuko's younger daughter, comes to live with her mother for five days, because Keiko, Etsuko's elder daughter, who lived in a rented flat in Manchester, has recently strangled herself. She was found by the landlady, and her image, hanging from the ceiling, keeps haunting her bereaved mother, although Etsuko pretends otherwise: "[...] such things are long in the past now and I have no wish to ponder them yet again. My motives for leaving Japan were justifiable, and I know I always kept Keiko's interests very much at heart. There is nothing to be gained in going over such matters again" (p. 91). Niki's visit leads to Etsuko's recalling essential moments of her life in a suburb of Nagasaki in the early 1950s. After listening to her mother's story, Niki returns to London whilst Etsuko decides to sell the big house, for all her younger daughter's opposition.

For her narrative, Etsuko chooses two prominent memories of one particular summer in post-war Japan. One of the memories refers to the visit of her father-in-law Seiji Ogata, whom she politely called Ogata-san. While she was pregnant with her first child, her husband Jiro found interest only in his pitiful job as an electronics worker. Although he strongly believed in the dutiful, subservient role of his wife, Etsuko seemed grateful for the few pleasant moments they spent together in their small apartment, whereas an entire nation was trying to recover from the horrors of the atomic bomb. According to Etsuko's description, all apartments were identical and "rather difficult to keep cool during the warmer months", with tatami floors and "bathrooms and kitchens of a Western design." Although their living space offered enough comfort for a period of peaceful transition, Etsuko and Jiro were "waiting for the day [they] could move to something better" (p. 12), which indirectly suggests the Japanese's eagerness to exit the survival mode and start thinking freely of a better future. Once Seiji Ogata came to stay with his son and daughter-in-law during the summer, his chauvinistic views on the teaching system and women's role in society became apparent. The restrained style of recollection indicates the individual and collective lack of guidance at the time, as well as the painful wavering between the old and new in trans-generational relationships and gender roles.

Etsuko's second memory shows her unconventional friendship with a Japanese woman in her thirties: "I was thinking about [...] a woman I knew once [...] when I was living in Nagasaki.

[...] A long time ago” (p. 10). Sachiko and her weird ten-year-old daughter Mariko lived in a dilapidated, bomb-spared wooden cottage in the forest that somehow escaped the city planning, not far from Etsuko’s newly built block of flats. The two places were separated by a river and “an expanse of waste ground” that contained “several acres of dried mud and ditches.” Sachiko had come from Tokyo a year before, where she was living in comfortable conditions at one of her uncles in another region of Nagasaki. The reader is given no explanation as to why she has decided to leave such a decent place for “the one wooden cottage spared by the devastation of the bomb and the government’s bulldozers” (p. 96). In retrospect, Etsuko realizes that she “never knew Sachiko well” and that their relationship actually consisted in “no more than a matter of some several weeks one summer many years ago” (p. 11). Yet, the two women “were to become friends that summer” and Etsuko, probably in her fourth month of pregnancy, was to be admitted into Sachiko’s confidence (p. 13). Sachiko was dreaming of immigrating to the US with her daughter and an American soldier named Frank. She kept repeating that her “daughter comes first” (p. 86) and that “being a mother [...] makes life truly worthwhile” (p. 112) and yet Mariko experiences one of the worst forms of parental neglect, spending most of her time alone or walking through the forest at inappropriate hours.

Throughout the book, there are overt warnings about the deceiving aspect of recollection: “As far as I remember, that was the first occasion I spoke to Mariko” (p. 16). “As far as I remember, that was all that took place between us that morning” (p. 17). “It is possible that my memory of these events will have grown hazy with time, that things did not quite happen in quite the way they come back to me today” (p. 41). “Memory, I realize, can be an unreliable thing; often it is heavily colored by the circumstances in which one remembers, and no doubt this applies to certain of the recollections I have gathered here” (p. 156). As such, Ishiguro places the responsibility of the factual development of the plot in the reader’s hands. *A Pale View of Hills* is not intended as an autobiography and yet the reader cannot overlook Ishiguro’s own migration experience, being himself born in Nagasaki and moving with his parents to England when he was very young. The author’s own pidgin identity thus serves as a primary source of inspiration for his novels. Since his parents did not see themselves as immigrants, ready to return to Japan whenever the time was right, they were trying to preserve their Japanese customs inside their family and within the cultural boundaries of the English world (Mason, 1989, p. 336). This explains why Ishiguro is only partially concerned with “a realist purpose in writing” and with “what really did happen” (Mason, 1989, p. 341). He just invents a Japan that serves his literary needs. And he puts that Japan together “out of little scraps, out of memories, out of speculation, out of imagination. [...] What’s important is the emotional aspect, the actual positions the characters take up at different points in the story, and why they need to take up these positions [...] not as a Japanese phenomenon but

as a human phenomenon” (Mason, 1989, p. 343). Moreover, Julie Mehta gives an even more personal note to Etsuko's story and Keiko's suffering as she refers to Ishiguro's loss of his beloved grandfather: “Ishiguro's absence at his beloved grandfather's deathbed in Japan, to whom he was extremely close, affected him deeply and this fuels a haunting exploration of what happens to children when they are forcibly exiled from their familiar surroundings” (2017, p. 35).

Shadow's Embrace

A Pale View of Hills is a narrative manifestation of post-traumatic stress disorder, as it may occur in real-life situations. The non-chronological regression in time and distortion of past events thus become useful strategies of overcoming the trauma of emigrating and assimilating new traditions. Displacement can be regarded as a three-dimensional reality, with social, economic, and political dimensions (Ravenstein, 1885, p. 167-227). However, its mental and emotional implications far exceed the demographic ones: “A man might work and make his contribution in one place, but at the end of it all [...] he still wants to go back to the place where he grew up” (Ishiguro, 1990, p. 150).

Etsuko's mangled memories indirectly indicate her twofold experience of becoming a mother and leaving her post-war homeland for a better life in England with a non-Japanese husband, whom she did not know very well. Although Etsuko's inability to relate events as they were may be due to the evasive and repressive feeling in Japan after the war (Eckert, 2012, pp. 77-92), Ishiguro manages to separate the collective trauma of a post-nuclear-bomb world from Etsuko's personal turmoil, although the latter is the direct consequence of the former. His reason for doing so is that he has to “know the fictional landscape in which [his] novel takes place very well” (Mason, 1989, p. 345). This is “the landscape” he wants to introspect, not the actual “chunk of history or real country.” Therefore, as the reader advances through the factual story, they are presented with the other demons from Etsuko's past, verbalized in an ambiguous, elusive, and puzzling way, to culminate with a mind-boggling revelation close to the end of the novel. Ishiguro thus proves the importance of his narrative strategy when “someone ends up talking about things they cannot face directly through other people's stories” (Mason, 1989, p. 337). This is the *pale view* of what actually resulted from the combination of motherhood, failed marriage, and displacement.

Because of the subconscious fight between wanting to repress their trauma and wanting to deal with it once and for all, sufferers of post-traumatic stress disorder fail to determine what they should reveal in their narratives, hence their memory blanks and distorted recollections that jar with the traumatic realities (Molino, 2012, pp. 322-334). At a linguistic level, the yearn for objectivity triggers mental confusion in the form of random, inaccurate, or syncopated

renderings (Rogers, 2004, p. 6), along with repetitive phrases and unfinished sentences indicating the inability to move on: “I assure you; I was merely ...” (19). The true size of Etsuko’s emotional damage can only be deduced by finding revelatory pieces of the puzzle such as Ogata’s own perspective on Etsuko’s suffering: “You were very shocked, which was only to be expected. We were all shocked, those of us who were left” (Ishiguro, 1990, p. 58). According to Cathy Caruth, the need to face and escape a traumatic event is present in literature as is in psychoanalysis (1995, p. 3). Therefore, “quite often, we have situations where the license of the person to keep inventing versions of what happened in the past is rapidly beginning to run out” (Swift, 1989, p. 23). Being dependent on adults’ choices and decisions, children are more likely to be more affected by what they cannot control or understand, like detrimental family conditions, loss of a parent by death or divorce, illness, loss of a pet, abuse, and violence.

All characters in *A Pale View of Hills* have suffered individual traumas that resulted from the collective war trauma. However, none of them seems to know how to deal properly with their post-traumatic stress disorder, so their coping with their internal wounds merely consists in either keeping silent, as if nothing had happened or rebelling against the world. Jiro’s father strongly disagrees with the way old values and beliefs are criticized, sneered at, or dismissed as brainwashing in the post-war period, and he overtly blames the Americans for their influence on Japan. Ogata’s trauma starts augmenting when he comes across an article in a magazine stating that all teachers of his type should have been sent home once the war ended. The article was written by Shigeo Matsuda, one of his former students and Jiro’s colleagues at school. Having been insulted in public, Ogata hopes that he will receive the rightful apologies meant to restore his tarnished name, yet his son claims that he is too busy and tired to do anything about the whole situation and that “some things aren’t such a loss.” On the other hand, his father states that “children become adults but they don’t change much” (p. 131) as a way to prove that Jiro behaves in the same way he did when he disliked something as a child. As schoolboys before the war, both Jiro and Shigeo Matsuda were taught about the divine, gods-given supremacy of Japan over other nations, a lie that had fed people’s minds for so long, leading to a catastrophic disaster. Their joint trauma consists in the effort of reconfiguring their subconscious, full of lies about the false greatness of a nation humbled by the war horrors. Jiro no longer supports his father’s traditional views while Matsuda dares to criticize traditional teachers, although he used to spend a lot of time in the Ogata house and owed his current teaching position to his teacher. But “time really flies”, which means that “things are changing still” because, according to Matsuda, it is time for Japan to change its cold, pitiless, and undemocratic thinking patterns. On the other hand, Jiro’s friend, Hanada, lives a false trauma by struggling to remove the new ways, especially the ones regarding women’s mental freedom. The true trauma is experienced by his wife, whom he wants to beat with a golf club unless she votes for the same party as he does.

Besides its trauma-related connotations, the novel also proves that prejudices and cross-cultural conflicts are, in reality, timeless. On the one hand, there is the Japanese old patriarchy, with women incapable of making reasonable decisions: "My wife votes for Yoshida just because he looks like her uncle. That's typical of women. They don't understand politics. They think they can choose the country's leaders the same way they choose dresses" (p. 63). On the other, there is the western misconception that Japanese people are prone to suicidal thoughts and deeds, most likely because of the old practice of *hara-kiri*²: "The English are fond of their idea that our race has an instinct for suicide as if further explanations are unnecessary; for that was all they reported, that she was Japanese and that she had hung herself in her room" (p. 10). This imagological interpretation, shared by the English newspaper disseminating the news of Keiko's death, disregards the human predisposition to suicide, which can be activated by chronic distress, like depression or post-traumatic stress disorder. As for Frank, he behaves "like a little child", according to his girlfriend Sachiko. His incapacity to take full responsibility for his acts and stop drinking is rooted in the traumatic times he has to face as an American soldier in Japan. Irrationally enough, he pretends to prepare everything for his departure to America with Sachiko and Mariko only to disappear for three days, until he drinks away all the money Sachiko has saved for tickets to her new life abroad. His alcohol addiction makes Mariko compare him to a pig. As an unsympathetic character, he is expected to leave Sachiko in the traumatic position of Madame Butterfly³.

By presenting past events that seem unrelated to her present loss, Etsuko may indirectly tell the reader, as well as her younger daughter, that Sachiko is, in fact, she alter ego, and that, despite her troubled past, she has always had Keiko's best interests at heart. Etsuko thus sees Niki's visit as an opportunity to come to terms with her Shadow⁴. Nevertheless, the discussion she has with her younger daughter should have taken place much earlier, given that Niki lived with her parents all through her early years. Surely, at some point, the child or teenager Niki would have asked her mother about her life in Japan? The fact that Etsuko discloses these past aspects only after Keiko's tragic death indicates that she has failed to bond with her younger daughter the way she once failed to do so with her elder one. The only difference

²*Seppuku* or *harakiri* refers to the Japanese practice of committing suicide by sticking a knife through the belly. This ritual was usually used by samurai to die an honorable death instead of being captured by the enemy (Fusé, 1980, p. 57).

³John Luther Long's story is based on Pierre Loti's novel *Madame Chrysanthème* and inspired Giacomo Puccini to create *Madama Butterfly*, an opera in three acts about Cio-Cio-san, a Japanese woman, and her short, unfortunate marriage to a deceiving American naval officer, called Franklin Pinkerton (Schwarm).

⁴"Everyone carries a shadow and the less it is embodied in the individual's conscious life, the blacker and denser it is" (Jung, 1938, p. 131).

is that Niki does not carry within herself the losses and traumas, nor is she sensitized to the distorted values and harsh restrictions, of a post-war Japanese world. For her, Japan is just a distant image of the genetic code she is half carrying within her DNA.

The idea of duality, of a dark side that co-exists with someone's better self, is quite old, both in literature and psychology. Probably, the most famous example of bipolarity in fiction is *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (Stevenson, 1886). Up to the end of the novella, the two personalities are perfect opposites, making it hard for the reader to understand that they are, in truth, part of a single, fully-rounded character. This comes as a metaphorical allegory of the human preoccupation to hide the hideous and depraved part (Mr. Hyde) while showing society only the well-liked and respectable one (Dr. Jekyll). Nonetheless, neither of these personality facets is genuine or realistic on its own; each of them needs the other to create balance. It is the relationship between the two that makes a person whole. Separating or suppressing the bad in order to stay moral, decent, and courteous will eventually lead to identity confusion and ill health. On the other hand, acknowledging the dark side, along with the truth of a dual personality, has the power to render the alter ego dormant. One does not have to eradicate it; one just has to learn to embrace it in the right way. Therefore, in order to assimilate the true significance of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, one must ultimately consider the two as one single character. Indeed, taken alone, neither is a very interesting personality; it is the nature of their interrelationship that gives the character its power: "If only it were all so simple! If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart" (Solzhenitsyn⁵, 1974, p. 17)?

In the same vein, Etsuko and Sachiko, the protagonist and the antagonist, live symmetric lives, as if the latter is the dark version of the former. However, Sachiko is much more than that, considering that she refuses the aristocratic life provided by her in-laws in order to wash floors and serve noodles while dreaming of an American life with a drunkard of a man named Frank. Her self-description is only a façade of joking indifference, one of the most dangerous forms of reactivity: "How am I getting on? Well ... it's certainly an amusing sort of experience, working in a noodle shop. I must say I never imagined I'd one day find myself scrubbing tables in a place like this" (Ishiguro, 1990, p. 27).

According to the Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung, the open acknowledgement of one's dark side, or Shadow, is the first step towards rendering it dormant instead of allowing it, consciously

⁵Based on the experience of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago* presents the horrible reality of the Soviet prisons (1974).

or unconsciously, to control one's life: "The shadow is a moral problem that challenges the whole ego-personality, for no one can become conscious of the shadow without considerable moral effort. To become conscious of it involves recognizing the dark aspects of the personality as present and real. This act is the essential condition for any kind of self-knowledge" (1969, p. 8). Ishiguro may not have intended Sachiko to act as Etsuko's Shadow, yet the reader gradually realizes that, back in Japan, Etsuko allowed her Shadow to overcome her good side as a form of rebellion against the immediate aftermath of the war, as well as the image of subdued womanhood. As a brutal and irrational woman and mother, Sachiko gathers together all the societally disapproved features of Etsuko's personality, which should have been rejected, repressed, or hidden deep down into her subconscious mind (Matthews & Groes, 2010, p. 48). At a factual level, Etsuko recalls, with distant dismay, her Shadow's doings, mainly fueled by Sachiko's obsessive desire to emigrate from post-war Japan, despite her daughter's opposition. However, Etsuko's pidgin identity prevents her from revealing what happened in and outside her first marriage, which turned her into Sachiko. She only chooses to present herself through the relation between her two sides, positioned at different moments in time: her subservient self, shaped by the anti-feminist societal rigours, and her shadowy self, ignited by societal decay and personal pain.

In the past, Etsuko respected her husband Jiro, for all his coldness, and had a good relationship with her father-in-law. She did not wish to break the boundaries of the Japanese women's roles in a patriarchal society. If Etsuko was Sachiko towards the end of the American Occupation, around April 1952, then the obedient Etsuko must have lost her husband Jiro, or separated from him, during the war. Her familial losses, whatever their causes and extent, were to leave deep wounds, hence her failure to care for her baby girl. As a major constituent of her pidgin identity, Etsuko's Shadow can in no way be disregarded as the main trigger for Keiko's depression and long-term trauma that culminated with her suicide. The reader will thus deduce that Sachiko and Mariko's continued quarrel over migrating into the US could have been the very conflict between Etsuko and Keiko, as the latter, too, must have opposed being uprooted and foreignized.

The present-day Etsuko is visited by a recurring dream, which indicates how guilty she feels about Keiko's tragic fate: "At first it had seemed a perfectly innocent dream; I had merely dreamt of something I had seen the previous day – the little girl we had watched playing in the park. And then the dream came back the following night. Indeed, over the past few months, it has returned to me several times" (Ishiguro, 1990, p. 47). According to Jung, dreams come from the purposive psyche (body–mind–emotions) as they indicate certain stages of individuation or personality development: "Dreams are impartial, spontaneous products of the unconscious psyche, outside the control of the will. They are pure nature; they show us the unvarnished, natural truth, and are therefore fitted, as nothing else is, to give us back

an attitude that accords with our basic human nature when our consciousness has strayed too far from its foundations and run into an impasse” (Jung, 1938, p. 317). While Freud sees dreams as allegories of hidden wishes, with latent and manifest content (1953, pp. 631-633), Jung believes that dreams “do not lie, they do not distort or disguise. [...] They are invariably seeking to express something that the ego does not know and does not understand” (1933, p. 189), since they are “a spontaneous self-portrayal, in symbolic form, of the actual situation in the unconscious” (p. 505). In Etsuko’s dream, the little girl pulls “hard on the chains” yet she cannot “make the swing go higher” (Ishiguro, 1990, p. 48). In the end, Etsuko has to admit its connection with her Shadow: “The fact that I mentioned my dream to Niki, that first time I had it, indicates perhaps that I had doubts even then to its innocence. I must have suspected from the start – without fully knowing why – that the dream had not to do so much with the little girl we had watched, but with my having remembered Sachiko two days previously” (p. 55). A stronger psychoanalytical approach to Etsuko’s fractured dream indicates that the oneiric girl is, in fact, hanging from a noose (Shaffer, 1998, p. 11). This may also come in line with the fact that most characters spend their time “thinking about the dead” (p. 23): “It seemed to be that little girl, but it wasn’t. [...] It was just a little girl I knew once. A long time ago. [...] In fact, I realized something else [...] about the dream. [...] The little girl isn’t on a swing at all. It seemed like that at first. But it’s not a swing she’s on” (pp. 95-96).

Although Etsuko presents Sachiko as an old acquaintance, the unexpected pronoun shift at the end of the novel testifies to the conscious omission and distortion of certain events in the story. Because Niki’s friend needs an image of Nagasaki for her poem about Etsuko, Niki is given a calendar picture with the Inasa hills as the backdrop for the Nagasaki harbour. The picture conveys the daytrip Etsuko allegedly went on with Sachiko and Mariko. The expat suddenly alters her depiction of events by switching from Mariko to Keiko, when she was supposed to be pregnant with her baby girl during that trip. Etsuko makes this move deliberately, thereby partly telling the truth, not to Niki, who may be left wondering as much as the reader, but to herself – a sort of shameful escape from the guilt of being a horrible mother to a very traumatized daughter: “That calendar I gave you this morning. [...] That’s a view of the harbour in Nagasaki. This morning I was remembering the time we went there once, on a day-trip. Those hills over the harbour are very beautiful. [...] Keiko was happy that day. We rode on the cable cars. [...] No, there was nothing special about it. It’s just a happy memory, that’s all” (Ishiguro, 1990, p. 103).

In the Paris Review interview, Ishiguro states, from his experience as a social worker, that suffering people may unconsciously use a third person, whether imaginary or real, to refer to their own pain. Therefore, he had to use a sort of “gimmickry” at the end of the novel to leave room for the reader to deal with “the texture of memory” and put the pieces of the puzzle together (Hunnewell, 2008). If that is the case, then the friendship between the two women

can be indeed regarded as a mental contrast between the subservient Etsuko, optimistically expecting a baby, and the hardboiled, rebellious Sachiko, whose mothering hopes and expectations have been shattered by the horrifying war. Another way of interpreting Sachiko as Etsuko's Shadow after the war is by thoroughly investigating the few facts provided by Etsuko herself. As she mentions that Sachiko's husband came from a good family, being a fierce adept of the old misogynistic views, Etsuko's husband Jiro could have been the perfect candidate for interdicting Sachiko to learn a foreign language like English, for instance. As for Sachiko's father, he was an internationally-connected business man, and she also had an uncle from her husband's side who lived in Nagasaki. Etsuko had lost all her family during the war, which put her under the protection of Ogata-san before he became her father-in-law, hence her strong attachment to him at the time she was pregnant. The former teacher could thus be none other than Sachiko's old, sickly uncle, considering that Etsuko also refers to a time when her father-in-law became ill. As regards Etsuko's emigration to England instead of America, the reader can easily deduce that a man like Frank could not have kept his promise, yet a determined woman like Sachiko could easily have found someone else to take her far from Japan, a man trustworthy and idealistic enough to offer Mariko a better life. This seems to be the exact profile of Mr. Sheringham, Etsuko's deceased husband and Niki's father.

True Victim

Although Etsuko only mentions her elder daughter's suicide, it is this traumatic event that prompts the Japanese mother's elliptic and ambiguous story. During her early childhood, Keiko/Mariko was irreversibly traumatized by her mother's carelessness and cruelty. Later on, she would not attend school regularly, being often left unattended, only with her beloved cats for company. Being forced to leave her homeland would not have added to her old traumas if Keiko/Mariko had forgiven her mother in the first place. But in order for that to happen, Etsuko/Sachiko should have had at least one open discussion with her long-suffering daughter. Instead, the expat would go on with her British life, detaching herself completely from her daughter's depressive manifestations. The full extent of Keiko's post-traumatic stress disorder could be properly assessed by investigating the psychological implications of long-term human relationships as presented in John Bowlby's attachment theory. As the British psychologist mainly analyzed the effects of the parent-child relationship, his theory aimed to explain children's anxiety, stipulating that their attachment derived from the primary role of their parents as caregivers. Bowlby, however, also discovered that children's attachment far exceeded their response to feeding and nourishment, so much so that their anxiety could have long-term repercussions due to a distorted relationship with their parents in the first years of life (Cassidy, 1999, pp. 3-20). In other words, the way attachment develops in the first part of a child's life determines what kind of adult they will be. This comes to reinforce the

important role of a mother in her children's lives, not only as a food provider but also as a dependable person that provides the subconscious of her children with a healthy sense of security. Based on Bowlby's theory of attachment, the psychologist Mary Ainsworth developed a three-dimensional theory of attachment in the 1970s, distinguishing between three types of attachment (Bretherton, 1992, pp. 759-775), to which another dimension was added in 1986 (Main & Solomon, 1986, pp. 95-124): (1) secure attachment; (2) ambivalent-insecure attachment; (3) avoidant-insecure attachment; (4) disorganized-insecure attachment.

According to Bowlby and Ainsworth's theory, Keiko must have had an avoidant-insecure type of attachment towards her mother, and later on towards her step-father and half-sister, to whom she was barely close. As an antisocial loner, she kept herself isolated and locked in her room for days on end, going into the kitchen only to eat the meals left for her:

For the two or three years before she finally left us, Keiko had retreated into that bedroom, shutting us out of her life. She rarely came out, although I would sometimes hear her moving around the house after we had all gone to bed ... She had no friends, and the rest of us were forbidden entry into her room ... In the end, the rest of us grew used to her ways, and when by some impulse Keiko ventured down into our living room, we would all feel a great tension. (pp. 53-54)

Although Etsuko states that the rest of the family eventually became used to Keiko's depression, she later admits that her British husband hoped to help Keiko heal her old wounds: "Your father was rather idealistic at times. [...] He really believed we could give her a happy life over here. [...] But you see, Niki, I knew all along. I knew all along she wouldn't be happy over here" (p. 176). Niki should not have needed this piece of information, given that, as a member of the same family, she grew up with Keiko. She even has a different opinion on her father's attitude towards her elder sister: "I suppose dad should have looked after her a bit more, shouldn't he? He ignored her most of the time. It wasn't fair, really" (p. 175).

It is most unfortunate that Etsuko has chosen to reconcile herself to her daughter's depression instead of taking remedial action against her abominable way of raising her first-born daughter back in Nagasaki, when she only made idle promises and pretended that her "daughter's welfare [was] of the utmost importance" (p. 86). At some point, Etsuko does admit to her younger daughter that "nothing you learn at that age is totally lost" (p. 56). The ten-year-old Mariko avoids her abusive and neglectful mother while developing a needy type of attachment towards her cats. When she begs her mother to take her kittens with them to America, Sachiko interdicts Mariko to be "so childish" as to attach herself to such creatures, taking the crate and drowning the kittens in the river before Mariko and Etsuko's eyes. Sachiko's dread of being left behind because of some animals blinds her to the point of strangling the poor

creatures while drowning them, to be certain she gets rid of them for good: "Sachiko was gazing down into the vegetable box through the wire gauze. She slid open a panel, brought out a kitten and shut the box again. She held the kitten in both hands, looked at it for a few seconds, then glanced up at me. 'It's just an animal, Etsuko,' she said. 'That's all it is.' [...] 'It's still alive,' she said tiredly ... 'How these things struggle'" (Ishiguro, 1990, p. 167). The scene is indicative not so much of the unemotional Japanese way of dealing with horrors as of Etsuko's being only a mental witness to her Shadow. In her defense, Sachiko blames the externalities: "If it wasn't for the war, if my husband was still alive, then Mariko would have had the kind of upbringing appropriate to a family of our upbringing" (p. 45). However exhausted, miserable, or depressed she must have felt at the time, though, her misbehavior is inexcusable. Neglected, emotionally battered, and unmissed, Mariko/Keiko will never recover, hence her radical decision to end her life.

It must therefore be Etsuko's witnessing position that prevents her from intervening and saving both the poor kittens and Mariko, who runs away in great distress. After the two women arrive back at the cottage, the pregnant Etsuko returns for Mariko using a lantern to find her more easily, which she does, at the river bank. It is here that Etsuko speaks to Mariko as if she were Keiko, willing her to be courageous, because "everyone is a little frightened of new things", promising that their life in America next to Frank will be good and, if it turns out not to be so, they can return at any time (pp. 172-173). This is how Sachiko should have spoken to her daughter to alleviate her fears of the unknown. Instead, she conveniently prefers to admit her total failure as a mother: "Do you think I imagine for one moment that I'm a good mother to her" (p. 171)? Her helplessness clashes with her earlier belief in a better life elsewhere: "Mariko will be fine in America. It's a better place for a child to grow up. And she'll have far more opportunities there, life's much better for a woman in America ... She could become a business girl, a film actress even. America's like that, Etsuko, so many things are possible. Frank says I could become a business woman too. Such things are possible out there" (p. 46).

Etsuko's mothering is anything but exemplary with regard to both her daughters, which may prove that Etsuko's pidgin identity has resulted more from her Shadow than from her kinder self. Unlike her sibling, though, Niki was brought up in a Western world and had a caring father when correct parenting counted the most. She assures her mother of not being "responsible for Keiko's death" (p. 11), yet Etsuko knows that Niki has never been close to her half-sister, hence her decision not to attend Keiko's funeral:

"Did you expect me to be there? [...] At the funeral, I mean."
"No, I suppose not. I didn't really think you'd come."
"It did upset me, hearing about her. I almost came."
"I never expected you to come." (p. 34)

Niki's name represents a linguistic compromise between Etsuko's pidgin identity in the making and her second husband's pseudo-love for Japan. Mr. Sheringham wanted his daughter to bear a Japanese name while the immigrant mother preferred an English one "not to be reminded of the past" (p. 9). Understandably, in the transition period, Etsuko hoped to undergo a process of identity reconfiguration by shedding her *Japaneseness* altogether while assimilating a completely new identity. Only later will she realize that her hard-earned *Englishness* will never become pure. Niki may seem a more "affectionate child", but she is far from showcasing a secure type of attachment; she is rather ambivalently attached, sometimes wanting to feel secure next to her family while avoiding their proximity at other times. Unlike Keiko, Niki has known only her mother's pidgin identity, as Etsuko Sheringham, which explains her overt empathizing with her mother's past hardships: "Sometimes you've got to take risks. You did exactly the right thing. You can't just watch your life wasting away" (p. 34). "It couldn't have been easy what you did, mother. You ought to have been proud for what you did with your life" (p. 90). "[...] how could you have known? And you did everything you could for her. You're the last person anyone could blame" (p. 176).

As if her mother's neglect had not sufficed, Mariko/Keiko's trauma was augmented by her seeing a woman drowning her baby and then cutting her own throat just before the nuclear bombing (pp. 73-74). The horrible image remained in Mariko's subconscious, materializing in the post-war Nagasaki as a strange woman that seemed to be living "on the other side of the river" (p. 19), near a war graveyard, and who dropped by when Sachiko was not around. According to Anne Whitehead, the leaking of the past into the present can happen both psychologically and linguistically: "The irruption of one time into another is Figured [1-3] as a form of possession or haunting. The ghost represents an appropriate embodiment of the

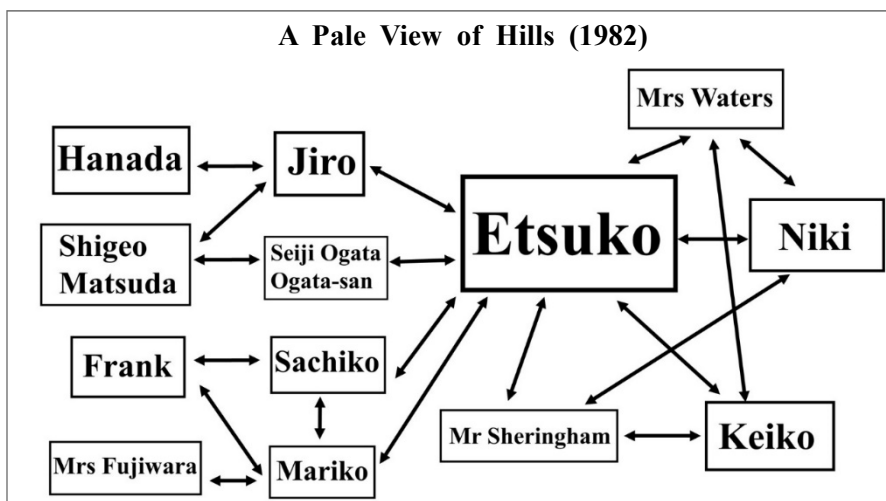


Figure 1: Characters' interaction

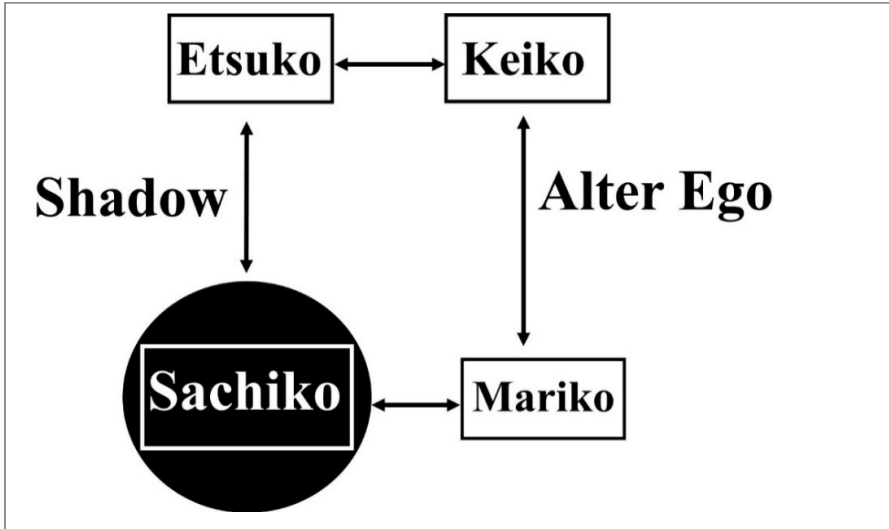


Figure 2: Etsuko's Shadow

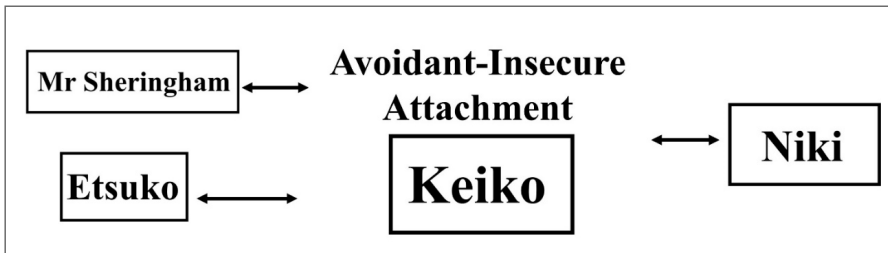


Figure 3: Keiko's type of attachment

disjunction of temporality, the surfacing of the past in the present” (2004, p. 6). Throughout the novel, Mariko makes repeated references to the ghost woman: “The other woman ... The woman from across the river. She said she’d take me to her house. She lives across the river. I didn’t go with her” (Ishiguro, 1990, p. 18). “The other woman. The woman from across the river. She was here last night while mother was away” (p. 25). “She said she’d take me to her house, but I didn’t go with her. Because it was dark” (p. 27). At some point, Sachiko admits to Etsuko that the product of her daughter’s imagination is related to the traumatic scene she had to witness back in Tokyo: “The woman you’ve heard Mariko talking about, Mariko saw her” (p. 73).

All in all, under the pretense of acting in Keiko’s best interest, Etsuko’s abusive motherhood, including her daughter’s brutal uprooting, has led to her daughter’s reclusiveness, and withdrawal within herself. Although “Sachiko’s symbolic murder of Mariko appears to have nothing to do with Etsuko and Keiko” (Shaffer, 1998, p. 8), the reader can relate them through the way

Etsuko has behaved towards her young tomato plants: “I really have been rather neglectful about those tomatoes this year” (p. 92). “What does it matter about the dirty little creatures?” Sachiko says about the poor kittens (p. 165). “It doesn’t really matter,” Etsuko says about the dead tomatoes (p. 92). Her comfort resides in her continued illusion that her “motives for leaving Japan were justifiable” because she has “always kept Keiko’s interests very much at heart” (p. 91).

CONCLUSION

There is an intriguing feature of the subconscious mind – that of getting used to repetitive traumas. In other words, human beings are prone to becoming accustomed to horrors that keep occurring in the same or a similar form: “All of us have our own inner fears, beliefs, opinions. These inner assumptions rule and govern our lives. A suggestion has no power in and of itself. Its power arises from the fact that you accept it mentally” (Murphy, 2011, p. 28). In the same vein, Etsuko confesses that she has become unwillingly intimate with the horrid image of her daughter’s suicide because it keeps popping into her head: “I have found myself continually bringing to mind that picture – of my daughter hanging in her room for days on end. [...] The horror of that image has never diminished, but it has long ceased to be a morbid matter; as with a wound on one’s own body, it is possible to develop an intimacy with the most disturbing of things” (Ishiguro, 1990, p. 54). Another dangerous behavior of the subconscious mind is to create a false sense of safety through the denial of a tragic event. Thus, when Mrs. Waters asks about Keiko in the street, Etsuko does not tell the piano teacher the truth about her daughter. “It seemed easiest to say what I did” (p. 52), she explains to Niki, although the latter cannot help noticing her mother’s weird pleasure to deny her sister’s death: “It was odd just now, with Mrs. Waters. It was almost like you enjoyed [...] pretending Keiko was alive” (p. 52).

In his interviews, Ishiguro repeatedly states, in a direct fashion or otherwise, that his true mission is to offer more questions than answers while dealing with the vast abyss of human emotions. Sure enough, at the end of his first novel, there are more questions than answers, just as he has intended in the first place: Are Sachiko and Mariko the past representations of Etsuko and Keiko? Does Etsuko consciously convey an unreliable version of her past or does she also lie to herself? What is the true significance of the ghost woman that Mariko repeatedly sees? Does Etsuko’s coming to Mariko at night with a rope caught in her sandal really foreshadow Keiko’s tragic destiny? In the end, it is up to the reader to decide the answers to all these questions, and many others, based on the arrangements their own individuality dictates, hence the therapeutic nature of Ishiguro’s novel. The author claims that he is not interested in his characters having done things they later regret, but in how they come to terms with those acts (Jaggi, 1995). Although Etsuko’s consolatory narrative renders

her recollections inaccurate and disorganised, she will eventually decide that “it’s not a bad thing at all, the old Japanese way” (p. 165). Her return to her subservient self may mean that, in light of her daughter’s suicide, Etsuko regrets her pidgin identity and only pretends to agree with Niki’s enthusiastic adoption of western freedom. At the same time, the reader can deduce that the middle-aged expatriate is willing to find new motivation for living, through selective and distorted remembrance, although her pidgin identity, impossible to recalibrate, may affect her ability to heal.

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