

'She was Japanese and she had hung herself in her room': Theorising Kazuo Ishiguro's *A Pale View of Hills*

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Abstract

This study of Kazuo Ishiguro's novel, *A Pale View of Hills*, with its strong autobiographical elements, locates the British writer in exile within the paradigmatic cognitive geography of twentieth-century post-war Japan. Through explorations of reiterative imagery of love and death this essay hazards a theory about *why* the settler remains unsettled. I argue that the author seems to have experienced multiple disruptions of cultural ideologies of empires—both British and Japanese. And in his unique tellings, he reveals the displacement, dissonance, dichotomies and paradoxes that accompany the conditions of exile, especially when coupled with hybridity in a uniquely *sakoku* (secluded nation) situation that is Japan. Significantly, Ishiguro's engagement with exile generates a number of contradictions, gaps and questions at best; and, at worst, unresolvable tensions which are finally signposted in the novel's ambiguous ending.

Keywords: identity, empire, memory, displacement, hybridity

I caught the sudden look of some dead master,
 ...Both one and many;
 ...The eyes of a familiar, compound ghost...
 So I assumed a double part, and cried
And heard another's voice cry: 'What! Are you here?'

Although we were not. I was still the same,
Knowing myself yet being someone other—
 And he a face still forming; yet the words sufficed
 To compel the recognition they preceded.
 And so, compliant to the common wind,
 Too strange to each other for misunderstanding,
 In concord at this intersection time
 Of meeting nowhere, no before and after,
 We trod the pavement in a dead patrol.

—T.S. Eliot, 'Little Gidding', *Four Quartets* (italics added)

Death as a trope of ultimate displacement and exile is reiterated with a quiet relentlessness in *A Pale View of Hills*. Obliterating any possibility of retrieving a single sense of identity for the narrator, the past and the present are fused together in a somewhat macabre dance. To problematize the issue of identity further, within the first few sentences, the memory of the death of the narrator Etsuko's Japanese daughter Keiko, from her first marriage—who committed suicide when forcibly taken to England because she could not adjust to the dual identity of Japanese and British, required of her—provides the trajectory of the multi-dimensional narrative: 'For although we never dwelt long on the subject of Keiko's death, it was never far away, hovering over us whenever we talked' (p. 10). And through its entire length, the narrative, as it unravels in an idyllic village in England, where the narrator is now resident, shifts between time present in an eerily quiet country estate somewhere in Southern England where Keiko's ghost wakes up Etsuko every so often in the pre-dawn darkness, and time past in the 1950s, in Nagasaki, after the bombings and during the American Occupation. Works by immigrant writers often echo the crisis of being caught between two worlds and the painful process of adjusting or distancing oneself from that overwhelming situation, failing which in certain cases suicide seems to be the most desperate solution. Linda Hutcheon suggests, 'Doubleness is the essence of the immigrant experience'.¹

Death does not indicate closure in Ishiguro's first novel. On the contrary, its contrapuntal presence, by the palpable existence of the spirits of those who died coming alive, beleaguers the living to continue a relationship with those dead. Memory and desire,

in the Eliotesque setting of a late English spring, mix into a potent potion, which leaves the reader journeying with the narrator through a nostalgic Japan, once her home. In addition, Keiko's spirit pervades the atmosphere and brings a certain palpable tension between the widow Etsuko's past life and her present existence. Keiko's ghost is non-threatening and is pivotal to the narration because it provides a connection with Etsuko's 'other' life in Japan. Etsuko feels Keiko's nearness constantly, and this gives her a seamless passage to the past: 'I too had experienced a disturbing feeling about that room opposite...it had been Keiko's fanatically guarded domain for so long, a strange spell seemed to linger there even now, six years after she had left it—a spell that had grown all the stronger now that Keiko was dead' (p. 53); 'At first, I was sure someone had walked past my bed and out of my room, closing the door quietly' (p. 174); 'Then, for a moment, I was sure I had heard a sound come from within Keiko's room, a small clear sound amidst the singing of the birds outside...' (p. 174).

The telling is riddled with the shrapnel of dismembered lives from a war like no other, a war that widened the gaping differences between Japan and the western world and between an old and a new Japan, in the blink of an eye displacing, dislocating and finally destroying exiles such as Keiko who were unable to settle in a new homeland chosen by their families. As Etsuko admits to her second daughter Niki after Keiko commits suicide: '... I knew all along. I knew all along she wouldn't be happy over here. But I decided to bring her just the same' (p. 176). She evinces a terrible guilt with which she must live for being the catalyst of displacement.² This theme of parental guilt and the criterion for blame are echoed at several points in the novel: 'My motives for leaving Japan were justifiable, and I know I always kept Keiko's interests very much at heart' (p. 91); '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); '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); '[Niki] had come not merely to see how I had taken the news of Keiko's death; she had come to me out of a sense of mission...and she had come to tell me that I should have no regrets for those choices I once made. In short, to reassure me that I was not responsible for Keiko's death' (p. 11); '...how could you have known? And you did everything you could for her. You're the last person anyone could blame' (p. 176).

Ghosts, suicides, deaths by hanging, the diffused thunder following the wake of the Hiroshima-Nagasaki atomic bombings, the horror of a woman drowning her newborn child in a canal and then slashing her own throat in the act of *hara-kiri* (self immolation), child killings, a murdered child hanging by a rope, Keiko hanging by a rope and discovered days afterwards— these are some of the insidious, understated and convincing presences which connect the past with the present in their invocation. The world of the living and that of the dead collide with credible consistency in Ishiguro's complex first novel, where Etsuko's identity in the English present is inextricably linked to and embedded in the wasteland of a post-war Japanese past, not unlike the worlds in T.S. Eliot's 'Little Gidding'. The canto from Eliot, quoted at the beginning of this article, recounts the incidents that occur at dawn after a bombardment during the Second World War. It is splendidly exultant, and in an uncanny way reiterates Ishiguro's theme of the tyranny of enduring memories—memories that distort and reflect a spectral double of the self and its perceptions of the past, and memories which are not completely reliable. The past for Etsuko the narrator, who lives the lonely life of a Japanese widow in exile in England, is reclaimed by memory and it is alive with ghosts of people dead—her whole family who died in the Nagasaki bombings: Nakamura-san, the man she was once betrothed to and, most recently, her daughter Keiko. The places in her memory from the past, such as the ordinary landmarks like Mrs. Fujiwara's noodle shop (pp. 150-153) or the devastated, bombed wasteland by the polluted river where her apartment block was when she was married to her first husband, Jiro, (pp. 99-100) and was pregnant with their daughter, Keiko—are transformed to half-forgotten, partly-regurgitated repositories of identity. Ishiguro seems to ask again and again: What, after all, is the importance of the past? Is it to inform present identity? as Eliot did in 'Little Gidding' ('Why should we celebrate/These dead men more than the dying?')

In this essay I argue that the 'use of memory' for Ishiguro seems to provide the means to smudge the line of voluntary control between the past and present, between the dead and living. It is also to make the dead live for the living, and life a living death for those who live: thus, Etsuko Sheringham looks at a line of hills beyond the apple orchard from her home in a village in England as she chats with her half-English daughter Niki, and simultaneously 'sees' the hills she used to encounter beyond the curve of the harbour at Nagasaki when she picnicked with her Japanese daughter Keiko, now dead: 'That's a view of the harbour in

Nagasaki. Those hills over the harbour are very beautiful' (p. 182); and, again, 'On clearer days, I could see ...a pale outline of hills visible against the clouds. It was not an unpleasant view, and on occasions it brought me a rare sense of relief from the emptiness of those long afternoons I spent in that apartment' (p. 99). Once again, Ishiguro's project echoes Eliot's in 'A Song for Simeon', where Eliot invokes the words of Heraclitus: 'Those who do not die, die; those who die, do not die; of one another they live the death and die the life'.³ The personal nature of the encounter between the ghost of Keiko, and the other ghost in the novel—the woman who visits Sachiko's daughter Mariko—also play the facilitator role to make the past come alive. To Ishiguro the ghost is half a stranger, half a familiar friend as he is to the poet in 'Little Gidding'—'the eyes of a familiar, compound ghost'. As Grover Smith evinces, the spectral double (that emerges after a hallucinated scene post-air raid) or 'double part forms the crux; everything depends upon it,' and he suggests that the ghost in the poem is 'perhaps a *doppelganger* of the poet'.⁴

In her analysis of Ishiguro's novel, Cynthia Wong argues: 'Ishiguro explains that Sachiko's character serves as a *doppelganger* or spectral double to Etsuko's, as one way to show how people move through loss and death.'⁵ To endorse her argument, Wong invokes Ishiguro himself in an interview with Gregory Mason: '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.'⁶ Wong explains that Ishiguro does not suggest that the friendship between Etsuko and Sachiko is an imaginary or supernatural one, rather that he introduces this complexity because he expects the reader to be confused, though not daunted by the apparent similarities. Wong also maintains that remembering Sachiko is one way Etsuko might console herself about Keiko's death, and these memories are scarred with images of dying and death, from a past that is ever alive in the present. Perhaps the longest and most direct statement the narrator makes in the novel is also the most vivid and horrible, since it represents the timeless grief that shrouds the suicide of a loved one, and fuses the past with the present in a historic episode:

I never saw Keiko's room in Manchester, the room in which she died. It may seem morbid of a mother to have such thoughts, but on hearing of her suicide, the first thought that ran through my mind—before I registered even my shock—was to wonder how long she had

been there like that before they had found her. Later, the coroner said she had been there ‘for several days’. It was the landlady who had opened the door, thinking Keiko had left without paying the rent.

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 (p. 54).

And there are more such references, by other characters, to the powerful propulsion of memories of the past into the present, often confusing the fine line between then and now. Mrs. Fujiwara in her conversation with Etsuko, when they are discussing how the past plays tricks with the present, concedes: ‘Like you say, in the mornings, just as you wake, it can catch you unawares. I often wake up thinking I’ll have to hurry and get breakfast ready for *all*’ (pp. 76-77)—where *all* (italics mine) refers to all the family members who died in the bombings.

The recurring images of water and drowning also find particular significance in Ishiguro’s telling, and are used to resurrect memories of past deaths—unnatural and horrible—that were either murders or suicides, as a result of the war and subsequent displacement. The second ghost, the woman who haunts Mariko, ‘invites’ her across the river to the site of a war cemetery. The landmark is imprinted upon the reader from the first meetings Etsuko has with Mariko, where Mariko speaks of the woman who lives ‘on the other side of the river’ (p. 19, p. 25, p. 27). We learn: ‘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’ (p. 18). When Etsuko suggests to Mariko that ‘the other woman’ might have been her, Etsuko, whom Mariko had met the night before by the river, Mariko states emphatically, ‘Not you. The other woman. The woman from across the river. She was here last night while mother was away.’ A little further into the story, Mariko once again tells Etsuko: ‘She said she’d take me to her house, but I didn’t go with her. Because it was dark’ (p. 27).

As we learn later, the woman who haunts Mariko is the one she had encountered in the act of drowning her baby close on the heels of the atomic bombing. Sachiko recounts to Etsuko: ‘The woman you’ve heard Mariko talking about, Mariko saw her’, followed by: ‘At first I thought the woman was blind, she had that kind of look. Her eyes didn’t seem to

actually see anything...She was kneeling in the water, elbows submerged. Then she brought her arms out of the canal and showed us what she'd been holding under the water. It was a baby. The woman had drowned the baby.... She killed herself. She cut her throat' (p. 73).

The attempted drowning of Mariko's only 'living' friends, her black kittens, by her mother Sachiko in the muddy, polluted river is yet another echo of the way Ishiguro uses death by drowning as a leitmotif to convey the sense of devastation and derangement that are contiguous with displacement and exile, that results from a cataclysmic experience such as war:

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' (p. 167).

The snuffing out of life in the creatures, though, proves to be daunting—the fact is they do not *want* to die. Although the force of death seems overwhelming and tumultuous with all its trappings of war, dislocation and displacement in *A Pale View of Hills*, the will to live and the formidable power of the life force in the most insignificant of creatures, signifying an independent identity, is powerfully pitted against death, and brings to mind the graphic and unforgettable account by Leonard Woolf of the puppies who struggled valiantly when he tried to drown them in a pail of water as a young boy.⁷ These two remarkably similar scenes stand out for their analogous depictions of the living, representing the present struggling against the forceful agencies of death, or the past.⁸

Ishiguro does not attempt to provide a finished version of a life in *A Pale View of Hills*. Ishiguro's text focuses on the process of reconstructing a life, Etsuko's, that has been severely displaced with all the ruptures, gaps, and workings of memory; the fictionalizing that reconstruction requires; the complex nature of the task, the parallel sub-texts (such as Sachiko's and Mariko's refracting Etsuko's own and her daughter Keiko's lives), and a constant oscillation between geographical spaces. Inscribing the self in the fictional account provides a challenge and demands a constant shift of focus as an onlooker and a character. Etsuko in her quest to bridge the two lives she has led, and still continues to lead,

crosses and re-crosses the borders between auto/biography and fiction in order to question static and holistic conceptions of the writing subject. The constant fractured mindscape in Ishiguro's first novel is achieved by examining Etsuko's dispersed memories, some of which are often unreliable. In this narrative, through Etsuko, the author makes himself present in the text, directing, sieving, and surreptitiously negotiating the multiple webs of her life. The writer, to some extent, takes on the position of a reader, constantly questioning the accuracy of the events: '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). The texture of the tellings is broken, disparate and disrupted, like a crackled piece of celadon. Various narrative webs intersect, bend, and engulf one another. There is no linear movement; the past amalgamates with the present and vice-versa. This complex and contradictory process therefore pulls us away from any single shape of a well-sketched life.

The tension between belonging and not belonging is actively examined and developed by Ishiguro through the elusive and muted language of memory in this novel. 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. Ishiguro has indicated that for him, the creative process has been about regret and melancholy, not anger and death. As he said in 1995 to Maya Jaggi: 'For me, the creative process has never been about anger or violence...I don't feel I've regretted not having grown up in Japan. That would be absurd. But it is to do with strong emotional relationships I had in Japan that were suddenly severed at a formative emotional age, particularly with my grandfather.'⁹

However fragile, in writing himself into the landscape of the past Ishiguro documents Etsuko's struggle to overcome the gaps and silences that get in the way of her attempts to recover this past in the present. In each of her reminiscences, her awareness of her Japanese identity is complemented by the discovery and a recognition of her multiple selves. In this highly complex maze of memory, Etsuko realizes the profundity of her own displacement and difference in identity.

In *A Pale View of Hills* Ishiguro does not stake his exploration of love on the familiar Japanese narrative zone where it has generally lain: within the tightly-constructed structure of same-race mating, in which sex is enacted and legitimized within the boundaries of 'keeping a mistress' or maintaining a geisha, or in marriage, which is generally harnessed to its biological consequence, motherhood. But in this novel Ishiguro places that stake in less hallowed ground—in hybrid love, love outside the fold of the formal, traditional Japanese social framework, love with an outsider as envisaged in Sachiko's passionate and hopeless involvement with an American soldier with a fear of commitment. Love is also wounded and confused in Etsuko's action leaving her first husband Jiro for Sheringham, an English journalist, dislocating her daughter Keiko from her familiar surroundings and father. As evident through the unlocking of Etsuko's bank of memories, in her recountings of both her life and Sachiko's, Ishiguro's women are a bewildering mix of the old and the new. They are much like the women in director Ozu Yasujiro's acclaimed 1953 film *Tokyo Monogatari* (*Tokyo Story*), where the filmmaker explores the disjoint between the stereotypical Japanese woman and the complex identities that constituted the 'modern Japanese woman' in the 1950s. Ishiguro's tale is also located in that timeframe where a limping post-war Japan, struggling to make a comeback, was a fractured land with a national crisis of broken families (i.e. the Japanese). War urbanization had exacerbated the already dysfunctional social framework where men who had been killed at war had left behind a million national tragedies of fatherless families. Women were forced to look for work and gradually began to embody the multi-dimensional aspects of the feminine and the newly emerging, practical and more worldly modern. Sachiko, who lost her husband in the war, says as much to Etsuko: '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). As stated earlier Etsuko, while speaking to Niki, admits to bringing Keiko against her will to England to give her a better life.

The war left many jagged edges in the consciousness of the older generation of Japanese who suffered the devastation of the atomic bomb. Post-war reflection among Japanese survivors also brought to the surface the way Americans had perceived and represented the Japanese in wartime reports and sharpened the indelible differences between Japan and the West. Thus Etsuko's father-in-law from her first marriage Ogata-san reminisces to Etsuko,

who had lost her entire family: ‘You were very shocked, which was only to be expected. We were all shocked, those of us who were left’ (p. 58). And again Ogata-san points out the wounds of war that have widened deep and irretrievable gaps in the relationship between Japan and the West:

The Americans, they never understood the way things were in Japan. But in Japan things are different, very different. Discipline, loyalty, such things held Japan together once. People were bound by a sense of duty. Towards one’s family, towards superiors, towards the country. But now instead there’s all this talk about democracy. You hear it whenever people want to be selfish, when they want to forget obligations. These things we have learnt so eagerly from the Americans, they aren’t always to the good (p. 62).

It is significant that the only observations Etsuko makes about her life with Sheringham echoes Ogata-san’s sentiments about the western view of Japan and Japanese people, which are less than real: ‘For in truth, despite all the impressive articles he [Sheringham] wrote about Japan, he never once understood the ways of our culture, even less a man like Jiro’ (p. 90). Etsuko’s other statement on the local news report on Keiko’s death is a definitive comment about how superficially Japanese culture was viewed in post-war England. The statement also reflects the way the Japanese perceived the British perceiving *them*: ‘The English are fond of their idea that our race has an instinct for suicide, as if further explanations are unnecessary; for that is all they reported, that she [Keiko] was Japanese and that she had hung herself in her room’ (p. 9).

War is the underlying cause of all displacement in *A Pale View of Hills*. The atomic bomb and the havoc it reaped prefaces the novel’s main plot and sub-texts: ‘American soldiers were as numerous as ever—for there was fighting in Korea...the bomb had fallen and afterwards all that remained were charred ruins’ (p. 11). Ishiguro’s fitting together the scraps of history, although he was not in Japan either during or long after the war, is supported in historian John Dower’s seminal study *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II* showcasing the fallacious western mindset that the Japanese were a congenitally challenged race. Dower’s findings shatter some of the myths of the war. Dower reveals in his research how western powers believed that *all* Japanese pilots suffered from myopia and poor hearing and this yielded several hundred accounts in the months

before the Second World War's Pacific engagement. Japan's losing the war gave the western commentators a field day, as reported by S.E. Smith and other historians who wrote about the war. By 1943, most Japanese soldiers were trapped and doomed and knew their fate. As Smith points out: 'many thousands of Japanese soldiers fought with tenacity and a sense of devil-may-care, sometimes charging to their deaths against their foe with frenzied patriotic zeal'.¹⁰

The 'othering' of Japan was nowhere more brutal than in the records available on Ernie Pyle, who became a folk hero among American war correspondents. He wasted no time once he was transferred to the Pacific in 1945, weeks before Germany surrendered, to point out how the enemy in Asia was different: 'In Europe we felt that our enemies, horrible and deadly as they were, were still people. But out here I soon gathered that the Japanese were looked upon as something subhuman and repulsive; the way some people feel about cockroach or mice...they gave me the creeps, and I wanted a mental bath after looking at them.'¹¹

Thus with many male family members being wiped out, economic need drove women who had never known employment to go seek a livelihood, to stave off starvation. The formation of woman's consciousness and the increasing number of jobs gave coherence to the unfolding of professional working women's experiences during post-war Japan. Displacement of people from hierarchical class and gender structures finds poignant representations in *A Pale View of Hills*. Sachiko's story of a fall from a glorious lifestyle after having everything wiped out by the war, is one of the most powerful sub-texts in the narrative. Her lighthearted, bantering tone when she speaks of her toil at the noodle shop to Etsuko: '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' (p. 27). Ogata-san, who knew Mrs. Fujiwara as part of the gentry business class in Nagasaki, on seeing her reduced circumstances as a noodle seller laments to Etsuko: 'A great pity to see her like this' (p. 151). In *The New Japanese Woman: Modernity, Media, and Women in Interwar Japan*, Barbara Sato¹² explains how this post-war deconstruction of social and familial structures brought about a quiet revolution in restructuring women's identities in Japan, giving them agency and an independent will to

look for relationships outside their own racial limits—a rare phenomenon in Japan’s history.

In her seminal work *Women on the Verge*, Karen Kelsky¹³ invokes the Japanese term *akogare* to describe Japanese women’s feelings for the West. Translated, the word *akogare* denotes longing, desire and idealization. ‘*Saiyo/Amerika ni akogare ga atta*’ (I had a longing for the West/America) with which most women’s narratives began in post-war Japan in the 1950s, the timeframe in which Ishiguro set his first novel, *A Pale View of Hills*. Ishiguro does something very interesting here. In addition to the already problematic question of how hybridity is viewed in Japan and how people of hybrid origin deal with their marginalized status in Japanese society, he adds another complicated layer: The troubling question posed by Ishiguro in this earliest work is *why* do Japanese women, if given the chance, prefer white husbands over their own ethnicity, knowing their mixed offspring will marginalize them in Japanese society? Is it because in their romance with western men they seek to ‘fulfill a longing’ and also see an opportunity to circumvent what they consider their country’s oppressive family and corporate structures? A powerful voice from the 1930s and 1940s from Japan gives refreshing articulation to the problem of Japanese women demanding respect and rights from an essentially patriarchal society. Sakanishi Shiho, the post-war liberal intellectual, translator and internationally acclaimed writer who built up the Japanese collection at the Library of Congress in the 1930s in Washington D.C., recounts an anecdote in her best-selling book *The American Woman* (1946), which is a revelation of what was so acutely objectionable about Japanese men that Japanese women could not deal with. She remembers a meeting with a highly-placed diplomat from the Japanese Embassy in Washington D.C. who greeted her with, ‘Oh, so you are Dr. Sakanishi? I despise educated women.’ Her rejoinder, ‘Oh, I’m so sorry, I despise uneducated men,’ sums up accurately the gender distinctions and discrimination that drives Japanese women with a keen interest in the *kokusaiteki* (international) status of equality for women to want to break free from a life such as Sachiko’s and Etsuko’s had been.

Kelsky suggests the answer lies in both the phallic and the financial whereby white men come to be viewed in Japan as coveted erotic commodities linked to a kind of transnational social upward mobility. She cites three women’s texts dating from the 1970s, 1980s and

the 1990s which show the longing for and evolution of these discourses of money, sex and race, over time, among a growing band of Japanese women who have long wish fulfillment lists: Kirishma Yoko's *The Lonely American* (1975), Takahashi Fumiko's *How to Date a Foreign Man* (1988), and Kida Midori's *Women! What do you want from America?* (1998) are cases in point.

However, economic privilege by no means translates simply into racial and gender privilege, especially if these women have hybrid offspring, as we witness in *A Pale View of Hills*. Etsuko, the narrator and protagonist in this novel, marries an English journalist Sheringham and her friend Sachiko the American Frank. Sachiko has a deep sense of this longing for a white man because she sees it as a means to a better life for both herself and her daughter Mariko, although Mariko rebels against the immigration to America:

‘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).

Barry Lewis places *A Pale View of Hills* as a ‘link in the chain of literary reformulations’ and suggests, that by aligning itself to the long line of operatic and artistic works that emerged post-1850s after Japan returned to the international stage, it ‘obstructs realist readings’. The parallels between Giacomo Puccini’s *Madame Butterfly* and Sachiko; and between Frank, Sachiko’s absconding American lover, and Lt. Benjamin Franklin Pinkerton, *Madam Butterfly*’s paramour, are easily traced. Sachiko’s daughter Mariko is similar in circumstance to Sorrow, the child born of the union of *Madam Butterfly* and Pinkerton. As hinted in the introductory chapter, *A Pale View of Hills* shows a flexibility for transculturation—grafting the historical on to the contemporary: Nagasaki is the hometown of Ishiguro, it is the central locale of *A Pale View of Hills* and also the backdrop of Puccini’s opera, *Madam Butterfly*. ‘Its overt inter-textual nods towards Puccini hint at the novel’s constructedness, preventing the reader from interpreting its depicted world too literally.’¹⁴

The omissions, lapses and ellipses in Etsuko's story are reinforced by the parallel subtext of Sachiko and her daughter. Etsuko recalls a trip to Inasa and exclaims to Niki: 'Keiko was happy that day,' when in fact Etsuko was pregnant with Keiko and was actually accompanying Sachiko and her daughter Mariko. This, and another instance, where Etsuko is purposely equivocal about whether she is speaking to Mariko or her daughter Keiko, at the bridge encounter, confuses the reader (purposely or by an oversight):

'What are you doing here?' I asked.

'...I don't want to go away. And I don't like him. He's like a pig.'

'You're not to speak like that...Everything will turn out well I promise...In any case...if you don't like it over there, we can always come back...Yes, I promise...If you don't like it over there we'll come straight back' (pp. 172-173).

The links are like pieces in a jigsaw in the beginning of the narrative, but fit together in the end, as Ishiguro hints that Mariko possibly drowns herself when she cannot cope with the thought of exile from her familiar surroundings. Keiko, Etsuko's daughter by her first husband Jiro, who is Japanese, is also unable to adjust to the move from Japan to England and hangs herself in a rented room in Manchester, having severed ties with even her mother Etsuko, many years later. Millions of people in the twentieth century have been caught trying to straddle the conflicting values of two worlds. Ishiguro offers a poignant example of this in the second plot, the fragmentary tale of Sachiko and her neglected daughter Mariko, who is constantly pulled out of one location to another, as her mother seeks a new mode of employment or a new benefactor. The child does not attend school, is introverted, troubled and unable to make friends, although she shows great promise as an artist. She is literally lost at various times in the novel. Her mother is equally lost, chasing an American serviceman in the hope of redemptive immigration to the America that destroyed Japan. Her equivocation and uncertainty are well illustrated by her inability to care for her daughter, who symbolizes the next generation. At one time she says, 'I'm a mother, and my daughter's interests come first' (p. 86). At another time she sarcastically asks, 'Do you think I imagine for one moment that I'm a good mother to her?' (p. 171). Barry Lewis in his seminal work on Ishiguro interprets this subplot and mixed identity as a purposeful displacement technique by the author. Lewis argues:

The competing interpretative possibilities keep shifting, like the colored shapes in a kaleidoscope. Either a) Etsuko is confusing different sets of memories; or b) Etsuko is merging memory and fantasy; or c) Etsuko is projecting her guilt about forcing Keiko to leave Japan on to her memories of Sachiko in a similar situation; or d) Etsuko is projecting her guilt about the above on to a fantasy of a woman called Sachiko and her child.¹⁵

Ishiguro's power as a writer about Japan comes from a memory bank that he carried with him when he left his homeland. At the time he was just five years old. For the Japanese he is an outsider. This makes the author's own identity highly complex especially because he is 'in exile' and he is hybrid in a strange way and yet searches for a Japanese homeland in his novel as a homeless Romano would through songs, for a home he never had.¹⁶

How Ishiguro perceives himself is evinced in an interview he gave to the Nobel Prize winning writer Kenzaburo Oe:

I was very aware I had very little knowledge of modern Japan. But still, I was writing books set in Japan, or supposedly set in Japan. My very lack of authority and knowledge about Japan, I think, forced me into a position of using my imagination, and also of thinking of myself as a homeless writer. I had no obvious social role because I wasn't a very English Englishman, and I wasn't a very Japanese Japanese either.¹⁷

Perhaps Ishiguro's contemporary and close friend Pico Iyer, also a hybridized, and displaced writer with a dual identity, who intermittently resides in and writes about Japan might have the last word on Ishiguro's rendering of Japan from memory:

Ishiguro's Japan is probably akin to my India—in other words, a culture inhaled through inheritance, through family, through dim memories and presumed connections. At home, I find, it's easy to be blind to one's blessings; but as soon as you go abroad, you realize all you otherwise take for granted (and come to see home with new eyes). And an outsider is in some ways an importer of new and fresh eyes for the people around him. I can never write about Japan as Ishiguro does because it's an adopted and not an inherited home; and it will never be in my blood. Maybe we should both write therefore about Britain.

Certainly I feel more affinity with Ishiguro's writing than with that of many people who share my racial heritage—a sign that the old definitions don't work any more.¹⁸

In this essay, in my reading of Kazuo Ishiguro's *A Pale View of Hills* I have explored the dislocation, paradoxes and troubled disharmonies that attend the conditions of exile, as viewed through the Japanese main protagonist and her hybrid daughter Niki. Etsuko's reminiscences highlight the days immediately following the end of the Second World War. Inflected by personal loss and guilt, these reminiscences project confusion, ruptures and gaps resulting in a severe sense of displacement and doubleness such that by the close of the novel the accumulated tensions still remain ambiguously unresolved.

Notes

¹ See Linda Hutcheon and Marion Richmond, eds. *Other Solitudes: Canadian Multicultural Fictions* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1990), 9.

² See Angelika Bammer, ed. *Displacements: Cultural Identities in Question*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), xi. She defines displacement as the separation of people from their native culture either through physical dislocation (as refugees, immigrants, migrants, exiles, or expatriates) or the 'colonizing imposition of a foreign culture,' and argues 'it is one of the most formative experiences of our century.'

³ Heraclitus, *Fragment 62*, in W.B. Yeats, *Collected Works of W.B. Yeats: A Vision* (1925), vol.13 (London: Macmillan), 183.

⁴ See Grover Smith, *T.S. Eliot's Poetry and Plays: A Study in Sources and Meaning* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1950), 291.

⁵ See Cynthia F. Wong, *Kazuo Ishiguro*. (Devon: Northcote House, British Council, 2000), 32.

⁶ Gregory Mason, 'An Interview with Kazuo Ishiguro,' *Contemporary Literature*, 30, 3 (1989): 335-347, 337.

⁷ See Leonard Woolf, *The Journey, Not the Arrival Matters: An Autobiography_2: 1911-1969*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 387, where he writes about the horror of trying to drown the extra puppies in the litter according to custom: 'This blind, amorphous thing began to fight desperately for its life, struggling, beating the water with its paws. I

suddenly saw it was an individual, that like me it was an ‘I’, that in its bucket of water it was experiencing what I would experience, and fighting death as I would fight death if I were drowning in the multitudinous seas.’

⁸ See Verlyn Klinkenborg, ‘The Saxony Drake’, *The New York Times*, 27 October 2003, where he describes a similar connection he perceives between the dead and the living while holding a dead Saxony drake from his flock, in his arms: ‘In our lives, we make steady, categorical distinctions between the present moment and the past, as if the two could never meet. And yet the beautiful brown cape on this Saxony’s shoulders carried the deep past of evolution directly into the present, where I stood with the drake under my arm, watching the leaves whirl away from summer into fall.’

⁹ See Maya Jaggi, ‘Kazuo Ishiguro talks to Maya Jaggi’, *Wasafiri* 22, (1995): 20-21.

¹⁰ See S. E. Smith, *The United States Marine Corps in WW II* (New York: Random House, 1969), 145.

¹¹ See Ernie Pyle, *Last Chapter* (New York: Henry Holt, 1945), 5. See also Jack Goodman, ed., *While You Were Gone: A Report on wartime Life in the United States* (Simon & Schuster), 367.

¹² See Barabara Sato, *The New Japanese Woman Modernity, Media, and Women in Interwar Japan*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

¹³ See Karen Kelsky, *Women on the Verge: Japanese Women, Western Dreams*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 26.

¹⁴ Barry Lewis, *Kazuo Ishiguro* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 23.

¹⁵ Barry Lewis, *Kazuo Ishiguro*, 36.

¹⁶ Mark Reiscenzck, a doctoral student in Anthropology at the University of Toronto at a South Asian Studies seminar on March 3, 2004: ‘What does it mean at the end of the twentieth century to speak of a native land? In my own Romany family, nostalgia is the essence of our songs and stories. But nostalgia for what? ‘*Nostos*’ is the Greek for ‘a return home’; but we have no home. Utopia – ‘*ou topos*’ means ‘no place’. Nostalgia for utopia: ‘a return home to no place.’

¹⁷ Kazou Ishiguro, interviewed by Kenzaburo Oe, ‘The Novelist in Today’s World: A Conversation’, *Boundary 2*, 18, 3 (1991): 109-122, 115.

¹⁸ Pico Iyer, personal email interview with Julie Mehta, 20 March 2004.

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