

博士論文

Kazuo Ishiguro and His View of Life: Idealism, Nostalgia, Fatalism

(カズオ・イシグロとその人生観——理想主義、ノスタルジー、運命論)

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INTRODUCTION

Rationales

This is a study in Kazuo Ishiguro and more particularly in his general view of life. The primary aim of this thesis is to describe a trajectory of the formation of Ishiguro's visions on life, by recourse to his literary works and his interviews. Ishiguro is well known for his unreliable narrators, his narrative stages of historical significance and cultural dimensions, and above all, his calm and clear writing style. A variety of studies on Ishiguro's works have been conducted from these diverse perspectives, in addition to many others as well.¹ What rationale then does one have to address the writer's vision? The business of literary studies basically revolves around analyses of literary works. It has been assumed that the object of literary studies should be literary texts, not an author.² Everything crucial about literary works lies in works themselves, not in external comments an author makes about them. That is why we *criticise* literary texts, not their author: criticism is for literature, not for authors. Isn't that what literary criticism is for?

¹ For guides to the critical studies of Ishiguro's fiction, especially from theoretical points of view, see Wai-chew Sim's *Kazuo Ishiguro* (2010) and Matthew Beedham's *Kazuo Ishiguro: A Reader's Guide to Essential Criticism* (2010).

² This echoes a judgement offered by Malcolm Bradbury of the condition of literary criticism in the late 1980s: 'Literary study today is not really to do with writers but writing, not with authors but texts, not with penny lives but conceptual theories' (*No, Not Bloomsbury* 309). And, as Bradbury notes, analytical stress on texts, not authors, dates back to 'the New Criticism of the 1940s and 1950s [that] questioned biography's dominance' (312).

It is as true as the claim above, nonetheless, that there is a person, or an author, *behind* every literary work and that our interest more often than not gets drawn towards the author behind. We know, from our own experience, not a few cases of reading some literary works feeling irresistibly compelled towards the mind and thoughts of their creator. We come across such literary works as make our attention gradually shift from literary phenomena in the texts towards the very presence of an author who creates them. The shift tends to involve contemplation on these questions: what view does this writer have on life? How does that view inform his fiction? Gradually we find ourselves probing a view of life that literary works draw on. When encountering such writers we cannot evade posing these questions to ourselves while reading their works. Kazuo Ishiguro is one of such writers.

In addition to this very personal rationale there are at least two others that allow us to examine Ishiguro's visions on life.

One rationale is that Ishiguro himself demands examination of his visions. Ishiguro is a writer who is highly articulate about his aim in fiction—how he wants his fiction to work and how he wants it read. The aim of his fiction is, Ishiguro declares, ultimately to '*communicate a vision*' (Interview, 1990, Vorda and Herzinger 83; italics added).³ Communicating his vision is tightly linked to his ambition as a writer. He describes his ambition in the author

³ Citation of interviews in this thesis follows the rule set here. A year refers to the one when a given interview was conducted, not the year when the interview was published. For instance, Brian W. Shaffer's interview with Ishiguro, included in *Conversations with Kazuo Ishiguro*, was conducted in 2000 and printed in 2001 originally in *Contemporary Literature*. In the works cited at the end of this thesis the interview is cited as follows: 'Shaffer, Brian W. "An Interview with Kazuo Ishiguro" (2001). Shaffer and Wong, 161-73. Print'. However, referred to in the main text it is cited as follows to make explicit the year of interviewing: (Interview, 2000, Shaffer 166).

statement he made in 1989, part of which British Council carries on its website. He wants to write ‘an international novel’, one ‘that contains *a vision of life* that is of importance to people of varied backgrounds around the world’ (Brandmark; qtd. in Sim, *Kazuo Ishiguro* 20; italics added). Ishiguro’s statement about what should be an international novel encapsulates his view of how his fiction works.⁴ The term ‘international’ can be interpreted as referring to universalism of the impact of a literary work on readers across countries. Thus he says: ‘I think, the deeper the work, and the deeper the truth of the work, the more likely it is to be international, whether the author is consciously addressing a small group of people or a large number of people’ (Interview, 1989, Oe 60). Ishiguro’s emphasis on a vision of life as something crucial to his own literary endeavours appears in a more recent interview, too: ‘I want people to read my books not because they might learn something about the period in which these things happened, but because I might be able to share some *more abstract vision of life* and the world with them’ (Interview, 2001, Wong 175; italics added).

The other rationale for exploration of Ishiguro’s visions comes from the way he has actually been read. Many of Ishiguro’s readers, critics and scholars alike, point out that his principal vision is fatalistic, as his most recent novel, *Never Let Me Go* (2005), amply suggests. They acutely observe fatalistic aspects of Ishiguro’s literary works, but few consider how his fatalistic vision has been shaped and why; as a result, they fall short of exploring a

⁴ The internationalism of novel as a story form is a frequent topic these days. See Bruce King, *The Internationalization of English Literature* (esp. Introduction). Salman Rushdie, a well-known international writer, states that today’s writers ‘are inescapably international writers at a time when the novel has never been a more international form’ (*Imaginary Homelands* 20). But it should be noted that Rushdie’s statement is made in the context of placing emphasis on the international influence on contemporary writers from a variety of their literary ancestors with different nationalities and cultures.

pair of visions behind his fatalism: idealism and nostalgia. Indeed, Ishiguro's fatalistic vision does not make much sense without understanding the development of these two visions. And this is exactly the point I am going to make throughout this thesis: that is to say, while it is true that Ishiguro has been a fatalist from the beginning of his writing career, his idealism and nostalgia have strengthened and deepened his fatalism.

To sum up my motivation to address Ishiguro's view of life: Ishiguro has visions to communicate to his readers (rationale 1), but the latter have apparently failed to give them due consideration (rationale 2); therefore, the writer of the present thesis deliberately complies with the author's wish by reading his fictions precisely in the way he wants them read.

We do not have to meet an author's wish at all—undoubtedly. On the contrary, to explore things that even an author is unaware of his work containing is the genuine thrill of literary criticism. Sophisticated critics and scholars of literature are expected to outsmart not only other professional readers but also an author himself in order to continue offering fresh perspectives on literary works. This expectation provides us with the implicit rule by which we practice literary studies in the common pursuit. All the same, when the thrill of outwitting an author in the name of literary sophistication is stressed too much, it may possibly be done at the expense of something crucial inherent in the motivation of reading literary works: a purely intellectual interest in an author who creates works we feel compelled to read. This thesis intends to adopt a more naive approach: to examine what the writer says about his works and to read them in the way he wants us to. The aim is to let other professional readers know what Ishiguro says about his works and how it affects our understanding of Ishiguro.

Visions

Only recently has Ishiguro's view of life increasingly been getting scholarly attention, especially since Ishiguro's exploration into existential territories like mortality and fatalism in

Never Let Me Go, a novel about the cloned protagonists all predestined to offer their organs to human beings. Some scholars have been fascinated by Ishiguro's fatalism in particular. Wai-chew Sim, for instance, notes what he calls a 'disconcert[ing]' aspect of fatalism in *Never Let Me Go* when he writes thus:

The novel does raise existential questions [. . .] by the fact that even the most rambunctious among the clones accept so placidly the fate arranged for them by society. This fatalism captures our attention and stokes our curiosity: the fact that they never question their allotted purpose in life and at the most only ask for a deferral. The clones unsettle and disconcert us because they lack volition and agency and because they completely accept the social order they find themselves in. In some ways perhaps they remind us of ourselves, of the pressures that modern society puts on us. (*Kazuo Ishiguro* 81)

It is not only Sim who has been attracted by Ishiguro's philosophical turn to fatalism. Indeed, quite a few reviewers of *Never Let Me Go* from across the globe got bewildered at the extreme form of fatalism proclaimed by the fiction. It is not right, however, to assume that Ishiguro has suddenly taken a philosophical turn to fatalism with *Never Let Me Go*. In fact, several scholars maintain that fatalism runs through Ishiguro's *oeuvre*. Kyoko Hirai points to Ishiguro's essentially fatalistic view presented in his early fiction when she observes a manifestation of ironic fatalism in the way that, while boasting about his power of judgement in his youth, Masuji Ono, the protagonist and narrator of *An Artist of the Floating World* (1986), finds himself being swept into the current of the times towards militarism in the wartime period (*Kazuo Ishiguro* 69). Cynthia F. Wong, too, takes note of such an acute sense of fatalism in several of Ishiguro's works but goes further in her analysis when she sheds light on an intrinsic distinction between fatalism in Ishiguro's early works and that in his more recent works, *When We Were Orphans* and *Never Let Me Go*. All his protagonists, argues

Wong, are compelled to confront ‘discomfiting truths about their lives’ in some ways, but: ‘[u]nlike the early novels in which such confrontations also required that the first-person narrators evade the implications of new knowledge, the epiphanies encountered by Christopher and Kathy shock their recipients into quiet yet painful and wrenching acceptance of their irrevocable fates’ (*Kazuo Ishiguro*, 2nd edition, 83). Hiromi Nagara, also focusing on Ishiguro’s fatalism, attempts to explain the same difference in terms of the ages of the narrators when they confront the truths about themselves. Nagara points us to the fact that while the narrators of old age in Ishiguro’s early novels are given choices in their lives the consequences of which, though, they have to face now in the present of the narration, the younger narrators of his more recent novels are given no such choices in their lives: choices are completely out of their reach. All things that happen to them are out of their control. And the most extreme case is, in Nagara’s view, the cloned children in *Never Let Me Go*, where the uncontrollability of fate, as well as its inevitability, is stretched to the limit. Then Nagara puts forward a hypothesis: Ishiguro’s apparently increasing interest in general childhood as a subject matter in his recent works may come from his desire to highlight his own sense of general powerlessness against fate (‘Kazuo Ishiguro’ 213). Then Nagara argues that in Ishiguro’s fiction children represent the poignant way in which human beings confront the powerlessness of humanity.⁵ These new ways of reading spotlighting Ishiguro’s fatalism are indeed in harmony with the writer’s latest vision represented in *Never Let Me Go*.

These previous studies combined show the fact that fatalism predominates Ishiguro’s works from the outset and that the general nature of his fatalism itself has been changing over the time. But at the same time, at this point there should occur some questions: why is

⁵ Nagara argues in a similar vein in another of her articles on *Never Let Me Go* (‘Ishiguro no sakuhin’ 399-400).

fatalism right there, even in Ishiguro's early works? Why is it that the nature of his fatalism is changing too? The same studies, however, give us few clues as to possible answers (except for a few cases we will examine later on). The reason is obvious: they fail to connect fatalism to two other visions, that is to say, idealism and nostalgia, a pair of ideas in which Ishiguro shows philosophical interest. Their philosophical relevance to the development of fatalism is what this thesis will show thoroughly in the chapters below.

The concepts, idealism and nostalgia, are familiar to readers of Ishiguro's interviews. They started to present themselves synchronically in some of his interviews from the early 1990s onwards. Indeed, almost every time he mentions nostalgia, he compares it to idealism. In Ishiguro's terms, nostalgia refers to an emotional propensity towards memories of one's Eden-like childhood, a period he calls *a childhood bubble*. Ishiguro sees the function of nostalgia in quite a positive way: 'it does allow us to picture a better world', and in this regard, nostalgia is 'kind of an emotional sister of idealism' (Interview, 2000, Chapel). Idealism and nostalgia are thus regarded alike by Ishiguro as desires for something that does not exist at this moment. Both desires, as Takahiro Mimura argues, necessitate 'the faculty of imagination to see something invisible that Ishiguro considers is the driving force of not only a reminiscence of the past but a hope for the future' (*Kazuo Ishiguro* 146; my translation).

Nostalgia in this particular sense has naturally been referred to in academic studies on Ishiguro.⁶ In her study of *When We Were Orphans* (*Kazuo Ishiguro*, par. in Ch. 5), for

⁶ The other meaning more commonly attached to the term nostalgia in the context of literary criticism is a sentimental attachment towards the golden days of British imperialism before the Second World War. Critics tend to locate critical representations of this nostalgia in literary works. In Ishiguro studies, John J. Su is the one who attempts to read *The Remains of the Day* as a rejection of such a nostalgia for 'essentialisms' represented in Stevens's definition of 'dignity' (122). Although Ishiguro

instance, Hirai emphasises the significance of nostalgia in Ishiguro's works, especially his image of 'Eden-like' childhood. Ishiguro's nostalgic obsession with childhood and its bubble-like fragility, as well as his optimistic view of nostalgia itself, is noted by Mimura too (*Kazuo Ishiguro* 145-46). Takayuki Shonaka traces concrete evidence of Ishiguro's nostalgia for his own childhood to autobiographical allusions in the text of *The Unconsoled* (*Kazuo Ishiguro*, par. in Ch.5). Pascal Zinck attempts to identify in Ishiguro's early novels the novelist's nostalgia for his loss of what Japan stands for to him, or his missing identity. Perhaps Ching-chih Wang has most thoroughly analysed the implications of Ishiguro's nostalgia from the viewpoint of one being displaced away from home. Wang maintains that the obsession of Ishiguro's characters with their memories derives from their loss of home, literal or figurative, producing 'their anxiety to return to a nostalgic past' (151). Nostalgia is thus one of the most commonly addressed subject matters in Ishiguro studies.

But, as implied above, there is something that all these scholars commonly neglect to do. They never discuss the idea of nostalgia in terms of Ishiguro's view of life, let alone in relation to fatalism nor idealism—except Nagara, it seems, who finds fatalism in the way children in Ishiguro's works play roles of representing the uncontrollability of life while seeking a subtle link between idealism and nostalgia in the way the same characters in adulthood show the hope for the future through their nostalgic recollections of childhood (214). But even Nagara is found to omit going into implications of the link between idealism and nostalgia other than the extent to which Ishiguro himself suggests. And their relation to fatalism is still unclear. Idealism, on the other hand, has been almost entirely disregarded in

refers critically to this version of nostalgia in several of his interviews (see Interview, 1990, Vorda and Herzinger 74; Interview, 1995, Wachtel 26; Interview, 1999, Gallix 143), this has nothing to do with the nostalgia he has been interested in and defined in other interviews, which we will see later on.

Ishiguro studies to this day. Only several scholars like Shao-Pin Luo and Ron Charles make brief references to idealism that figures in the psychological inclination of the protagonist of *When We Were Orphans*.

Thus, nostalgia and idealism have generally been studied independently from fatalism and have not been recognised as filling the essential part of Ishiguro's view of life as broadly as fatalism does. What this thesis attempts to do is construct Ishiguro's view of life from the three different yet intricately interrelated perspectives: idealism, nostalgia, and fatalism.

How is it then that we approach these visions of Ishiguro's?

Use of Interviews

Reading contemporary writers of fiction today necessitates perusal of their interviews, and as long as writers are alive their comments and statements on their works and some issues that concern them are constantly corrected and updated in their interviews. The sharp increase of the number of interviews with so-called international writers has been made possible by their frequent book promotion tours across the world. Writers are now able through their interviews to make corrections to some misunderstanding on their readers' part about their work. This means that, these days, readers can no longer read living writers' texts without being informed of what the writers *say* about their own texts. The same goes for Ishiguro's interviews, which amount to more than one hundred in number in many different forms including audio and visual interviews. In 2008, *Conversations with Kazuo Ishiguro*, edited by Brian W. Shaffer and Cynthia F. Wong, a collection of interviews of great import, was published making much easier our access to Ishiguro's thoughts on fiction and life than before.

Of course, it is quite a risky business to take what a writer says as something revealing his own true intention. Julian Barnes, for example, warns the reader against taking at face value any comments writers make in interviews: 'I would warn anyone against taking an

interview with a writer, however interesting and seemingly truthful, as a surer guide to the author's intentions than the book itself' (*Conversations with Julian Barnes* ix). This axiom offered by a writer about a writer's unreliability is traceable far back to D. H. Lawrence, who wrote: 'An artist is usually a damned liar'. Therefore, Lawrence declares, 'Never trust the artist. Trust the tale. The proper function of a critic is to save the tale from the artist who created it' (*Studies in Classic American Literature* 8). Ishiguro himself follows this customary line when he throws doubt on the truthfulness of what authors say about themselves or their work in an interview. Writers are getting increasingly protective about what they will say about their work, as they come to realise that book tours and interviews affect their own writing. In order to prevent their emotions from seeping through interviews into their works, Ishiguro suggests, writers intentionally lie about themselves (Interview, 2008, Hunnewell 47). It can be a new truism that writers in interviews are less reliable than writers in works.

However, it is no less true that writers cannot always control what they say about themselves or their work. Ishiguro again says: 'A lot of what goes into your work can be unconscious, or at least the emotional reverberations from these images might have been' (Interview, 2008, Hunnewell 47). Occasional slips of tongue occur and, although writers correct their original statement in another interview that follows, the reader is able to compare two versions of the same statement, and can sometimes judge which is more worthy of critical attention. An interview, after all, is a text that constitutes a part of a writer's work; an interview is as informative as the book itself about the writer's intention.⁷ The goal of this

⁷ The assumption here is that fiction reflects and reveals something truthful about the author, too. Another contemporary writer of Ishiguro's, Graham Swift states in an interview that, while fiction is far from 'a recycling of the contents of the writer's life', and is never 'about what has actually happened to the author' (*Making an Elephant* 2), yet it is 'true that in a fundamental sense all fiction

thesis is to zero in on Ishiguro's visions.⁸ Therefore, a huge number of interviews will be cited on page after page hereafter simply to show what the novelist says about his intentions.⁹

Interviews are essential for my study of Ishiguro's visions but also have many other possibilities as a material of literary studies. They pave the way for a study of a living writer's biography whose personal writing, for example, letters and diaries, are usually unavailable while he is alive (although we can immediately find an exceptional case like V. S. Naipaul¹⁰). Interviews also provide a material for comparison of writers' linguistic propensity between fiction and interviews. Ishiguro, although he tends to be regarded as a reticent writer, an

writing is autobiographical, since where else does it come from but from within the author?' (*Making an Elephant* 1). Martin Amis also emphasises the working of the unconscious in the creation of fiction: 'that's what novels are (among other things): not almanacs of your waking life but messages from your unconscious history. They come from the back of your mind, not from its forefront' (*Experience* 218).

⁸ This does not mean, of course, that Ishiguro provides every intention of his about any details in his works. My emphasis on an author's intention, therefore, does not exclude the fundamental necessity of close reading required and expected in the practice of literary criticism. Close reading of a text supplements the inevitable absence of authorial comments on every detail of the text.

⁹ It is ironical that Roland Barthes, while denying the authority of an author in his essay, 'The Death of the Author', originally published in French in 1968 and translated into English in 1977, remarked on the continued existence of authors in what he calls 'ordinary culture' thus: 'The *author* still reigns in histories of literature, biographies of writers, interviews, magazines' (Barthes 143; italics in original). The *author* is still alive and more vibrantly in the ordinary culture in the twentieth-first century. See Stevenson 120-121.

¹⁰ See Patrick French, *The World Is What It Is: The Authorized Biography of V. S. Naipaul*.

image created from his unfailingly calm writing style in his fiction, is in fact very voluble in his interviews. While his first-person narrators like suppressing their emotions and express themselves through sometimes obnoxiously long and complicated sentences,¹¹ Ishiguro in his interviews is clear and articulate both emotionally and intellectually. In short, interviews help reveal aspects of a writer that we can never capture as long as we stick to his creative works.

Summary

The following is the summary of each Part of this thesis.

Part I focuses on Ishiguro's idealism. We will seek its origin in the context of the period Ishiguro grew up in (Chapter 1, Idealistic generation) before recognising Ishiguro's understanding of idealism as a universal instinctive urge he finds in human beings (Chapter 2, Instinct for contribution). Ishiguro's keen interest in the idea of idealism inevitably leads, as Chapter 3, Fear of the Future, shows, to his fear of his own future, a fear partly deriving from his imagination of how he might have ended up had he been born in Japan one generation earlier during World War II in which many idealists involved themselves with the intention of contributing to their country and found themselves being tormented by a sense of guilt for their military (or military-related) actions. We also examine Ishiguro's idealism from the perspective of his excessive demand for writers as well as readers to execute proper artistic judgement (Chapter 4, Value judgement), which is also reflected in strong professionalism

¹¹ Indeed, although the unreliability of Ishiguro's first-person narrators is almost universally considered as manifestation of ironic detachment on the author's part, close perusal of Ishiguro's statements in interviews cited below shows evidence to the contrary. As the following chapters will demonstrate, Ishiguro's first-person narrators are much more similar emotionally and intellectually to the author than we generally assume.

commonly seen in Ishiguro's protagonists (Chapter 5, Pride in professions). The stress on the power of judgement and professionalism comes, as Chapter 6, Ethics, demonstrates, from Ishiguro's ethics based on idealism, and Stevens, the butler in *The Remains of the Day*, embodies Ishiguro's idealism in every possible way. The dominance of idealism in Ishiguro's view of life is finally shown by the analysis in Chapter 7, Optimism in the denouement, of the commonly optimistic endings of Ishiguro's works.

Part II is the section for the analysis of Ishiguro's nostalgia as well as the latter's relation to his idealism and fatalism. The overall aim in this part is twofold: to show both the nature of Ishiguro's nostalgia and the process by which Ishiguro seeks the source of idealism in our emotionally fragile relation to nostalgia involving what he calls 'wound'. Chapter 8, Embarking for memories, retraces Ishiguro's initial attempt to deal with nostalgia by exploring how Ishiguro treats memory in his early works. In Chapter 9, Nostalgia for childhood bubble, Ishiguro's view of nostalgia is examined to follow the formation of Ishiguro's idea of childhood bubbles. The burst of childhood bubbles creates what Ishiguro calls 'childhood wound', an idea we will address in Chapter 10, Wound to caress. Our close examination of wound in Ishiguro's psychology points us to its return in one's mid-thirties, quite akin to so-called mid-life crisis. Thus the comparison of these two ideas will be made in Chapter 11, In their mid-thirties. In Chapter 12, Guilty wound, we will trace the origin of wound to Ishiguro's guilty feeling towards his grandparents. The formation of childhood wound is coterminous to the destruction of childhood bubbles. The process of the creation and destruction of bubbles is, indeed, recurrently represented in Ishiguro's later works, the examination of which is provided in Chapter 13, Fantasy, while Chapter 14, Staging wounds, show how Ishiguro's idea of wound has been developed focusing on two particular novels, *A Pale View of Hills* and *The Unconsoled*. The last chapter of this Part, Chapter 15, Reconciliation, provides a kind of biographical reading in terms of wound and nostalgia:

Ishiguro attempts to reconcile himself to his own wound through the vicarious reconciliation between the protagonist and his mother in *When We Were Orphans*. These chapters in Part II combine to show that the formation of wound in childhood ramifies into two temporarily-opposed desires, a backward longing to return to the better world and a yearning for creating a better world: nostalgia and idealism. In Ishiguro's philosophical scheme, idealism is the optimistic motivation for one to compensate the lost world which one believes is better than the world one inhabit now, and one's obsession with the past world Ishiguro calls nostalgia.

Part III is to examine Ishiguro's fatalism itself and its relation to idealism and nostalgia. Ishiguro's fatalistic vision has been shown by his preoccupation with the idea of perspective the unattainability of which has been the recurrent theme of his entire oeuvre. Chapter 16, Perspective, sheds light on this theme pointing to many examples of symbol of perspective in the form of its distortion, limitation, and absence in his fiction. Ishiguro's pessimistic view of the unavailability of perspective is strengthened by his feeling of losing control over his own life, a sense he finds in people in general. Chapter 17, Out of control, is the chapter to analyse this peculiar feeling through reading of *Never Let Me Go*. Chapter 18, Fate, the last one of this Part and of the whole thesis, re-examines Ishiguro's references to the term 'fate' in his interviews as well as his literary works to realign it with the preceding visions, idealism and nostalgia.

Part I IDEALISM

Ishiguro, both as a person and as a writer, has a keen interest in ideal ways of life. He concerns himself with the issue of how to live idealistically and at the same time properly in moral terms. Indeed, Ishiguro believes in the instinctive urge of human beings to be idealistic about making some contribution to society, irrespective of scales of their contribution.

On many occasions Ishiguro refers to the influence of the general ideological tendency of the 1960s and 1970s on his vision of life, and especially on his belief in the fundamental tendency of humanistic idealism. What Ishiguro did with his first three novels was to explore how his protagonists-first-person narrators deal with the consequences of their idealistic endeavours in their professions. Ishiguro's point in his early works lies not in his protagonists' too grand ambitions or their self-aggrandising notion of their own value (which are more relevant to his later works), but rather in the way they reconcile themselves to what their idealism brought to themselves at the end of their lives. That is why Ishiguro takes an interest not only in the implications of idealism—the course idealism takes one through life to its end—but also in the way people address the consequences of their idealistic activities, or how they attempt to preserve their dignity that is tantamount to the remains of their idealism.

In this part, we first examine where Ishiguro's idealistic tendency comes from and what kind of idealism Ishiguro grew up in (Chapter 1, Idealistic generation). While the specific context of his youth enables him to be sensitive to idealism, at the same time, we can see in Chapter 2, Instinct for contribution, that Ishiguro recognises our universal urge towards idealism and pursues the urge in several of his works. Ishiguro's obsession with idealism, however, comes in part from his fear of overvaluing (which idealism demands) his own life, a fear also deriving from his imagination of what kind of life he might have led in Japan had he been born a generation earlier during the Second World War (Chapter 3, Fear of the Future). On the other hand, this fear is the other side of his idealistic view, part of which can be seen in

his early essay, 'Bomb Culture' (1983). In Chapter 4, Value judgement, we will have a glimpse at a rare example of Ishiguro's criticism of his contemporary writers of mediocrity who jumped at big themes like holocaust to gain popularity in the early 1980s and also witness Ishiguro's emphasis on the importance of value judgement on the reader's part. Ishiguro's stress on the power of judgement is naturally correlated with his professionalism, which is represented in immense pride with which his protagonists boast their disparate professions (Chapter 5, Pride in profession). Ironically, in Chapter 6, Ethics, we will see the same professionalism causes ethical plights into which Ishiguro's characters inevitably fall. In the same chapter we also see not only the strong parallelism between Ishiguro and Stevens the butler in their views of idealism, professionalism, and judgement, but also Ishiguro's contemplation through the internal struggles of Stevens' and other characters' on the consequences of idealism as well as its fatalistic aspect. In the last chapter of this part, Chapter 7, Optimism in the denouement, we examine why, despite such a strong sense of fatalism, Ishiguro's novels end with a general tone of optimism, and in the optimism we find Ishiguro's overall stress on idealism as a vision of life.

1 Idealistic generation

Ishiguro's reference to idealism has two types. One is the type of reference made in the comparison with nostalgia. When Ishiguro attempts to explain what he means by nostalgia, he almost always refers to idealism as something akin to nostalgia. The other type of reference to idealism appears in Ishiguro's interviews where he gives accounts of how he grew up in the 1960s and the 1970s. In this chapter the latter type of reference to idealism is focused on to see Ishiguro's perception of how his idealism has been formed in his youth.

Idealism is ubiquitous. It is something that exists in all times and in all places. Idealism exists in all of us in one form or another just as optimism, scepticism, or pessimism does. Nonetheless, it is also the case that people are by and large influenced by the particularity of the period of their youth, and that their view of life is shaped by the kind of idealism prevalent in the world they inhabit.

The second half of the 20th century is often described as the age of 'transformation' (Arthur Marwick, cited in Rosen ix) when 'changes in values and practices blurred or obliterated many of the stereotypes and rigid conventions' (Rosen 7). The late 1960s in particular fell globally on the period when leftish ideas are predominant in politics and social life. It was a period of changing, revolution, and movements. The youth protested against power and tradition; women challenged sexual biases against themselves; ethnic minorities claimed their right to be proper citizens, not second-class citizens. The 1960s, in short, 'witnessed enormous transformations in attitudes to authority, sexuality, censorship, and civil liberties'—the so-called 'swinging sixties' full of 'commercial interest' and 'youth idealism' (Waugh 5). In the decade of the '60s 'the collective impulse that had begun with the rebellion of the early Romantics reached its peak' in the form of the 'youth revolution' (Booker 31). This was the period Ishiguro went through in his youth.

In interviews Ishiguro repeatedly directs interviewers' attention to the fact that he grew

up in the idealism of the 1960s and early '70s: 'I grew up in that climate of 1960s idealism' (Interview, 1987, Bigsby 21); 'as somebody who had grown up in an idealistic time in the late '60 and early '70' (Interview, 1990, Swaim 105); 'I did grow up in that period of idealism—whether it was phoney idealism I don't know—but I did grow up very much influenced by the sixties and the early seventies' (Interview, 1995, Wachtel 26). When Ishiguro refers to the idealism of the late 1960s and early '70s, he also recalls the distinct general atmosphere of the period.

In one of his earliest interviews, Ishiguro remembered that in his youth 'there was a tremendous pressure to do something *worthwhile*' (Interview, 1986, Tookey 34; italics added). In Ishiguro's view, the pressure turned the youth in those days into getting obsessed with making a contribution to humanity. In the interview by Christopher Bigsby, Ishiguro described his generation's commonly-held passion for grand contribution to the society in this way: 'the younger generation—people of my age—we grew up thinking that we were going to change the world, that we had a duty to change the world' (Interview, 1990, Swaim 100). And his generation was particularly obsessed with the notion of 'usefulness':

You had to do something *useful* with your life, something good for humanity in some way: improve the world, make the world a better, more peaceful world. [. . .] I came through school and went to university in that time when people like myself and my peers competed with each other [. . .] in terms of how *useful* we were being. Were we making a *useful* contribution to humanity? We were ideologically sound? (Interview, 1987, Bigsby 21; italics added)

His generational preoccupation with his own usefulness as a member of the society he belongs to comes from the generation's large-scale ambition to make useful contributions to humanity. One has to be useful, and being useful means doing something good for humanity as a whole, and doing something good for humanity must be making the world a better place

to live in.

It follows then that their passion was directed towards their professions. Only through their professions did they believe they could make a real contribution. Ishiguro says in the interview by Nicholas Clee: ‘I thought that if you *acquired certain abilities* your duty was to put them towards something *useful*’ (Interview, 1989, Clee 1327; italics added). The idea of usefulness naturally shaped their view of work as well as how they would make contributions. In other words, ‘It wasn’t good enough simply to earn a living’ (Interview, 1999, Gallix 152). They could not help being highly conscious of the worthiness of their individual work. They had to remind themselves constantly of ‘whether they were helping humanity’ through their work (152). In short, Ishiguro perceives his own generation to be so idealistic as to be burdened with extremely ‘large missions to improve humanity’ (152).

Idealism is also tightly linked to, and reified by, obsession with professionalism. This is shown by his central characters’ preoccupation with professional perfection. All of them have excessive pride in the contribution they achieve in their own respective professional fields. It could be said that in Ishiguro’s world professions are a means as well as a manifestation of idealism.

The sense of mission Ishiguro’s generation commonly shared was extended beyond their professions into social or volunteer work they engaged in. Ishiguro himself ‘was often involved in many political active groups and also in voluntary social work fields’ (Interview, 1990, Swaim 100). It should immediately be pointed out, however, that Ishiguro confronted people deprived of idealism through this activity. In an interview he remarks that the homeless he encountered ‘have the responsibility for their own lives taken away from them. It’s not that they’re incapable but they’re not given the responsibility’ (Interview, 1982, de Jongh 11). While Ishiguro’s desire to help the homeless to get independent obviously came from his idealism, he faced the negative consequence of the service people like him provided

them with—what he calls the deprivation of responsibility.

Nonetheless, the general atmosphere of the era was dominated by idealism, and the youth in particular seems to have considered themselves as a generation stirred by a strong sense of idealism: ‘I grew up when I did, when young people tended to be very *idealistic*’ (Interview, 1999, Gallix 151; italics added)—when they had ‘a lot of *idealistic* notions’ (Interview, 1990, Swaim 100; italics added). Doing ‘something useful’ was ‘almost a creed of the younger generation’ in those days (Interview, 1995, Wachtel 26).¹² These bits of statements by Ishiguro suggest that the idealism of the 1960s and ’70s largely shaped Ishiguro’s vision of idealism.

At the same time, of much interest in the context of idealism is the fact that Ishiguro’s idealism, or rather his protagonists’ idealistic notions bear resemblance to the idealism prevalent in the decades that precede the 60s—‘during and after the war’, indeed, the ‘fabric of loyalty, patriotism, and idealism’ was maintained (Stevenson 15). This was the period Ishiguro did choose for his first three novels whose protagonists (and one supporting character named Ogata-San in *A Pale View of Hills*) the writer forces to confront the consequences of the actions they took during the war.

Ishiguro’s keen interest in the idealism of the previous generations may be explained by the influence of his father’s idealistic personality. A Japanese interviewer makes a comment on his father, Shizuo, thus: ‘His [Kazuo’s] father [. . .] is a type of person who has a strong wish to contribute to the society. [. . .] He’s now retired, making a gadget of a text reader for the blind’ (Interview, 1990, Hama 101, my translation; See also Interview, 1987, Ikeda 139).

¹² Such idealism spread across the globe in those days. In the Far East, too, a writer recalls the 1960s thus: ‘The anti-Vietnam War and student movements originally derived from strong idealism’ (Murakami 168; my translation).

This suggests that, while Ishiguro grew up in the idealistic times, cultivating a very strong interest in possible consequences of his generation's youthful endeavours the 1970s saw, the concrete form of idealism he explores in his works has a much closer relevance to the idealism endorsed by his father's generation. It is possible therefore to surmise that Ishiguro has been influenced by two types of idealism—his generation's and that of his father's generation, and Ishiguro's familiarity with dual values of idealism explains why his obsession with idealism in his works has some universal appeal to the reader. The possibility is endorsed by Ishiguro's comment on his own literary activities as we witnessed in Introduction: in an interview he says that he writes his fictions not because his readers can 'learn something about the period in which these things happened, but because I might be able to share some *more abstract vision of life*' (Interview, 2001, Wong 175). Although it is true that the late 1960s and early 1970s through which Ishiguro passed his youth had a significant impact on the writer, what the writer himself manages to do through his fiction is not necessarily recalling his generational idealism but exploring the more universal nature of idealism and its psychological consequences on people in general.

In fact Ishiguro enlarges the concept of usefulness his generation espoused to include the universality of human 'instinct' for idealism. Ishiguro dares to say, 'a lot of people have it [the instinct]' for idealism even at the less idealistic age of the present. We will see what he means by this statement in more detail in the coming chapter.

2 Instinct for contribution

In the previous chapter we have seen the view of Ishiguro's idealism in terms of his generational tendency which he maintains was prevalent in the 1960s and 1970s. In the distinctively ethical tendency of his generation, however, Ishiguro also recognises 'an instinct' for idealism commonly shared by us as human nature. Ishiguro remarks that there is something instinctive about how we lead our lives, an instinct that will not leave us alone as long as we fail to live up to moral standards each of us sets on ourselves: 'I think at some *instinctive* level we all have an idea of what a satisfying life is, and if what we do fall short of that, I think we get very unhappy' (Interview, 1995, Wachtel 28; italics added). In the same interview Ishiguro describes the inner desire all of us share to believe that we are able to make some contribution, albeit trivial and small, to the world at large:

[. . .] We *want* to tell ourselves that we contributed to something good, that we furthered the cause of humanity and left the world a slightly better place than we found it. We all seem to have a *big need* to do this. So even if we're doing rather trivial little jobs, as most of us are, we're *determined* to try and find some dimension to it that will allow us to believe that ours, although it's a humble contribution, is nevertheless a contribution to something larger and bigger.

(Interview, 1995, Wachtel 28-29; italics added)

For Ishiguro, therefore, idealism is an instinct which makes us obsessive about what we do in moral terms. We cannot help being idealistic. Four years after this interview, Ishiguro attempts to connect this instinctive urge for contribution to a sense of morality in the interview conducted by François Gallix, one of Ishiguro's frequent interviewers:

[. . .] *this sense of some nagging feeling* that there is some kind of *moral mission* that one has to fulfil and that one's life would not be satisfactory if one has not fulfilled it, I think that is there all the time in my work and it is there in the book

I've just finished [i.e. *When We Were Orphans*]. Once again I would not quite call it 'guilt' but it is almost entirely about this, *almost irrational urge* to fulfill some mission even if it seems *idiotic and pointless*. (Interview, 1999, Gallix 151; italics added)

Irrationality and pointlessness are quite obvious in Ishiguro's protagonists' endeavours to fulfil their missions, particularly in Ryder's in *The Unconsoled* and Christopher Banks's in *When We Were Orphans*. Both carry grandiose missions to save communities or even the world from unspecified evils through the professional (piano or detective) skills they have acquired in the long span of their careers.

Although Ishiguro's remark above is made in reference to the protagonists of his novels, it is obvious from another remark of his below that Ishiguro is moving towards the generalisation of this instinct for *moral missions* by attributing it to something intrinsic to human nature:

We are very different [from other creatures like cats and dogs], we keep stopping and saying, 'Is this good enough?' and so on, and we *behave in a very strange way, almost a perverse way* because we want to fulfil some idea of having done good, although *nobody knows what that is*. I'm sure cats and cows don't worry about these things, but *we do and I think that's always fascinated me*, and I think all my characters are people who suffer from *this peculiar human thing*. (Interview, 1999, Gallix 152; italics added)

But why do we feel compelled to 'fulfil some idea of having done good'? How can we predict what we are going to do can be categorised in moral terms as something good? After all, it is hardly possible to forecast consequences of one's action. Sometimes what we consider something good turns out to be not just useless or worthless but also even harmful to others. The line between good and bad is almost always fuzzy in our real lives, especially in ideological

contexts. Despite the fact, Ishiguro argues, all of us are sufficiently idealistic to believe in the possibility of small contribution to society.

This strong urge for contribution can be found in almost every protagonist of Ishiguro's novels, as partially seen in the cases of Ryder and Banks. Ryder believes he can save communities he visits by his own music and speech, as much as he believes he can repair his own parents' relationship by the same means. Banks is an idealist from the beginning of his career. At the gathering of the Charingworth club, the young Banks, at first, feels embarrassed not to mingle well with those present who are much advanced in age. He feels so in part because of his naiveté and partly because of his lack of knowledge of the larger world. But then he comes to get frustrated: 'After a while, I grew angry—at myself, at Osbourne, at the whole proceedings. I felt I had every right to despise the people around me; that they were for the most part greedy and self-seeking, lacking any *idealism* or sense of *public duty*' (*Orphans* 13; italics added). One elderly man, however, approaches Banks to facilitate the young man's smooth initiation into the London society. When the old man learns that Banks aims to be a private detective, he mumbles thus:

One feels so *idealistic* at your age. Longs to be the great detective of the day. To root out single-handedly all the evil in the world. Commendable. But really, my boy, it's just as well to have, let us say, a few other things to your bow. Because a year or two from now—I don't mean to be offensive—but pretty soon you'll feel quite differently about things. (*Orphans* 15-17; italics added)

Taking a defiant attitude towards this old man's assumption that Banks is a naïvely ambitious young man, Banks retorts immediately: 'With all respect, sir. The ambition which I just confided to you is hardly the whim of a moment. It's a calling I've felt my whole life' (16).

The old man then replies with a hint of sarcasm:

'Your whole life? But what are you? Twenty-one? Twenty-two? Well, I

suppose I shouldn't discourage you. After all, if our young men won't entertain *idealistic* notions of this sort, who is there to do so? And no doubt, my boy, you believe today's world to be a far more evil place than the one of thirty years ago, is that it? That civilisation's on the brink and all that?'

'As a matter of fact, sir', I said curtly, 'I do believe that to be the case'.

'I remember when I thought so too'. Suddenly his sarcasm had been replaced by a more kindly tone, and I even thought I saw tears fill his eyes. (*Orphans* 16; italics added)

This is a typical conversation between a young man and an old man—idealist versus ironist. But Banks becomes a detective and remains an idealist to the end. Arriving in Shanghai to combat the heart of the evil spreading across the world—though we do not know exactly what that 'evil' is—Banks faces the lack of interest people in the International Settlement show towards what is going on outside the settlement. In a ballroom Banks feels frustration mounting inside him again (*Orphans* 162) and then later on gives narrative expression to his anger amidst the ruins of the fire in a battlefield:

every now and then it would occur to me that in among the wreckage beneath our feet lay cherished heirlooms, children's toys, simple but much-loved items of family life, and I would find myself suddenly overcome with renewed anger towards those who had allowed such a fate to befall so many innocent people. I thought again of those pompous men of the International Settlement, of all the prevarications they must have employed to evade their responsibilities down so many years, and at such moments I felt my fury mount with so much intensity I was on the verge of calling out to the lieutenant to halt, just so I could give vent to it. (*Orphans* 241)

The intensity of Banks's fury with the indifference of people in the International Settlement to

what is happening to the Chinese rests on his strong sense of mission to save the whole world. Sarah Hemmings, a woman who shares the same fate of orphanage as Banks, is as ambitious as Banks is. Sarah's ambition is to get married to a man and then help him contribute to humanity. To meet such a man at parties held within the high society she, though uninvited, makes her way in to participate, quite often making a situation that looks 'embarrassing' to onlookers. 'But what else am I to do?' she appeals to Banks. 'I don't wish to look back at my life when I'm old and see something *empty*. I want to see something I can be *proud* of. You see, Christopher, I'm *ambitious*' (*Orphans* 46; italics added). Sarah too is obsessed with the notion of contribution:

'If my parents were alive today,' she said, 'they'd be telling me it's high time I was married. And perhaps it is. But I *won't do* what I've seen so many girls do. I *won't waste* all my love, all my energy, all my intellect—modest as that is—on some useless man who devotes himself to golf or to selling bonds in the City. When I marry, it will be to someone who'll really *contribute*. I mean to *humanity*, to a *better world*. Is that such an awful ambition? I don't come to places like this in search of famous men, Christopher. I come *in search of distinguished ones*. What do I care about a little embarrassment here and there?'—she waved towards the room—'But I *won't accept it's my fate* to *waste* my life on some pleasant, polite, *morally worthless* man'. (*Orphans* 47; italics added)

Sarah's obsession with contribution in moral terms basically runs through Ishiguro's protagonists. The butler Stevens, in *The Remains of the Day*, places the utmost importance on 'the *moral* status of an employer' one serves in attaining the name of greatness in butlership (*Remains* 120; italics in original). In *An Artist of the Floating World*, Masuji Ono prides himself on the fact that based on his 'good character and achievement' he was elected one of the four candidates for the auction by the Sugimura family of their old house built by late

Akira Sugimura, which was finally sold to Ono himself (*Artist* 8). Ono praises this procedure of selecting who should purchase the house solely on the basis of the candidates' '*moral* conduct and achievement' (*Artist* 10; italics added).

And all of these characters are ambitious, too, to contribute to humanity. Stevens's generation, indeed, was 'ambitious [. . .] to serve gentlemen who were, so to speak, furthering the progress of *humanity*' (*Remains* 120; italics added). Also, Chishu Matsuda, Ono's old friend in *An Artist of the Floating World*, nostalgically recalls the days when Ono 'wanted so badly to make *a grand contribution*' (*Artist* 199; italics added). Ishiguro states that there is a universal urge in us to be idealistic about how we should lead our lives. The constant 'irrational urge to fulfil some mission' (Interview, 1999, Gallix 151), or to contribute to humanity, however humble and small the contribution is, obsesses one 'for some peculiar, eccentric reason' (Interview, 1995, Wachtel 28). We can find the clearest form of idealism in our unexplainable obsession with the missions we have set on ourselves to fulfil in the course of our lives. This instinct for contribution, however, produces a fear of one's future, a fear of one's failure to contribute, or even a fear of one's moral efforts leading to possible harm to humanity.

3 Fear of the future

In his twenties part of Ishiguro began to worry about implications of being an idealist. A certain kind of fear started to well up in him: that is, where will idealism take him to in the end? This is a normal process youth goes through. Strong idealism contains uncertainty about the ethical, political, or professional values it espouses. Ishiguro in his early thirties gained a glimpse at the unreliability of idealism—a glimpse which in turn produced in him a sense of fear about what his future might bring to him:

I do write from a kind of *fear* that my life will be *wasted* in some way, that I *overestimate the value of my life*. I have a *fear* that we will all reach a certain age, look back and feel that we've *achieved nothing*—or even worse, that we stuck our necks out and *did something rather awful, made things worse*. (Interview, 1986, Tookey 34; italics added)

Naturally, this sense of fear propelled him to explore moral dimensions of idealism in his early novels, through his depictions of the protagonists' wrestling with the consequences of what they chose to do in the past with good intention. The following is a statement Ishiguro made in 1987, one year after he published *An Artist of the Floating World*:

I feel I am a part of that generation for whom making something good out of your life, morally good, was a very conscious thing. I suppose I now write out of a kind of fear, that I project about my own life, that I will reach a certain age and look back on my life, and perhaps the lives of the people around me, and ask *what became of all of us who made such an effort to make something useful of our lives*. (Interview, 1987, Bigsby 21)

The fear about how one is to be seen from the perspective of the constantly changing values is nothing unusual for a young man in his early thirties to feel. As long as we are very much in the space-time continuum where the past is followed by the present which is in turn followed

by the future, it is hard to attain any perspective outreaching the future. But at the same time, it is often true that this kind of fear is aroused by the presence of strong idealism. The more strongly and determinedly one espouses ideals and principles, the higher the risk might be of one's idealistic hope resulting in disillusion and disappointment.

Moreover, Ishiguro belongs to a generation who demand moral significance from what they do, which makes the situation more complicated. As Ishiguro warns against his future self, it might turn out that we end up not only doing something useless and worthless—‘wasting our lives’, in Ishiguro's terms—but also doing something ‘worse’ in moral terms. The stance of espousing such abstractive concepts as morality and usefulness, the significance of which, of course, changes from period to period, inevitably leads to the realisation of the near impossibility of attaining a broader perspective to predict what result one's efforts produce in the end:

I am very conscious, and have become more so since my more *idealistic* days, that it is awfully difficult not simply to be at the mercy of the prevalent social or political climate. Very few of us seem to possess that kind of *special perspective*, that insight into the situation that surrounds us, which enables us to make decisions over and above what the crowd around us is buying for. So this question of trying to do something *useful* with your life is very difficult. (Interview, 1987, Bigsby 21-22; italics added)

It is almost impossible to attain a perspective with which to see what is happening around us. Hence ‘for most of us the best we can hope for is to use our rather small skills in serving people and organisations that really do matter’ (Interview, 1989, Clee 1327). Here Ishiguro comes around to a modest degree of idealism. Obviously, Ishiguro's adoption of a more cautious attitude towards idealism obviously comes from his imagination about what he might have done had he been born one generation earlier in Japan:

If you are German or Japanese, you do ask yourself, if you were just a few years older, if you were born just one generation earlier, what would you have been doing? If you come from the West, you still ask yourself, what would I have done had I lived through a period when everybody around me was caught up in this nationalistic or fascist fervour? *Would I have stood against it or would I have gone with the tide? You ask that in an abstract way.* I suppose I ask it in an abstract way too, but it's a little less abstract because you're talking about *my parents' generation.* And all you have to imagine is being just a few years older. *If you were born just a few years before, what would I have done?* (Interview, 1995, Wachtel 26-27; italics added)

His imaginative backward leap into the period that people born one generation earlier than Ishiguro's underwent—an imaginative leap which Ishiguro attempts to do over and over again in his earlier works—is his own way of making sense of living in a politically volatile period when it is so hard to stick to a particular political or ideological agenda.

Direct experience teaches one a lesson about the difficulty of sticking to idealism. Just as his engagement in social work was driven by his vision of idealism, the chance to see the reality hiding behind the vision was given by the same job:

I worked with the homeless and so on. But after a while the picture starts to complicate, and you realize that it's not at all clear. You think you're doing something *useful* but, when you look at it more closely, you can see all the ways in which you could just as easily be doing *harm*. Increasingly, people I knew got into this *dilemma*. [. . .] You go in saying you're doing *good*, and then you look at it and it starts to fall apart in your hands. (Interview, 1995, Wachtel 27; italics added)

This is what we saw in the previous chapter: the difficulty of predicting consequences of one's action based on good intention. And this is also about the difficulty of attaining a broad

perspective with which to look beyond one's surroundings. Ishiguro himself underwent such an experience through his volunteer work among the homeless in his twenties.

Ishiguro provided his own analysis of the conditions of the homeless as early as 1982, the year his first novel *A Pale View of Hills* came out, especially about the calamitous consequences of deprivation of responsibility from the homeless, which may be of some relevance to the dilemma he and many other social workers got into then: 'Part of the effect of suffering from poverty or homelessness or being institutionalised is that they have the responsibility for their own lives taken away from them. It's not that they're incapable but they're not given the responsibility' (Interview, 1982, de Jongh 11). So he feels 'sympathy with people who want to run away from responsibility', because at the time of writing this article, he still 'work[ed] for the Cyrenians with' the homeless or unemployed and 'often [saw] staggering weakness' in such people (Interview, 1982, de Jongh 11).

Ishiguro directs a similar kind of sympathy towards people who strive to achieve something good but who end in failure. Referring to Masuji Ono, the protagonist of *An Artist of the Floating World*, Ishiguro says: 'I'm very interested in people who have a great desire to do something of worth, something to distinguish themselves, but who maybe in the end find that they don't have it in them to be more than *ordinary*' (Interview, 1986, Tookey 34; italics added). The realisation that you are simply an ordinary man does not lead straight to the easy acceptance of the fact. Ishiguro says, 'people have actually to deceive themselves to a certain extent to preserve their dignity. You have to allow people to do that' (Interview, 1987, Sexton 32). It is sometimes necessary for us to protect our dignity from the reality denying its validity, no matter how ordinary we are. But at the same time it is as difficult to maintain this dignity intact when you have realised your mediocrity. The thing is whether you can reconcile your self-image to your true self. Ishiguro has this to say about Ono:

I wanted him to realize his own humble position in the world. A certain kind of

reconciliation with the world comes because of that. He realizes the world didn't actually turn on what he did at all, he was just a small ordinary man. In the end if his life has been messed up somewhat *he's the only person who really cares about it*. I'm very interested in how people preserve their dignity when confronted with the truth about themselves. (Interview, 1987, Sexton 32; italics added).

The author's comment that 'he's the only person who really cares about it' reflects Ishiguro's fear of overvaluing his own life. Indeed, the novelist has another important character, Chishu Matsuda, make the same comment in *An Artist of the Floating World*: 'We're the only ones who care now. The likes of you and me, Ono, when we look back over our lives and see they were flawed, we're the only ones who care now' (*Artist* 201). Ono and other characters accept their ordinariness in Ishiguro's fiction, which Ishiguro calls 'the dignity of being human, of being honest': 'they have some sense of dignity as human beings, that ultimately there is something heroic about coming to terms with very painful truths about yourself' (Interview, 1989, Swift 39). Even though one's ideals of doing something useful and worthwhile are shattered in the end, even though one turns out to be an ordinary person—far from his ideal figure he envisions—one has to accept one's ordinariness, the fact that one is among the mediocre. Ishiguro's sympathy with mediocre people apparently comes from his fear of his future: his fear that he might end up being a man of mediocrity. Ishiguro's fear of being designated as a writer of mediocrity seems to be reflected in the harsh criticism he expressed against some of his fellow writers in the essay 'Bomb Culture' (1983).

4 Value judgement

Ishiguro's fear of himself becoming a man of mediocrity is the seamy side of his idealism. And his idealism in its purest form, in fact, manifests itself in the essay 'Bomb Culture' published in 1983. In this essay Ishiguro analyses the literary circumstances in which his debut novel, *A Pale View of Hills*, was favourably received by the public:

Meanwhile, in the larger world outside, the threat of nuclear annihilation (sic) had re-emerged as an issue on a scale unseen since the Sixties. Given this climate, I became profoundly thankful for having been born in Nagasaki rather than, say, Bradford. For the mere fact of my novel taking place in that city was allowing me to achieve an easy kind of global significance, dialogue which may have sounded flat and parochial uttered outside Tufnell Park Tube Station positively rang with ominous meaning in the streets of Nagasaki.

Not only did Nagasaki give me a kind of short-cut to the global dimension, with the book's publication early last year I found my home town getting far more coverage than I could otherwise have hoped for. I appeared in interviews under the headings like 'Life after the bomb' (Guardian) and 'After the holocaust' (Time Out); non-literary journals like South and Asiaweek featured articles about the book under photographs of devastated ruins.

Nagasaki even protected me from the irony of the reviewers; they were uniformly solemn and respectful, apparently deeming it bad taste to write down a book about that city written by someone actually born there. Even gaps in my imagination or knowledge were taken for commendable restraint in the handling of potentially sensational material. And, as a bonus, I enjoyed being regarded by those around me as a socially aware, even radical person. (Ishiguro, 'Bomb Culture' 99)

Ishiguro's humble esteem of the literary value of his first novel implies his scepticism about the literary credit given to that novel. His Japanese name on the front of a copy of his novel with his Asian face on its back, he seems to think, must have enticed his potentially cruel book reviewers to veer away from doing what Ishiguro calls 'the irony' and instead seeking in his work one of the sprouts of multiculturalism that began to appear quite rapidly in England from the early 1980s onwards. The critical tendency Ishiguro notes in his essay was brought about by the diversification of the origins of British writers and their subject matters in the 1980s (see Stevenson 5-9). Indeed, the publication of *A Pale View of Hills* (1982) followed the appearance in the previous year of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, as well as the upsurge of what Ishiguro termed 'the large global theme'. Thus a new critical focus on immigrant writers, who 'made English literature international' (Bruce King, *The Internationalization of English Literature* 1), may have given rise to the warm welcome of his first novel, *A Pale View of Hills*.

This essay has also been the only written prose among Ishiguro's works in which he showed his own value judgement on fiction: What kind of works should have literary merit and what kind of works should be avoided by readers. While well known for a writer with profound modesty, Ishiguro in this essay is unusually outspoken in his judgement of certain kinds of literary works including his own debut novel. Before anything else, as we have seen above, Ishiguro placed his success with *A Pale View of Hills* in the particular literary climate in which emerged the public demand for fiction with international scopes, like Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, as well as the impending threat of nuclear annihilation worldwide. Ishiguro stated that the setting of the best part of his first novel, *A Pale View of Hills*, in Nagasaki helped to get more attention than he had hoped for, while the very setting of Nagasaki spared him harsh criticism that tended to be showered on a debut novel. In other words, he was very sceptic about his apparent success, even cautioning himself against being

complacent about it. Indeed, he remarked thus: ‘the temptation for me to flirt with the nuclear issue—with all the advantages and short cuts that would bring—is considerable’. Thus, Ishiguro went the length of maintaining, apparently to warn himself to keep off this territory, that ‘any further book I may write on this subject would inevitably fall into this category’ (‘Bomb Culture’ 9).

More than a decade and a half later, Ishiguro took up this issue again of an easy resort to a big theme like nuclear holocaust as something to avoid at all costs: ‘It is very easy to give your novel an easy kind of weight, simply by referring to the holocaust or to the atomic bomb, or to the war. You just bring this in and what would have been otherwise a banal story suddenly claims importance. That always makes me uneasy’ (Interview, 1999, Gallix 141). This uneasiness must have come from a certain sense of guilt he has felt about a lot of media attention *A Pale View of Hills* had attracted. In these statements can we get a glimpse at the working of the judgement of artistic value as well as the acute sense of morality of a novelist.

In the same essay Ishiguro was as merciless in despising literary works vying for such importance they didn’t deserve as he was sceptical about the significance of his first novel. In Ishiguro’s view, there was now a flourishing business going on of many writers and artists jumping at nuclear issues for subject matter apparently to gain more coverage from the media than they otherwise would, and in unusually acerbic terms he judged that many works of such type of writers must ‘almost certainly be shoddy’, because they were all simply aimed at ‘opportunism, ambition and the desire to be seen to be in tune with the times’ (9).

Ishiguro admitted that it was not entirely impossible to regard the emerging increase of these ‘shoddy’ works addressing the nuclear threat as due reflection of ‘the great unease now prevalent over the nuclear arms race’. But he also contended that there might be a much higher risk of such shoddy works producing a new ‘phoney and treacherous’ genre of nuclear holocaust that was ultimately to become ‘a major form of escapist entertainment’ whose

appeal would lie simply in 'its ability to transport us to a situation so calamitous that our everyday worries and frustrations look utterly trivial'. And the most perilous outcome of this new emerging genre will be to 'familiarise, even glamorise, the holocaust terrain, until it begins to resemble sci-fi territory' ('Bomb Culture' 9).

General calmness many critics like associating with Ishiguro as a fresh-and-blood person is here replaced by irritation being directed towards what Ishiguro calls 'shoddy' works treating a big theme like nuclear threat just for the sake of the popularity of the theme itself. At the same time, we can detect some assumption underlying Ishiguro's argument here. For Ishiguro, whatever aim involves in artistic endeavours should be paramount in the evaluation of a particular piece of literary work. Artistic value resides in for what purpose an artist sets for himself to create his work. Some works are shoddy when the creative motives come from outside, so to speak—like opportunism and desire for popularity—while other works do have literary merit when the motives come from within—the writer's inner necessity to create stories of his own.

As a matter of fact, in the same essay Ishiguro stressed the importance of readers exercising judgement of artistic value, too. We 'must' distinguish works of 'poor quality' and 'little artistic worth' from those of artistic real 'value'. And those 'works of real quality will be valuable, not only in their own rights, but for supplying the human and moral dimensions'. Therefore—

[not] just the artists and consumers, but publishers, theatre groups, TV drama executives, magazine editors, reviewers must all exercise responsibility and good sense. And we must all of us resist the temptation to support or applaud a mediocre work simply because its heart is in the right place. (9)

Nowhere can we possibly find a more idealistic statement in the entire corpus of Ishiguro's prose than this. What should be recognised in this statement is not merely Ishiguro's unusual

display of the extreme form of idealism but the fact that Ishiguro himself is an idealistic writer.

His dismissal of works of mediocrity, together with his emphasis on ‘responsibility and good sense’ and his puritanical stress on the importance of resisting ‘the temptation’, reminds us of the sheer force with which F. R. Leavis propagated his value judgement in his literary criticism. In quite a recent interview with Sebastian Groes, Ishiguro questions the validity of the ongoing trend of relativism in academic literary criticism in which academics almost fail to make a list of literary canon:

I’m also wondering whether, not so much because of postmodernism, but because of things like gender studies and colonial studies, that academics and university departments are not allowed to say which books are better than others, or to say what is important. It’s become harder to argue for a particular reading list purely *for literary merit* and to champion works equivalent to *Ulysses* today. That confidence has disappeared in the relativist period, and as an academic you’re much more vulnerable to having to justify the teaching of books in terms of other disciplines, such as history, for example.

In the fifties you had people like F. R. Leavis, who were very confident about what a good book was, to the point where it was dodgy. You don’t get academic figures like that any more, people who lead the way, who shape taste. It’s that very activity that people are dubious about. The right to say if there’s *any philosophical soundness to making a judgement at all* has gone and we just have a kind of review-pages consensus in which new writers should rise to prominence and older writers are preserved. It’s *a relatively arbitrary process* by which we are selecting a future canon. (Interview, 2011, Groes 263-64; italics added)

Ishiguro’s apparent dissatisfaction with the recent academic practices with the relative lack of consensus on literary value and merit strikes a reverberating chord with his earlier remarks on

the importance of writers' as well as readers' making an 'judgement of artistic value' ('Bomb Culture' 9). Perhaps Ishiguro's complaint echoes the puzzlement displayed by his mentor, Malcolm Bradbury, when the latter writes: 'In contemporary literary study, [. . .] there is little that is common, no such concept as truth, and nothing to be said for judgement', a critical attitude that Bradbury ventures to say never hesitates to question the validity of the tradition of literary criticism—what T. S. Eliot termed as 'the common pursuit of true judgement' (*No, Not Bloomsbury* 313).

Ishiguro's essay, 'Bomb Culture', should ultimately be read both as a form of excuse against the possible allegation that he may have written *A Pale View of Hills* for populism¹³—the implication of his fear about his own being one of such 'shoddy' works—and as a rare demonstration of his idealism in the form of the declaration of artistic value judgement. This emphasis on value judgement is correlated in Ishiguro's view of life with morality-oriented professionalism.

¹³ For the excuse, see Shonaka (*Kazuo Ishiguro* 27). Shonaka quotes the quote made by Clive Sinclair from the interview by *Time Out*: '“When Ishiguro chose to set that novel in Nagasaki and include the looming presence of the bomb,” it [the interview by *Time Out*] said, “he knew full well that this might be a way of catching the eye of publisher and public”' (Interview, 1987, Sinclair 36).

5 Pride in profession

In Ishiguro's fiction, idealism tends to find its best place to develop in characters' professions. Many of Ishiguro's protagonists are proud of their social statuses and professions. Indeed, the opening pages of some of his works begin with their declaration of such pride. Ishiguro's characters have strong identification with their occupations which become the basis for their sense of pride and dignity. The most recent novel, *Never Let Me Go*, starts with the narrator Kathy H.'s modest but evidently 'boasting' remark on her status as 'a carer':

My name is Kathy H. I'm thirty-one years old, and I've been a carer now for over eleven years. That sounds long enough, I know, but actually they want me to go on for another eight months, until the end of this year' (*Never* 3).

Although Kathy hastens to add, 'I'm not trying to boast', yet the remark is immediately followed by another: 'But then I do know for a fact they've been pleased with my work, and by and large, I have too' (3). Actually, she admits eventually—'Okay, maybe I *am* boasting now'—and adds an excuse to it by saying: 'But it means a lot to me, being able to do my work well, especially that bit about my donors staying "calm"' (3). This means that a lot of donors cannot stay calm, and it is natural because they have to wait for impending pain, followed by their 'complete', a codename meaning death, to approach them. Kathy's work as a carer is to help donors calmly 'complete', easing stress and fear arising from their imminent death: 'I've developed a kind of instinct around donors. I know when to hang around and comfort them, when to leave them to themselves; when to listen to everything they have to say, and when just to shrug and tell them to snap out of it' (*Never* 3). With this Kathy is obviously boasting her techniques to deal with her 'donors', though at this stage the reader is given no clue as to what 'carers' are nor what 'donors' are meant to be. Kathy is a narrator, however, who knows when to be discreet before her narratee. In order to avoid being regarded as pompous she lays due emphasis on her humbleness: 'Anyway, I'm not making any big

claims for myself' (3).

While Kathy is proud of the length of time during which she has been engaged in her profession as a carer, some of Ishiguro's earlier male protagonists take pride not only in their professions but in their identification with people enjoying higher social statuses than they do. *An Artist of the Floating World* opens with Ono's remark on his connection with a late man of distinction named Akira Sugimura. The house Ono has lived in since before the war was originally the Sugimuras':

Even if it [the house] did not occupy such a commanding position on the hill, the house would still stand out from all others nearby, so that as you come up the path, you may find yourself wondering what sort of wealthy man owns it.

But then I am not, nor have I ever been, a wealthy man. The imposing air of the house will be accounted for, perhaps, if I inform you that it was built by my predecessor, and that he was none other than Akira Sugimura. Of course, you may be new to this city, in which case the name of Akira Sugimura may not be familiar to you. But mention it to anyone who lived here before the war and you will learn that for thirty years or so, Sugimura was unquestionably amongst the city's most respected and influential men. (*Artist* 7)

While stressing the formidable externals of the house, Ono manoeuvres the reader into feeling the social importance of the former owner of the house—'he was *none other than* Akira Sugimura' (italics added). At first Ono appears to be humble about his social as well as monetary status ('But then I am not, nor have I ever been, a wealthy man'), the realisation dawns on the reader that Ono actually counts himself for such 'respected and influential men' as Sugimura. Ono's own self-conceit is partially attested by his reminiscences of the remarks made by his former disciples on their teacher: (Shintaro's) 'a benefactor of such influence and generosity' (*Artist* 21)—and Kuroda's:

‘Sensei was unaware of the high regard in which he is held by people in this city
[. . .] his reputation has now spread beyond the world of art, to all walks of life
[. . .] His reputation will become all the greater, and in years to come, our proudest
honour will be to tell others that we were once the pupils of Masuji Ono’ (*Artist*
25).

Later on Ono finds himself leaning towards self-declaration of his own importance by referring to how much he contributed to the opening of his favourite bar named ‘Migi-Hidari’ before the World War II began, around ‘1933 or 1934’ (63) when patriotism and nationalism had already been sweeping across the whole of Japan: ‘by that time my reputation in this town had grown to a certain extent; as I recall, I was not yet serving on the arts committee of the State Department, but I had many personal links there and was already being consulted frequently on matters of policy. So then, my petition to the authorities on [Migi-Hidari’s publican] Yamagata’s behalf was not without weight’ (63).

Ono’s pride extends so far as to his moral sense and judgement even. Recounting the episode of how he purchased the Sugimuras’ house flatters his pride, leaving him ‘with a certain feeling of achievement’ (21). In the process of deciding to whom they were to sell their house, Sugimura’s daughters told Ono that they had already settled on ‘four applicants’ they picked out ‘carefully’ based on ‘good character and achievement’ alone (8), and after their due investigation into the applicants’ ‘background and credentials’ (9) decided to offer the right to purchase the house to Ono due to his ‘moral conduct and achievement’ (10)—though we should remind ourselves of the fact that all this is recounted by the narrator, Ono himself. Yet every time he goes near to self-conceit, he immediately brings himself back to his usual modesty:

I was very lax in considering the matter of status, it simply not being my instinct to concern myself with such things. Indeed, I have never at any point in my life been

very aware of my own social standing, and even now, I am often surprised afresh when some event, or something someone may say, reminds me of the rather high esteem in which I am held. (19)

Indeed, Ono's narrative shows that he constantly shuttles back and forth between pride and modesty: 'It was, I suppose, another of those instances when one is struck by the realization that one is held in rather higher esteem than one supposed. But then I was never one to concern myself with matters of esteem' (63). This is of course because his narration betrays his inner unease about the impending marriage negotiation of his younger daughter Noriko's with Taro Saito, son of Dr Saito, a distinguished professor of art, and more particularly about the possibility that his deeds in the wartime might bring the negotiation to another failure.

Just as the house shows everything about his social status for Ono, Darlington Hall is everything the butler Stevens can associate himself with. For Stevens, the protagonist and narrator of *The Remains of the Day*, working at Darlington Hall guarantees much of his pride in his status as a distinguished butler. He claims he is good at many technical skills a butler is required to master, including drawing up a good staff plan: 'the ability to draw up a good staff plan is the corner stone of any decent butler's skills. I have myself devised many staff plans over the years, and I do not believe I am being unduly *boastful* if I say that very few ever needed amendment' (5-6; italics added). Allowed to take a leave by his present master, Mr Farraday, for a car trip to Cornwall, Stevens makes a very careful selection of clothes he is going to wear during the travel: 'I hope you do not think me unduly vain with regard to this latter [clothes] matter; it's just that one never knows when one might be obliged to give out that one is from Darlington Hall, and it is important that one be attired at such times in a manner of one's position' (*Remains* 11). Of course, here a dramatic irony is intended by the author Ishiguro, for during his trip spanning only a few days Stevens denies more than once the fact that he used to serve Lord Darlington, Stevens's former master whose diplomatic

negotiations during the war were to be lambasted in postwar Britain. But at least in the opening part of the novel Stevens manages to preserve pride in himself, as shown by his own remark on the praise accorded to him by Mr Farraday, the remark made in a style of pomposity beyond absurdity: ‘my new employer in several other instances had had occasion to call upon such qualities as it may be my good fortune to possess and found them to be, I would venture, dependable’ (7).

Steven’s pride in his sense of professionalism strangely echoes Mr Lewis’s emphasis on professional manoeuvring of highly complex political situations, downgrading the amateurism he connects to the way Lord Darlington involves himself in the global politics. Stevens’s professionalism and Mr Lewis’s professionalism echo each other, suggesting their imperfection: while Stevens’s professionalism is questioned in the narrative by the feeling of despair the butler himself displays at the end of his narrative, Mr Lewis’s professionalism fails to appeal to the gathering for intervention in Versailles Treaty.

Ishiguro’s protagonists, thus, take various degrees of pride in their professions and deeply identify themselves with their jobs to the extent that when they either temporarily or permanently leave their professional boundaries they get lost either in mind—Ono becomes increasingly pensive as his narrative proceeds—or in direction—Stevens loses his way several times on his journey to Cornwall. They cannot help being proud of their professions. But the very attitude of theirs plunges them into the depth of ethical crevices of professionalism.

6 Ethics

It can be conjectured that Ishiguro's fear of ramifications of idealism has been arising while he was shaping the idea of *A Pale View of Hills*. It is true that this novel centres on the relationship developed between the protagonist, Etsuko, and her friend, Sachiko, in a summer several years after the war, but it also has a subplot containing an ethical issue of Etsuko's father-in-law, Ogata-San's 'certain aspects' of his career as a teacher during the war, which Shigeo Matsuda, a former pupil of his, refers to (*Pale View* 148), as well as the consequential emotional struggle the old man has to be undergoing now. Ishiguro's interest in the consequence of one's idealistic actions can be best summarised by Matsuda's words directed at his former teacher: 'And to be fair, you shouldn't be blamed for not realizing the true consequences of your actions' (*Pale View* 148).

According to Ishiguro, this subplot about Ogata-San was originally expected to occupy the main storyline of his first novel (Interview, 1987, Ikeda 145). It is well known among Ishiguro's readers that this minor character, a former school teacher, is the prototype of Ono the painter and Stevens the butler, in terms of their common bewilderment at the sudden change of political and social values and the resultant downgrading of their social status as well as the moral worthiness of their achievements. But when he finished writing the novel Ishiguro found that Ogata-San's story 'ended up as a sub-plot' (Interview, 1991, Kelman 44). The finished novel as we know it now is about Etsuko's being caught in dilemma about whether the decision she made as a mother in the past was correct or not.

The reason that Ishiguro finished his first novel in the way he did was that he inadvertently incorporated at the very beginning of the narrative the episodic fact that the protagonist's daughter, Keiko, hanged herself. In an interview conducted in 1986, Ishiguro reflected in more general terms on his own immaturity as a novice writer when he was writing this first novel:

I often would bring in things simply because they worked rather nicely on that particular page in that particular chapter. And suddenly, I'd find myself with a daughter who'd hung herself, or whatever, on my hands and I'd have to figure out how to deal with that. If you really want to write something, you shouldn't bring things into your book lightly. [. . .] I think the most important thing I learned between writing the first and second novels is the element of thematic discipline.

(Interview, 1986, Mason 7)

Whatever lesson Ishiguro learned from writing his first novel does not concern us here (though this lesson would be crucially relevant to our discussion of his vision of nostalgia in Part II, more particularly in chapter 14 'Staging wounds'), but what should concern us now instead is Ishiguro's chronic obsession with ethical implications of idealism that can be identified in the trajectory of his central characters drawn from Ogata-San in *A Pale View of Hills* through Ono in *An Artist of the Floating World* to Stevens in *The Remains of the Day*. These three old men are, in a manner of speaking, parts of a person Ishiguro in his twenties and early thirties was afraid of becoming in the future. In short, the narratives of all these protagonists-first-person narrators can be read as the reflections of Ishiguro's mounting anxiety concerning the implications of idealism. Why is that anxiety growing inside him? It is in part because idealism is an essential part of what he considers as human nature, that is to say, because we cannot control our own idealistic tendency. And it is also partly because the consequence of our idealistic actions cannot be predicted and thus we have no control over it.

It is natural, therefore, that ethical issues a character faces in each novel get more complicated and more increasingly out of their control in his later novels than in his first one. While Ogata-San is apparently just bewildered at the unexpected criticism by one of his former pupils regarding what he did during the war, Ono, a former artist with much fame according to his own narration, is not only bewildered at the criticism directed at him from

some quarters but also getting into a certain dilemma he finds himself trapped in between his defence of his own actions in the past and his desire of escaping from facing the consequence of the same actions. Nonetheless, Ono is at least allowed to say he *is* responsible for what he did in the past—indeed, he makes a kind of public confession at the *miai* meeting for his younger daughter. Stevens, on the other hand, is not allowed such an opportunity for repentance to the end of his narrative. For the present situation the butler finds himself in is totally and absolutely beyond his control. For he has long denied himself a right to assert any opinion of his own, to show any feeling of his own, to lead his life in the way he wants to, all in the name of his professionalism. Stevens cannot be responsible for his own life, just as the homeless Ishiguro took care of couldn't. Stevens has so clearly defined himself as a butler being loyal to his master, Lord Darlington, that, when the master himself admits to himself and others that what he did in the past during the war was morally wrong, Stevens inevitably corners himself into a choice of two alternatives: either he continues to be *loyal* to his dead master by declaring that he used to be his butler or he *denies* the undeniable fact of his service to the master that spans the best part of his long career as butler. This is painful for him because he has designated himself as an idealistic butler, and the foundation of his idealism rests entirely on the following principle: one wants to be a butler with dignity and a butler with dignity is the one who never discards his professional being, who never ceases to be loyal to his master of morality, who never allows oneself to display emotion in professional contexts. Of course, Stevens cannot control his own idealistic tendency, still less the consequences his idealistic principles have brought to him.

Considering this ethical trajectory briefly sketched in Ishiguro's first three novels, it would be obvious that focus on *The Remains of the Day* is most effective in showing Ishiguro's way of addressing ethics in relation to idealism. In fact, a lot of professional statements made by the butler reverberates with what Ishiguro says about idealism in general

in his interviews: in short, ethics of profession. Therefore, this chapter, much longer in space than many other chapters for the sake of close reading of several parts of the novel, looks into the professional ethics espoused by Stevens and thereby gauges ethical implications of his idealism, as well as the extent to which Stevens's ethics reflects Ishiguro's own.

Ethics of profession

Stevens has a series of ethical rules to apply to his profession. He is a dedicated butler and aspires to be a perfectionist in his profession. When he devises his staff plan at the request of Mr Farraday, his present master, Stevens does so with full-hearted dedication: 'I spent many hours working on the staff plan, and at least as many hours again thinking about it as I went about other duties or as I lay awake after retiring. Whenever I believed I had come up with something, I probed it for every sort of oversight, tested it through from all angles' (*Remains* 8). This perfectionism, of course, derives from his espousal of professional ethics. In explaining his own professional ethics, Stevens employs a fair number of abstract terms such as 'greatness', 'dignity', 'contribution', 'morality', and 'loyalty', with eloquence and tautology. A 'great' butler, for Stevens, is like the 'English landscape at its finest' with the 'quality' best represented in the term 'greatness' (*Remains* 28), endowed with 'calmness and restraint' (*Remains* 29), unlike European landscapes with 'demonstrativeness' (*Remains* 29). Stevens then cites the definition of a distinguished butler presented by the Hayes Society, the organization which was, according to Stevens, most authoritative in the world of butlership in England of the nineteen twenties and the early thirties. Membership is only conferred on those of distinction: 'the most crucial criterion [for membership] is that the applicant be possessed of a *dignity* in keeping with his position' (*Remains* 33; italics added). Based on this definition, Stevens sets out to put forward his opinion of what comprises dignity. Making reference to some exemplary butlers including his own father, Stevens asserts that "dignity" has to do

crucially with a butler's ability not to abandon the professional being he inhabits' (*Remains* 43) and enlarges on it with this sartorial metaphor:

They *wear* their professionalism as a decent gentleman will wear his suit; he will not let ruffians or circumstances tear it off him in the public gaze; he will discard it when, and only when, he wills to do so, and this will invariably be when he is entirely alone. (*Remains* 44; italics added)

Stevens continues his harangue by saying that 'only the English race' is capable of such 'emotional restraint' and therefore that 'a great butler' is, 'almost by definition, to be an Englishman' (*Remains* 44). This highly nationalistic definition of a butler with dignity is, however, counterbalanced by his idealistic attitude that dignity is something all butlers should aim for in their career—'I believe strongly that this "dignity" is something one can meaningfully strive for throughout one's career' (*Remains* 34). This is where Stevens comes to differ from his fellow butler, Mr Graham, whose view was that dignity 'was something like a woman's beauty' (34) and Stevens calls it 'defeatist', the analogy having 'the implication that this "dignity" was something one possessed or did not by a fluke of nature' (34).

Stevens's definition of dignity as the essential quality of a great butler is, however, to undergo major modifications at several points in his narrative. The first modification can be witnessed in his entry, 'Day Two—Afternoon, Mortimer's Pond, Dorset'. Here Stevens adds two more qualities as much necessary for making a butler a great one. One quality is that a butler should be 'attached to a distinguished household' (*Remains* 119). Here he compares his generation with his father's, saying that his are 'a much more *idealistic generation*' (*Remains* 120; italics added). And the idealism of Stevens's generation should be bound together with 'the *moral* status of an employer' (120; italics added), the other quality necessary for a butler to be considered to be one of dignity. Indeed, Stevens says, 'we were ambitious, in a way that would have been unusual a generation before, to serve gentlemen who were, so to speak,

furthering the progress of humanity’ (120). For ‘professional prestige lay’, according to Stevens’s generation, ‘most significantly in the *moral* worth of one’s employer’ (*Remains* 121; italics added). Special emphasis on idealism in tandem with morality extends itself to direct or indirect involvement in contribution to humanity:

For we were, as I say, an idealistic generation for whom the question was not simply one of how well one practiced one’s skills, but *to what end* one did so; each of us harboured the desire to make our small contribution to the creation of a better world, and saw that, as professionals, the surest means of doing so would be to serve the greatest gentlemen of our times in whose hands civilization has been entrusted. (*Remains* 122; italics in original)

Stevens’s point is that a great butler is one who ‘has applied his talents to serving a great gentleman—and through the latter, to serving humanity’; therefore, he concludes that ‘association with a *truly* distinguished household *is* a prerequisite of “greatness”’ (123; italics in original). Such terms as ‘idealistic generation’, ‘contribution’, ‘moral worth’, and ‘to what end’ all echo what Ishiguro has said about his idealism, sounding as if coming directly from Ishiguro’s mouth as we heard from his interviews. Stevens here seems as if representing the 1960s idealism. Indeed, the butler is really ‘ambitious’ to the extent that he believes he can contribute to humanity somehow as this remark attests to it:

For our generation, I believe it is accurate to say, viewed the world not as a ladder, but more as a *wheel*. [. . .] To us, then, the world was a wheel, revolving with these great houses at the hub, their mighty decisions emanating out to all else, rich and poor, who revolved around them. It was the aspiration of all those of us with professional ambition to work our way as close to this hub as we were each of us capable. (*Remains* 121-22; italics in original)

Stevens regards himself as standing only few steps from direct contribution to humanity. At

this point in his narrative Stevens still maintains his idealism almost intact, but such a narrative situation does not last long in Ishiguro's fiction.

Morality

Stevens's incorporation of morality of a master one serves as an essential quality that helps guarantee a butler's dignity, as well as the grandiose idea of serving 'humanity' through service to such a master of moral worth, into his former definition of greatness of a butler, in actual fact, results from his private necessity to justify what he calls 'white lies' he made earlier on concerning his own association with Lord Darlington (*Remains* 132). Incidents involving the lies occurred separately: one took place in an apparently innocent conversation Stevens had with a friend of Stevens's present master's, Mrs Wakefield, on the latter's visit to Darlington Hall several months before and the other incident occurred in Stevens's chat with an old batman he encountered only an hour before writing his present entry. In both conversations, Stevens denied his past association with Lord Darlington when asked whether he had ever served the gentleman. Stevens subsequently begins to reflect on the implications of his own denials, concluding that the denials were rather 'white lies' not to hear 'nonsense' about his former master, by no means because he felt 'embarrassed or ashamed of [his] association with' Lord Darlington:

This does seem a very plausible explanation the more I think about it; for it is true, nothing vexes me more these days than to hear this sort of nonsense being repeated.

Let me say that Lord Darlington was a gentleman of great *moral* stature—a stature to dwarf most of these persons you will find talking this sort of nonsense about him—and I will readily vouch that he remained that to the last. Nothing could be less accurate than to suggest that I regret my association with such a gentleman.

(*Remains* 132-33; italics added)

Here Stevens assumes that his emphasis on his former master's morality guarantees his claim that he denied his association with the master not because of a regret or shame on his part but because he did not want to hear 'nonsense' about the master, while he does not reveal at all what that 'nonsense' is all about. But at the same time, this emphasis serves to confirm one hypothetical reading of his intention, that is, his desperate justification of his own lies. This means that Stevens's sudden modification in his narrative of his former definition of a great butler by including as other elements the morality of one's master and one's contribution to humanity through the medium of such a master is his desire to provide an excuse for his 'white lies'. The run of his logic can be paraphrased as follows: if he insists that one essential element of a great butler consists in his service to a master of 'moral stature' and the other consists in his service to the humanity only through such a moral master, and that his former master, Lord Darlington, was the very epitome of masters of 'moral stature', it follows then that he cannot have wished to dissociate himself from Lord Darlington; for this master's morality promises his own identity as a great butler. Hence, his denials of his association with Lord Darlington should be, very apparently, regarded as 'white lies'. What makes us doubtful, however, about the legitimacy of this logic is our foreknowledge of some implied dark side of Lord Darlington's life provided by none other than Stevens himself.

Part of the embarrassing aspect of Lord Darlington's life has been implied by Stevens earlier on in the entry, 'Day Two—Morning, Salisbury'. Recalling several episodes which occurred in the days when Miss Kenton and his ancient father were beginning to work at Darlington Hall as housekeeper and under-butler, respectively, Stevens turns his reflection to his former master's 'shy and moderate nature' (*Remains* 63), which Stevens says was perceived in the way the master managed to contact him on a sensitive issue like reducing the amount of work assigned to Stevens senior, who had then increasingly been committing basic errors. Stevens's tone of narrative voice suddenly alters here:

A great deal of nonsense has been spoken and written in recent years concerning his lordship and the prominent role he came to play in great affairs, and some utterly ignorant reports have had it that he was motivated by egotism or else arrogance. Let me say here that nothing could be further from the truth. It was completely contrary to Lord Darlington's natural tendencies to take such public stances as he came to do and I can say with conviction that his lordship was persuaded to overcome his more retiring side only through a deep sense of *moral* duty. Whatever may be said about his lordship these days—and the great majority of it, as I say, utter nonsense—I can declare that he was a truly good man at heart, a gentleman through and through, and one I am today proud to have given my best years of service to. (*Remains* 63-64; italics added)

Stevens's so far self-contained language, or what Mike Petry calls his 'strange butler "officialese"' (83), has vanished from his prose. What appears instead above is his strong defensive language with which to emphasise his former master's moral character with the combination of such emphatic words as 'nothing', 'completely contrary', and 'through and through', and the derogatory remarks like 'nonsense', 'utterly ignorant', and 'utter nonsense'. Furthermore, his subsequent sudden change of topics from this defensive remark to an account of his conversation with the master about the possible mitigation of his father's duties shows the extent of abruptness in this inserted defence of Lord Darlington. Thus, interestingly enough, in spite of, or rather because of his desperate effort to defend his former master, we can surmise that there might have been some shadowy aspect concealed about Lord Darlington's past, and that Stevens's excessive defence of his master's character might betray his acute feeling of embarrassment about it. To return to the issue of his modification of the definition above, bearing this faint revelation in mind, his argument that his sense of identity rests entirely upon Lord Darlington's morality, and that as long as this is so, Stevens can

retain his stable sense of identity, sounds extremely unconvincing now.

As if suppressing his own inner conflict resulting from the incoherency in his argument, he sets out next to emphasise his own achievement by recounting one old episode in which he was highly praised for his excellent silver-polishing. This episode appears in ‘Day Three—Morning, Taunton, Somerset’, the day after his recounting his own denials of his association with Lord Darlington. While revelling in recalling the episode, nonetheless, at certain point he is obliged, explaining its circumstances, to refer to the darker side of Lord Darlington’s life—his relationship with Herr Ribbentrop, Hitler’s ambassador, who frequently visited Darlington Hall asking for a help from the master to reinforce the activities of the Nazis. Naturally, Stevens obsessively insists that although his master complied with this pleading from the German ambassador and did actually support the organisation over some length of period, he soon realised the real intention of its political activities and soon cut his association with it. Stevens the narrator moves, however, to a more perilous issue inadvertently and inevitably:

It needs to be said too what salacious nonsense it is to claim that Lord Darlington was anti-Semitic, or that he had close association with organisations like the British Union of Fascists. Such claims can only arise from complete ignorance of the sort of gentleman his lordship was. Lord Darlington came to abhor anti-Semitism; I heard him express his disgust on several separate occasions when confronted with anti-Semitism sentiments. And the allegation that his lordship never allowed Jewish people to enter the house or any Jewish staff to be employed is utterly unfounded—*except*, perhaps, in respect to one very minor episode in the thirties which has been blown up out of all proportion. (*Remains* 145-46; italics added)

This disclaimer concerning Lord Darlington’s anti-Semitism is again reinforced by his highly emphatic and derogatory phrases such as ‘salacious nonsense’, ‘complete ignorance’, and

‘utterly unfounded’—all suggesting his strong defensive attitude towards the master, the attitude which bears a resemblance to the one he displayed in his former defence. Furthermore, in order apparently to strengthen his confidence in his master’s morality, Stevens then criticises those who voice scepticism about his generation’s idealistic view, saying that those very people are just ‘the most mediocre of our profession’:

There are certain members of our profession who would have it that it ultimately makes little difference what sort of employer one serves; who believe that *the sort of idealism* prevalent amongst our generation—namely the notion that we butlers should *aspire to serve those great gentlemen who further the cause of humanity*—is just *high-flown talk* with no grounding in reality. It is of course noticeable that the individuals who express such *scepticism* invariably turn out to be the most *mediocre* of our profession—those who know they lack the ability to progress to any position of note and who aspire only to drag as many down to their own level as possible—and one is hardly tempted to take such opinions seriously. But for all that, it is still satisfying to be able to point to instances in one’s career that highlight very clearly how *wrong* such people are. [. . .] But what I am saying is that it is these sorts of instances which over time come to symbolize an irrefutable fact; namely that one has had the privilege of practising one’s profession *at the very fulcrum of great affairs*. And one has a right, perhaps, to feel *a satisfaction* those content to serve mediocre employers will never know—the satisfaction of being able to say with some reason that one’s efforts, in however modest a way, comprise *a contribution to the course of history*. (*Remains* 147; italics added)

Again, this remark of Stevens’ reminds us of what Ishiguro writes about in his 1983 essay.

The logic of the butler’s criticism against what he calls ‘the most mediocre of our profession’ is parallel to that used in Ishiguro’s essay. Both espouse a common type of idealism—a strong

longing to make a contribution to humanity—and the idealism is shared by people in their generation. Both have no hesitation at all to call those sceptical of their idealism men of mediocrity, who they argue are professionally and morally wrong. But the standard of morality depends on a perspective from which one views one's action. Lord Darlington's and Stevens' morality is not equivalent to a sense of morality endorsed by the coming generation or, as we will see later, even by Miss Kenton, his longstanding colleague.

It should be noted that, in the last excerpt but one, Stevens expresses for the first time in his narration a small yet pregnant reservation of his own defense in the last part of the passage, the one immediately after the dash: 'except, perhaps, in respect to one very minor episode in the thirties' (145-46). Although the reason for this reservation will be evident later on, the supplementary comment works not only to reveal the allegation of his master's immorality, but also to suggest an element of doubt of Stevens's about the flawlessness of his master's career. Moreover, a very brief sentence, 'But I drift' (146), that follows the paragraphs devoted to showing Stevens's irritation of groundless accusation of his former master, implies that those digressive paragraphs function as Stevens's self-masking suppression of his embarrassment to dwell further on the same issue. In one way, in this small digression, the narrator lets himself slip into shaking badly the brittle foundation upon which his former argument about dignity lying in the morality of the master one serves rests. So much so that the following recount by Stevens about the encomium given to him for his excellent silver-polishing sounds different to our ears from when we were given no information about the seamy side of Lord Darlington:

But what I am saying is that it is these sorts of instances which over time come to symbolize an irrefutable fact; namely that one has had the privilege of practicing one's profession at the very fulcrum of *great affairs*. And one has a right, perhaps, to feel *a satisfaction those content to serve mediocre employers will never know—*

the satisfaction of being able to say with some reason that one's efforts, in however modest a way, comprise *a contribution to the course of history*. (*Remains* 147; italics added)

Although he uses modest words to refer to his own achievement, it is clear that he is associating himself with what he calls a great butler, since his words within the above excerpt—'one's efforts, in however modest a way, comprise a contribution to the course of history', are reminiscent of the remark made when he presented his generation's common view of an idealistic butler, the remark concerning their 'own small contribution to the creation of a better world' (*Remains* 122). Yet at the same time, an ironical implication on the part of the author in these words is obvious. For Lord Darlington turns out not merely to be a mediocre employer but even worse—contributing to the disservice to humanity by forming a relationship with the Nazi sympathisers. Stevens as the narrator, who certainly seeks to deny this crucial aspect, immediately closes his remark with the digressive marker again: 'But perhaps one should not be looking back to the past so much' (*Remains* 147), a marker which probably indicates a fake emotion working inside him. Thus, although he emphasises his past achievement, Stevens is simultaneously forced by his own narrative progress to reveal an element of doubt on his part about his master's morality. Also, while intending to present evidence of his being a great butler, he reveals the fragile aspect of his own idea of greatness. The more in detail he describes professional episodes from the past to show his greatness as a butler who served a gentleman of morality, the more increasingly he begins to suffer from the ethical dilemma—a dilemma of emphasising his professional contribution to Lord Darlington's work but also admitting the fact that he did a disservice to humanity in general, or of admitting his irrelevance to the larger world by stressing the narrow range of his professional contribution.

Ishiguro prepares Stevens for the latter's final confrontation with this dilemma. The

process can be witnessed in the next entry, ‘Day Three—Evening, Moscombe, near Tavistock, Devon’, an entry written after his conversation with some of the villagers in Moscombe in the same evening. His narrative in this entry begins, obviously affected by the conversation, with his reflection on the reservation he showed in the previous entry when defending Lord Darlington’s morality—‘except, perhaps, in respect to one very minor episode in the thirties which has been blown up out of all proportion’.

This ‘episode’ was actually far from a minor one. The truth is that, influenced by ‘Mrs Barnett’, ‘a member of Sir Oswald Mosley’s “blackshirts” organization’, the master did show his explicit sentiment of anti-Semitism by giving the order to Stevens to dismiss his two Jewish housemaids (*Remains* 154). Actually Stevens defends himself with hindsight by saying that his ‘every instinct opposed to the idea of their dismissal’ (*Remains* 156), but he complied with his master’s order to sack them, because, he explains, ‘my duty in this instance was quite clear, and as I saw it, there was nothing to be gained at all in irresponsibly displaying such personal *doubts*. It was a difficult task, but as such, one that demanded to be carried out with *dignity*’ (156; italics added). What is interesting about this revelation is not only that Lord Darlington displayed ‘anti-Semitic sentiments’ which Stevens had categorically denied initially but that the butler himself involved himself in this particular unfair treatment of the Jewish housemaids. But more clearly revealed is Stevens’s misguided idea that his execution of this profoundly outrageous order from his master could be performed with ‘dignity’ despite his ‘personal doubts’ that the order itself is *morally* wrong. Stevens pretends to ignore the fact that the immorality of the order from Lord Darlington is incompatible with one of the criteria for a great butler, that is to say, serving a master of ‘great *moral* stature’ which Lord Darlington obviously fails to be.

Dignity

Stevens is also forced to confront some implications of ethics by his own reflection on the conversation he has just had with some Moscombe villagers before writing this entry, though the reflection itself is delayed on and on until the last part of this entry. This reflective postponement is due to Stevens's unwillingness to think about the implications of what he said and heard in the heated conversation with one of the villagers present.

The conversation gets started based on a misunderstanding on all the villagers' part: they are convinced that, judging from the clothes Stevens wore which he had in fact borrowed from his present master, Mr Farraday, Stevens is a true gentleman. This misidentification is ironical in two senses. One is that he had chosen the clothes he was now wearing for the possible occasion when he 'might be obliged to give out that one is from Darlington Hall', but he denied his own true identity, that is to say, he *is* from Darlington Hall. The other irony is that the very clothes causes the villagers to mistake him for a true gentleman Stevens is not, a fact that challenges Stevens's understanding of dignity represented by his sartorial metaphor. Although Stevens assumes that butlers with dignity 'wear their professionalism as a decent gentleman will wear his suit', the very fact that he got mistaken for a real gentleman simply for the sake of wearing Mr Farraday's suit implies the arbitrariness of what he calls dignity.

Having lost an opportunity to remedy the false impression about his social standing, Stevens continues pretending to be a distinguished gentleman who used to be an acquaintance with politicians of influence such as 'Mr Churchill', 'Lord Halifax', and even the then prime minister, 'Mr Eden' (*Remains* 197). The pain he felt during the chat with the villagers with his true identity dissimulated is summed up in this reflective remark:

I can only say now that in all honesty I fail to see how I might reasonably have prevented the situation developing as it did; for by the stage I had become aware of what was occurring, things had gone so far I could not have enlightened these people without creating much embarrassment all round. In any case, regrettable as

the whole business was, I do not see that any real harm has been done. I will, after all, take my leave of these people in the morning and presumably never encounter them again. There seems little point in dwelling on the matter. (*Remains* 203)

But Stevens finds himself dwelling upon his conversation with Harry Smith, one of the villagers present, the topic of which was what would make one a true gentleman which all the villagers present believed Stevens to be. Stevens expressed his view of ‘dignity’ as an indispensable quality of a gentleman; however, this view was immediately challenged by Smith, who argues thus: ‘Dignity isn’t just something gentlemen have. Dignity’s something every man and woman in this country *can strive for and get*’ (*Remains* 195; italics added). This comment somehow reminds us of what Stevens had told us about what dignity means to butlers: ‘I believe strongly that this “dignity” is something one *can meaningfully strive* for throughout one’s career’ (*Remains* 34). Smith also has this to say about dignity—

what we fought Hitler for, after all. If Hitler had had things his way, we’d just be slaves now. The whole world would be a few masters and millions upon millions of slaves. And I don’t need to remind anyone here, there’s no dignity to be had in being a slave. That’s what we fought for and that’s what we won. We won the right to be free citizens. And it’s one of the privileges of being born English that no matter who you are, no matter if you’re rich or poor, you’re born free and you’re born so that you *can express your opinion freely*, and vote in your member of parliament or vote him out. That’s what dignity’s really about, if you’ll excuse me, sir. (*Remains* 196; italics added)

Smith’s description of a possible Nazified system of today’s British society with a dichotomy between ‘master’ and ‘slave’—of course without any idea of Stevens’s profession—could be read as corresponding to the relationship between Lord Darlington as master and Stevens as servant. On his own in his room Stevens concludes that Smith’s ‘statements were, surely, *far*

too idealistic, far too theoretical, to deserve respect' (*Remains* 204; italics added), and later on flatly dismisses it as reminding him 'very much of the sort of *misguided idealism* which beset significant sections of our generation throughout the twenties and thirties' (*Remains* 209; italics added):

I refer to that strand of opinion in the profession which suggested that any butler with serious aspirations should make it his business to be forever reappraising his employer—scrutinizing the latter's motives, analysing the implications of his views. Only in this way, so the argument ran, could one be sure one's skills were being employed *to a desirable end*. Although one sympathizes to some extent with the *idealism* contained in such an argument, there can be little doubt that it is the result, like Mr Smith's sentiments tonight, of *misguided thinking*. One need only look at the butlers who attempted to put such an approach into practice, and one will see that their careers—and in some cases they were highly promising careers—came to nothing as a direct consequence. I personally knew at least two professionals, both of some ability, who *went from one employer to the next*, forever dissatisfied, never settling anywhere, until they drifted from view altogether. (*Remains* 209-210; italics added)

Stevens's argument here about the inadequacy of 'reappraising' one's employer, however, contradicts what he said about his idealistic generation early on in his narrative:

we were, as I say, an idealistic generation for whom the question was not simply one of how well one practiced one's skills, but *to what end* one did so [. . .] such 'idealistic' motivations as I have described have played a large part in my own career. I myself moved quite rapidly from employer to employer during my early career—being aware that these situations were incapable of bringing me lasting satisfaction—before being rewarded at last with the opportunity to serve Lord

Darlington. (*Remains* 122; italics in original; underline added).

That a certain change of Stevens's view of dignity occurs is visible. Indeed, this conceptual contradiction starts to widen from this point onwards. Now Stevens says thus:

Let us establish this quite clearly: a butler's duty is to provide good service. It is *not to meddle in the great affairs* of the nation. The fact is, such *great affairs will always be beyond the understanding of those such as you and me*, and those of us who wish to make our mark must realize that we best do so by concentrating on what is *within our realm*; that is to say, by devoting our attention to providing the best possible service to those great gentleman in whose hands the destiny of civilization truly lies. (*Remains* 209; italics added)

Previously, Stevens said that his ultimate aim was to contribute to humanity through the employer he serves, which means that he gives priority to contribution to humanity and regards his service to his master as a means to the ultimate purpose. But now the stress moves from the ends to the means, or it can also be said that the means itself turns into an end. Thus, he repeats his point:

One is simply accepting an inescapable truth: that *the likes of you and I will never be in a position to comprehend the great affairs* of today's world, and our best course will always be to put our trust in an employer we judge to be wise and honourable, and to devote our energies to the task of serving him to the best of our ability. (*Remains* 211; italics added)

Quite obvious is the significant change of Stevens's view on his duty as a butler particularly in terms of 'great affairs'. In fact, only a few pages back—when he had a nervous chat with the villagers including Harry Smith—Stevens went on far as to say that 'I was most involved in *great affairs*' (*Remains* 187) and returned to the great affairs again soon: 'I dare say it [referring to Smith's idealistic notion of contribution to humanity] was a very similar urge

which led me to become involved in *great affairs* before the war' (*Remains* 189; italics added). Also, much earlier in his narrative, Stevens recalled with pride that 'one has had the privilege of practicing one's profession at the very fulcrum of *great affairs*' (*Remains* 147; italics added). There is no doubt that Stevens's present view presented in the excerpt above of an ideal image of a butler conflicts with his former one. Appearing to be criticising Smith's idealistic notion of democracy, where everyone has a right to voice one's opinion, Stevens is actually challenging his own professional idealism.

Loyalty

The new stress Stevens is now placing is on doing 'what is within our realm' and maintaining 'loyalty' towards one's master, loyalty which he argues must be '*intelligently bestowed*' (*Remains* 211; italics in original). We should not forget, of course, that this is the first time he makes reference to 'loyalty' as 'essential in all good professionals' (210). Deprived of the right to execute judgement, however, how could one display '*intelligently bestowed*' loyalty to his master who may make wrong decisions in moral terms? Stevens's refusal to accept this stark contradiction ultimately forces him to sever his crucial link to his former master on which the whole of his dignity as a great butler depends:

How can one possibly be held to blame in any sense because, say, the passage of time has shown that Lord Darlington's efforts were misguided, even foolish? Throughout the years I served him, it was he and he alone who weighed up evidence and judged it best to proceed in the way he did, while I simply confined myself, quite properly, to affairs within my own professional realm. And as far as I am concerned, I carried out my duties to the best of my abilities, indeed to a standard which many may consider 'first rate'. It is hardly my fault if his lordship's life and work turned out today to look, at best, a sad waste—and it is quite illogical

that I should feel any regret or shame on my own account. (*Remains* 211)

Of course it is illogical that he should have any regret or shame for the sake of what his master did. But it is logical in Stevens's professionalism, for he has based his identity as a great butler with dignity solely on the morality of his master. But he did. So it turns out that it is quite logical that regret or shame gnaws at him now, because it was he who argued in the first place that a great butler was one who served a gentleman of 'moral stature'—which he now denies here with his own words: 'misguided' and 'foolish'. It was he that argued that a great butler was one who got involved in the 'great affairs', which he denies again by asserting that 'I simply confined myself, quite properly, to affairs within my own professional realm'. And he it was again who argued that a great butler was one who contributed to the progress of humanity through serving his master, which he again denies by admitting that 'his lordship's life and work has turned out today to look, at best, a sad waste'. And he even renounces the only last resort available to himself: 'loyalty'. One element after another that Stevens maintained comprises the idea of dignity gets stripped off him—what does all this imply to him now? That is something he avoids admitting throughout his narrative: that he is a man of mediocrity.

One of the poignant parts of his narration is when he stresses his loyalty towards Lord Darlington while recounting in the entry, 'Day Four—Afternoon, Little Compton, Cornwall', written just before his meeting with Miss Kenton for the first time in two decades—a certain incident that he seems to think concisely demonstrates the extent of his loyalty: he remembers that his 'deep feeling of triumph started to well up within' him because he 'had managed to preserve', borrowing the terms of the Hayes Society, a 'dignity in keeping with [his] position' (*Remains* 238), in spite of the fact that on the very same night Stevens waited on the guests, Lord Darlington became a definite 'pawn' of the Nazi's manoeuvrings (*Remains* 233). And no less ironical than this is the fact that on the very night Miss Kenton confessed to him that

she accepted the marriage proposal from Mr Benn—her future husband (*Remains* 229).

Professionalism as a mask covering emotion

Ishiguro also delves into the psychological impacts of professional ethics on the protagonist. Stevens's lifelong behaviours have been predicated on a few fundamental tenets that comprise his professional ethics, as we have observed, such as morality, dignity, loyalty, which in fact converge on what he regards as 'professionalism' (*Remains* 53). For Stevens professionalism is the overriding principle as thoroughly adhered to even at the expense of emotion and affection. Stevens said to Miss Kenton, still young then, over and over again something like 'Surely I don't have to remind you that our professional duty is not to our own foibles and sentiments, but to the wishes of our employer' (*Remains* 157). Indeed, his emphasis on this professionalism is scattered throughout his narrative and almost always occurs in parallel with an abundance of his references to Miss Kenton.¹⁴

In the earliest of his references to Miss Kenton, Stevens the narrator introduces his motivation of taking a trip to the West Country where Miss Kenton, now Mrs Benn, lives with

¹⁴ A brief list of his references to Miss Kenton is as follows: 'professional matters' (5); 'these very same professional matters' (5); 'her exemplary professionalism' (10); 'put to good professional use' (10); 'a good professional motive behind my request' (14); 'the one professional task' (26); 'overwhelmingly professional in tone' (115); 'a professional kind' (149); 'predominantly professional in tone' (156); 'our professional duty' (157); 'professional matters' (160, 174); 'essentially professional character' (165); 'a fine professional understanding' (173); 'professional relationship' (178); 'a devoted professional' (179); 'a professional loss of some magnitude' (180); 'her professional duties' (180); 'professional communication' (184); 'some professional matter' (185); 'a little professional discussion' (186); and 'largely professional in character' (189).

one of her friends because of (according to Stevens's understanding of the recent letter from her) her nearly broken marital life with her husband. In these reminiscent references to Miss Kenton, Stevens repeatedly makes clear what his 'professional' intention in his trip is (*Remains* 10, 14, 26). He recalls the earliest days at Darlington Hall when he and Miss Kenton were working together, and then praises her professional attitude towards her work: 'I can vouch that during the time she worked as a housekeeper under me, she was nothing less than dedicated and never allowed her *professional* priorities to be distracted' (*Remains* 53; italics added).

Stevens's stress on their 'professional' relationship is likewise seen in his reminiscence of their over-cocoa evening meetings in Miss Kenton's parlour: 'These were, let me say, overwhelming *professional* in tone—though naturally we might discuss some informal topics from time to time [. . .]. I must reiterate, these meetings were predominantly *professional* in character; that is to say, for instance, we might talk over the plans for a forthcoming event, or else discuss how a new recruit was settling in' (*Remains* 155-56; italics added). In one of these conversations, his private, emotional life was exposed by Miss Kenton's inquiry, however. It is obvious that his excessive stress on what he calls his professional relationship with Miss Kenton is Stevens's self-masking tactics to conceal his personal emotion, or in more common parlance, his romantic affection to her, under the cover of his professionalism.

Stevens's defence mechanism of putting the mask of professionalism on his face, predicated on his ethics, was challenged again and again in the dialogues with Miss Kenton. Several of them occurred when Lord Darlington ordered Stevens to dismiss the Jewish maids and the latter conveyed his master's decision to Miss Kenton:

'Miss Kenton, I have just this moment explained the situation to you fully.

His lordship has made his decision and there is nothing for you and I to debate over'.

‘Does it not occur to you, Mr Stevens, that to dismiss Ruth and Sarah on these grounds would be simply—*wrong*? I will not stand for such things. I will not work in a house in which such things can occur’.

[. . .]

‘I am telling you, Mr Stevens, if you dismiss my girls tomorrow, it will be *wrong*, a sin as any sin ever was one and I will not continue to work in such a house’. (*Remains* 157; italics in original)

Two different senses of morality work here. Stevens’s morality lies in his professionalism, which amounts to following faithfully his employer’s order. Lord Darlington’s order, according to Stevens’s professional ethics, is given based on the master’s moral judgement. Miss Kenton’s morality lies, on the other hand, not in professional ethics, but in her view of justice. What is going on is that Stevens’s ethics is being challenged by Miss Kenton’s moral judgement. Yet Stevens privileges his professional ethics over Miss Kenton’s sense of morality by entrusting the power of judgement to their employer:

Miss Kenton, let me suggest to you that you are hardly well placed to be *passing judgements* of such a high and mighty nature. The fact is, the world of today is a very complicated and treacherous place. There are many things you and I are simply not in a position to *understand* concerning, say, the nature of Jewry.

Whereas his lordship, I might venture, is somewhat better placed to *judge* what is for the best. (*Remains* 157-58; italics added).

Stevens’s stance towards judgement is obvious: it is something that should entirely be placed at the discretion of someone higher in social status than one. One should not fiddle with one’s unreliable power of judgement. Stevens underlines the impossibility of the execution of judgement considering the position he is placed in.

However, this is another case of Stevens’s ethical contradiction. Indeed, in the earlier

part of his narrative Stevens bitterly criticises some of those in the profession for their lack of power of judgement, especially in discerning who are really great butlers: ‘those very same employees who once heaped praise on him [Mr Neighbours] will be too busy eulogizing some new figure to stop and examine their sense of judgement’ (*Remains* 30). This harsh criticism against his fellow employees reminds us of Ishiguro’s admonition in his essay ‘Bomb Culture’ directed towards the tendency of his contemporary writers of sacrificing the real value of literary works for the popular motif of holocaust and atomic bombing. But here Stevens’s conviction is wavering due to his conversation with Harry Smith. And to justify his mounting scepticism about the power of judgement Smith claims we all have, Stevens recalls another conversation from many years back with Mr Cardinal, a journalist who warns Stevens of the imminent risk his employer incurs:

‘Tell me, Stevens, aren’t you struck by even the remote possibility that I am correct? Are you not, at least, *curious* about what I am saying?’

‘I’m sorry, sir, but I have to say that I have *every trust in his lordship’s good judgement*’.

‘*No one with good judgement* could persist in believing anything Herr Hitler says after the Rhineland, Stevens. His lordship is out of his depth. Oh dear, now I’ve really offended you’. (*Remains* 225; italics added)

One year later when Lord Darlington came around to distrust of Oswald Mosley’s blackshirts organization, the master asked Stevens to trace the fired Jewish maids, admitting that ‘It was *wrong* what happened and one would like to recompense them somehow [. . .] See what you can do. It was *wrong*, what occurred’ (*Remains* 159; italics added). Stevens the narrator then remembers his conversation with Miss Kenton in the same afternoon after he told her what had occurred between him and his master. When Stevens teased her for not having left Darlington Hall after all despite her warning that she would if he dismissed the Jewish

housemaids, Miss Kenton said:

‘It was cowardice, Mr Stevens. Simple cowardice. Where could I have gone? I have no family. Only my aunt. I love her dearly, but I can’t live with her for a day without feeling my whole life is wasting away. I did tell myself, of course, I would soon find myself some new situation. But I was so frightened, Mr Stevens. Whenever I thought of leaving, I just saw myself going out there and finding nobody who knew or cared about me. There, that’s all my high principles amount to. I feel so ashamed of myself. But I just couldn’t leave, Mr Stevens, I just couldn’t bring myself to leave’. (*Remains* 161)

Miss Kenton was candid about her feeling of shame. She even used the term ‘cowardice’ to describe herself for not having followed what she said she would—leaving Darlington Hall. This candid remark of hers is highly contrasted with Stevens’s masking of his own emotion we can see challenged by Miss Kenton in the conversation that followed the above dialogue:

‘What’s done can hardly be undone. But it is at least a great comfort to hear his lordship declare so unequivocally that it was all a terrible misunderstanding. I just thought you’d like to know, Miss Kenton, since I recall you were distressed by the episode as I was’.

‘I’m sorry, Mr Stevens’, Miss Kenton said behind me in an entirely new voice, as though she had just been jolted from a dream, ‘I don’t understand you’. Then as I turned to her, she went on: ‘As I recall, you thought it was only right and proper that Ruth and Sarah be sent packing. You were positively cheerful about it’.

‘Now really, Miss Kenton, that is quite incorrect and unfair. The whole matter caused me great concern, great concern indeed. It is hardly the sort of thing I like to see happen in this house’.

‘Then why, Mr Stevens, did you not tell me so at the time?’

I gave a laugh, but for a moment was rather at a loss for an answer. Before I could formulate one, Miss Kenton put down her sewing and said:

‘Do you realize, Mr Stevens, how much it would have meant to me if you had thought to share your feelings last year? You knew how upset I was when my girls were dismissed. Do you realize how much it would have helped me? Why, Mr Stevens, why, why, why do you always have to *pretend*?’ (*Remains* 161-62; italics in original; underlines added)

These dialogues between Stevens and Miss Kenton not only reveal his duplicity especially about his emotion, but also threatens the foundation of his ethics of profession which dictates that great butlers ‘wear their professionalism as a decent gentleman will wear his suit’ (*Remains* 44). The threatening is partially revealed by his loss for words.

Stevens can discard the suit of professionalism only when he is ‘entirely alone’, that is, in his own parlour. But even the parlour was invaded by Miss Kenton. Stevens recalls how he was found by Miss Kenton to be reading ‘a sentimental love story’ (*Remains* 176) in the sanctuary of his privacy (*Remains* 175-76). Stevens of course prepares an excuse for this sort of book: he was often reading such a ‘sentimental romance’ (*Remains* 176) because he thought he could, by reading romantic chit-chat between lovers in it, maintain his command of English well enough to engage in polite conversations with ‘ladies and gentlemen’. However awkward this explanation is, Stevens manages to keep on protecting his ethics of profession to the last when Miss Kenton finally left Darlington Hall to marry Mr Benn.

After many years Stevens tries to meet her because he received a letter from Miss Kenton informing him of her living separately from her husband. And from the letter Stevens reasons that ‘she is pondering with regret decisions made in the far-off past that have now left her, deep in middle age, so alone and so desolate. And it is easy to see how in such a frame of mind, the thought of returning to Darlington Hall would be a great comfort to her’ (*Remains*

50). On this speculation by Stevens, Edward Costigan argues that Stevens's 'interpretation of the letter, which is partly quoted, partly remembered, is so strongly coloured by Stevens's own feelings that we are in some doubt as to who it is that has the sense of waste and needs the consolation' (33). Indeed, in the earliest part of his narrative, Stevens confidently claims that 'the letter from Miss Kenton' contains 'an unmistakable nostalgia for Darlington Hall, and—I am quite sure of this—distinct hints of her desire to return here' (*Remains* 10). And he stresses this point again in the next paragraph: 'I have, I should make clear, reread Miss Kenton's recent letter several times, and there is no possibility I am merely imagining the presence of these hints on her part' (*Remains* 10). Also, in the opening part of his entry 'Day Two—Morning, Salisbury', Stevens asserts that 'that is the *unmistakable* message conveyed by the general nuance of many of the passages, imbued as they are with a deep nostalgia for her days at Darlington Hall' (*Remains* 50; italics added). Eager to demonstrate his own confidence in this view, he cites, for instance, a passage from her letter, which seems to imply a feeling of nostalgia: 'The rest of my life stretches out as an emptiness before me' (*Remains* 51). However, as his narrative proceeds, this confidence begins to wane. In fact, in the last part of the entry 'Day Three—Morning, Taunton, Somerset', in which we have observed Stevens revealing for the first time the darker side of Lord Darlington's life, the butler reveals his own uncertainty of Miss Kenton's intention, though he never forgets to add the epithet 'professional' to his wishful thinking about Miss Kenton:

In fact, one has to accept the distinct possibility that one may have previously—perhaps through wishful thinking of a *professional* kind—exaggerated what evidence there was regarding such a desire on her part. For I must say I was a little surprised last night at how difficult it was actually to point to any passage which clearly demonstrates her wish to return. (*Remains* 149; italics added)

This uncertainty is to refigure more clearly in the entry 'Day Three—Evening, Moscombe,

near Tavistock', where Stevens is going through, as we have seen, his most crucial inner struggles about the total denial of his identity as a great butler, which in turn profoundly affects the way he reads Miss Kenton's letter: 'I may as well say here that having reread her letter again tonight, I am inclined to believe I may well have read more into certain of her lines than perhaps was wise', although he still insists that 'there is more than a hint of nostalgic longing' in her letter (*Remains* 189). Maya Wakana observes that at times the narrator's 'two points of view'—one 'is that of narrator Stevens in the "present" in 1956' and 'the other is that of his past self in the 1920s and 1930s'—'intermingle; at others, the former, or the latter, predominates over the other' (224). Stevens-in-the-present's possible act of misreading occurs probably due to his long-standing wish to retrieve his-past-self with which he had worked with Miss Kenton at Darlington Hall. This faint expectation of remedying their relationship, partly reflected in his repeated act of reading of Miss Kenton's letter, and partly in his nostalgic reminiscences of their 'professional' yet too much intimate relationship, makes his final emotional acceptance of the 'hard reality' much more painful for him than otherwise—this is what his professionalism at the expense of his emotional life turns out to be.

Stevens's acceptance of his long suppressed affectionate feeling towards his former colleague shows itself in his reflection on his recent conversation with her, the conversation which occurs on Day Four, but on which he does not reflect until he fills his last entry, 'Day Six—Evening, Weymouth'. In this conversation Miss Kenton confesses to Stevens very candidly the true affection she used to cherish for him before she left Darlington Hall (*Remains* 251). The sudden confession by Miss Kenton about her feeling of love towards him when they were still working together takes him by surprise, which leads to the first revelation not only of his once love for her but of his present 'sorrow':

I do not think I responded immediately, for it took me a moment or two to fully digest these words of Miss Kenton. Moreover, as you might appreciate, their

implications were such as to provoke a certain degree of sorrow within me.

Indeed—why should I not admit it?—at that moment, my heart was breaking.

(*Remains* 251)

His phrase ‘my heart was breaking’ with no hedges like ‘somewhat’ (*Remains* 238) he used when he referred earlier to his half-repressed feeling towards Miss Kenton in her last days at Darlington Hall belies his language of professionalism. Certainly, Stevens’s heart is breaking precisely because he must have had up to this moment a faint expectation on his part of remedying, and if possible, starting again the old ‘professional’ relationship between Miss Kenton and him. Once he realises its impossibility, however, he acknowledges his own so far suppressed feeling. As much notable is the contrast between his miserable self-conscious remark made in the above paragraph cited between the dashes on his own feeling, that is, ‘—why should I not admit it?—’ (*Remains* 251) and his first half-jovially self-conscious remark on his receiving a letter from Miss Kenton, made in the earliest part of his narrative: ‘—and why should I hide it?—the arrival of Miss Kenton’s letter’ (*Remains* 5).

Stevens’s emotional dialogue with Miss Kenton paves the way for his coming to terms with the implication of his professional ethics. The reconciliation occurs in a way which completely contradicts his view of dignity. At the end of the story he finally abandons the professional being he has inhabited in his whole career by making an emotional confession to a total stranger who quit being a butler only three years ago:

‘Lord Darlington wasn’t a bad man. He wasn’t a bad man at all. And at least he had the privilege of being able to say at the end of his life that he made his own mistakes. His lordship was a courageous man. He chose a certain path in life, it proved to be a misguided one, but there, he chose it, he can say that at least. As for myself, I cannot even claim that. You see, I *trusted*. I trusted in his lordship’s wisdom. All those years I served him, I trusted I was doing something worthwhile.

I can't even say I made my own mistakes. Really—one has to ask oneself—what dignity is there in that?' (*Remains* 255-56)

The façade of Stevens's ethics comprised of dignity and professionalism collapses here. Salman Rushdie, after his recent re-reading of *The Remains of the Day*, writes that both Stevens and Darlington are 'destroyed' by their codes of 'ethics'—Stevens by dignity and Darlington by gentlemanship—concluding thus: 'Ideals, Ishiguro shows us, can corrupt as thoroughly as cynicism' ('Rereading'). Should *The Remains of the Day* be read, as Rushdie indicates, as an ethical lesson that blind idealism teaches us?

No, there is more to the novel than that, as I have shown above. Ishiguro's vision of idealism ferments its extreme counterpart in Stevens's professionalism, and through the depiction of how Stevens copes with the destruction of his idealism Ishiguro shows the fatalistic aspect of idealism. For as long as idealism has temporal direction towards the future, it always contains an element of misguided aspiration. Thus, according to Ishiguro's philosophical scheme, it is inevitable that idealism ends up in fatalism. Ishiguro is not pointing to the possibility that ideals can corrupt but to the fact that they do, but not because ideals are essentially wrong or unnecessary but because they are essential and indispensable to humanity. We cannot help but be idealistic in our lives even though the vision is ultimately to be subsumed into fatalism, whether we know it or not. *The Remains of the Day* is a novel which reflects Ishiguro's idealism quite faithfully but at the same time which gives the author an opportunity to explore possible implications of idealism.

7 Optimism in the denouement

Ishiguro's idealism has a lot to do with the optimistic tone with which Ishiguro's narrators end their narratives. At the end of their stories all his narrators look back on what they did in their lives and feel both emptiness and satisfaction. And despite their irreconcilable emotions, the narrators try to see brighter aspects of their lives with the negative aspects being pushed back into the deep side of their mind to the extent that the way they do this sometimes appears grotesque.

Talking about *The Unconsoled* Ishiguro himself remarks on this strangely optimistic note with which he tends to end his novels:

I wanted to show that sort of hopeless, slightly pathetic kind of optimism, which in the end is something that we all have to resort to in order to keep going. [...] In a sense, all my books end on the same note—after the character discovers how empty life is. Here is Ryder is trying to gain something profound from what normally would be a superficial contact with other human beings. He's looking for some kind of consolation.

I do feel it is somehow pathetic, that kind of cheering up of oneself. But on the other hand, I have a certain kind of admiration for the human capacity to do just that. There's something admirable and courageous about it, even if it seems completely futile. (Interview, 1995, Steinberg 106)

The way that Ryder and Ishiguro's other characters try to seek brighter aspects of their lives at the end of their stories is not just pathetic and hopeless but logically impossible, especially after their realisation that their lives turn out to be not so satisfactory as they expected them to be and that their lives appear empty. Ishiguro says, however, that we cannot end our *own* lives with disappointment. We cannot but seek some consolation to feel that our lives at least were not so bad as they look. We attempt to cheer ourselves up however futile the attempt is. And

Ishiguro admires the attempt calling it something ‘courageous’. Ishiguro’s assumption is that we need to accept our lives as something meaningful and worthwhile, although it is difficult to see our lives that way when we feel our lives covered with a sense of emptiness. Thus Ishiguro highlights the importance of adopting such an optimistic attitude to life which he demonstrates in the denouement of his novels.

This chapter, the last of Part I, sees how Ishiguro ends some of his novels, *An Artist of the Floating World*, *The Remains of the Day*, *The Unconsoled*, and *When We Were Orphans*, and thereby aims to shed a fresher light on Ishiguro’s idealism.

Ono’s ending

Masuji Ono, the narrator of *An Artist of the Floating World*, is an idealist, as Chishu Matsuda says Ono ‘wanted to so badly to make a grand contribution’ (*Artist* 199). Yet Ono is most peculiar among Ishiguro’s narrators in that the old painter’s optimism is so incompatible with the last conversation that happened between him and Matsuda which the narrator recalls at the end of his narrative. In the conversation both Ono and Matsuda partially accept the emptiness their commonly wasted lives present to themselves, saying that it is due to the narrowness of their perspectives:

‘No doubt you’ll remember, Ono, how I used to call you naïve. How I used to tease you for your narrow artist’s perspective. You used to get so angry with me. Well, it seems in the end neither of us had a broad enough view’.

‘I suppose that’s right. But if we’d see things a little more clearly, then the likes of you and me, Matsuda—who knows?—we may have done some real good. We had much energy and courage once. Indeed, we must have had plenty of both to conduct something like that New Japan campaign, you remember?’

‘Indeed. There were some powerful forces set against us then. We might easily have lost our nerve. I suppose we must have been very determined, Ono’.

‘But then I for one never saw things too clearly. A narrow artist’s perspective, as you say. Why, even now, I find it hard to think of the world extending much beyond this city’.

‘These days’, Matsuda said, ‘I find it hard to think of the world extending much beyond my garden. So perhaps you’re the one with the wider perspective now, Ono’. (*Artist* 199)

They are clearly idealistic. They are idealistic because their conversation is predicated on the assumption that such a broad perspective might have been attainable if the situation had been otherwise. Indeed, Matsuda argues that the fact that such a perspective was unavailable to them was their ‘misfortune’ (*Artist* 200). But probably Matsuda seems to know more than he says, for he points to the inevitable marginality of their contribution in the same dialogue—‘But as for the likes of us, Ono, our contribution was *always* marginal’ (*Artist* 201; italics added). In this respect, Matsuda is more *realistic* than Ono, who remains thoroughly idealistic in his way of thinking. Indeed, Ono recalls this conversation after Matsuda dies, and then reasons that Matsuda must have felt that his life was not wasted away:

But even as he uttered such words, there remained something in Matsuda’s manner that afternoon to suggest that he was anything but a disillusioned man. And surely there was no reason for him to have died disillusioned. He may indeed have looked back over his life and seen certain flaws, but surely he would have recognized also those aspects he could feel proud of. For, as he pointed out himself, the likes of him and me, we have the satisfaction of knowing that whatever we did, we did at the time in the best of faith. Of course, we took some bold steps and often did things with much single-mindedness; but this is surely preferable to never putting

one's convictions to the test, for lack of will or courage. When one holds convictions deeply enough, there surely comes a point when it is *despicable to prevaricate* further. I feel confident Matsuda would have thought along these same lines when looking back over his life. (*Artist* 201-202; italics added)

Ono's conviction that Matsuda must have shared the sense of satisfaction he had about his own life appears to come from Ishiguro, who says in an interview:

I do have a lot of sympathy for people who feel that there comes a point when you *can't just prevaricate* and adopt this posture, you've got to move on. I think in some ways all my characters in my novels say something rather like this: there's nothing you can do other than to just *act on the evidence you've got at the time*. Of course it's a rather hopeless position, but *what else can we do?* (Interview, 1995, Wachtel 35; italics added)

What puzzles us the reader, however, concerning Ono's reasoning above is the fact that *immediately after* recalling his conversation with Matsuda he looks back on another episode from when he was at the peak of his career as an artist, awarded the Shigeta Foundation Award. Ono remembers that receiving the award led him to decide to pay a visit to his former master, Moriyama, with whom he had long lost contact with, but at the last moment he abandoned the visit, thinking this way:

And it was as I sat there, looking down at the villa, enjoying the taste of those fresh oranges, that *that deep sense of triumph and satisfaction* began to rise within me. It is hard to describe the feeling, for it was quite different from the sort of elation one feels from smaller triumphs—and, as I say, quite different from anything I had experienced during the celebrations at the Migi-Hidari. It was *a profound sense of happiness* deriving from the conviction that one's efforts have been justified; that the hard work undertaken, the doubts overcome, have all been *worthwhile*; that one

has achieved something of *real value and distinction*. I did not go any further towards the villa that day—it seemed quite pointless. I simply continued to sit there for an hour or so, in deep contentment, eating my oranges. (*Artist* 204; italics added)

Ono then argues that the triumphant feeling he had was the one that ‘the *mediocre*’ would never enjoy, and concludes thus: ‘it is always a consolation to know that one’s life has contained a moment or two of real satisfaction such as I experienced that day up on that high mountain path’ (*Artist* 204; italics added). It may be a consolation for Ono to look back over such a particular time when he felt deep satisfaction with his own life. But the time linked in Ono’s mind to this triumphant sentiment falls into the wartime period, and that what he did during the period has been causing his inner conflicts for the last several months. The satisfaction he is now feeling is not from the present but way back from the past.

Ono’s relentless downplaying of the mediocre makes our sympathy with him hard to get. Moreover, how can you say the things you did have ‘real value’ when you regret doing them elsewhere? That is why in his review of *An Artist of the Floating World*, Sou Aono, a Japanese novelist, describes this attitude of Ono’s as completely unrealistic. Aono writes in his review that the novel in question presents no reality that appeals to him and leaves him wondering why Ishiguro wrote the novel in the first place (69). Of course, Aono does not know that the novel in question has much reality to Ishiguro because his theme derives from his idealistic young days: how one comes to terms with one’s life when one’s idealism does not work for good. As Aono argues, however, it is obvious that Ono’s reasoning seems unsustainable. After all, what he calls triumph and satisfaction came not from his present’s situation but from his far-off past.

Probably Ishiguro will argue that there is no other choice but to do this for his protagonists as well as for us. No one cares what we do and what we feel about it as much as

we do, just as ‘no one has ever objected to’ Ono’s sitting on the bench in front of a building (*Artist* 205). People just walk past him, unaware of his presence there. It is only we ourselves that can console ourselves for the emptiness of our lives and the consolation will come only from the past or the future, not from the present. That is why in the last page of the novel Ono gives a positive thought to Japan’s future while watching young businessmen hurrying out of the buildings for lunch—‘And as I watched, I was struck by how full of optimism and enthusiasm these young people were’ (*Artist* 205):

I smiled to myself as I watched these young office workers from my bench. Of course, at times when I remember those brightly-lit bars and all those people gathered beneath the lamps, laughing a little more boisterously perhaps than those young men yesterday, but with much the same good-heartedness, I feel a certain nostalgia for the past and the district as it used to be. But to see how our city has been rebuilt, how things have recovered so rapidly over these years, fills me with genuine gladness. Our nation, it seems, whatever mistakes it may have made in the past, has now another chance to make a better go of things. One can only wish these young people well. (*Artist* 205-206)

Ono’s wish for the bright future of the young people as well as of the nation coexists in his mind with his nostalgia for the past when he was actively engaged in his painting career before and during the war. The young people’s optimistic looking and cheerful manner is something that is not available to Ono now, but at least he can remember the time when he was likewise optimistic and cheerful. Ishiguro himself refers to human capacity for maintaining hope, in a word, optimism:

It’s that kind of poignancy, that sort of balance between feeling defeated but nevertheless trying to find reason to feel some kind of qualified optimism. That’s always the note I like to end on. There are some ways that, as the writer, I think

there is something sadly pathetic but also quite noble about this human capacity to dredge up some hope when really it's all over. I mean, it's amazing how people find courage in the most defeated situations. (Interview, n.d., Shaikh)

Of course Ono's description of the young people's 'open innocence of a child' suggests his foreknowledge that the innocent looking period does not last forever and that many of these young people walking past in front of him will possibly go through the inevitable periods of disappointment and disillusionment as Ono did. But Ono hopes for the best for their future. Ono does not like to end his life with mere defeatism: the residue of his idealism remains active in him still.

Stevens's ending

The same run of logic operates in how Stevens accepts his own life at the end of *The Remains of the Day*. The only difference between the two narrators is the fact that while Ono can admit the ideological mistake he made during the war in a fairly public manner at his daughter's marriage meeting, Stevens is not allowed to do so because of his occupation: a butler. The one who made such a confession was his former employer, Lord Darlington. Of course, this fact does not exempt Stevens from the internal struggles, for his dignity and pride are entirely dependent on his master's actions, not his own. Naturally, only when he feels he helps his master with some big projects does Stevens enjoy a sense of pride. One instance is the silver polishing case we have seen. Stevens says that 'it is perhaps not absurd to think back to such instances with a glow of satisfaction' (*Remains* 146-47) and that 'one has a right, perhaps, to feel a satisfaction those content to serve *mediocre* employers will never know—the satisfaction of being able to say with some reason that one's efforts, in however modest a way, comprise a contribution to the course of history' (*Remains* 147; italics added).

However, he comes to the point when he cannot forever revel in his satisfaction when confronted in the present by people who claim that such a satisfaction should come from freedom of choice and opinions. Indeed, the above silver polishing case is quite the opposite. However satisfied Stevens feels about it, it is a fact that the same case helped lead his English master to comply with Nazi's activities. Inevitably, Stevens needs to defend his dignity, as we have seen in the previous chapter, by placing stress on the fact that he *was* loyal to Lord Darlington and that loyalty is 'one quality essential in all good professionals' (*Remains* 210):

if a butler is to be of any worth to anything or anybody in life, there must surely come a time when he ceases his searching; a time when he must say to himself: 'This employer embodies all that I find noble and admirable. I will hereafter devote myself to serving him'. (*Remains* 210-211)

Stevens's argument is parallel to Ono's: you cannot prevaricate for good what you are supposed to do; at some point you have to decide to do it. For Stevens there is no other choice. This argument with himself is triggered by his conversation with Harry Smith, who argues that men and women have their own opinions without which they fall just slaves. Stevens do not make any explicit counter-argument against this. So he ruminates on Smith's point in his solitary room and concludes that 'It is hardly my fault if his lordship's life and work have turned out today to look, at best, a sad waste—and it is quite illogical that I should feel any regret or shame on my own account. (*Remains* 211).

That Stevens feels regret or shame is natural and logical. Hence he continues with this self-inspective ruminations of his professionalism and dignity. But the novel ends with what Ishiguro calls 'slightly pathetic kind of optimism'. And this emotional turn occurs again on the solitary bench, though, unlike Ono, Stevens has just finished conversation on the bench with a stranger who used to be a butler:

Perhaps, then, there is something to his advice that I should cease looking back so

much, that I should adopt *a more positive outlook* and try to make the best of what remains of my day. After all, what can we ever gain in forever looking back and blaming ourselves if our lives have not turned out quite as we might have wished? The hard reality is, surely, that for the likes of you and me, *there is little choice other than to leave our fate, ultimately, in the hands of those great gentlemen at the hub of this world who employ our services*. What is the point in worrying oneself too much about what one could or could not have done to control the course one's life took? Surely it is enough that the likes of you and me *at least try to make a small contribution count for something true and worthy*. And if some of us are prepared to sacrifice much in life in order to pursue such aspirations, surely that is in itself, whatever the outcome, cause for *pride and contentment*. (*Remains* 256-57; italics added)

Just like Ono, Stevens tries to convince himself that he 'at least' made a small but true and worthy contribution through his profession of butlership. Whether his contribution was really worthy or not was out of the boundary of Stevens's reflection, as his comment suggests—'whatever the outcome'. Of course, in historical hindsight which is allowed to the reader of the novel, the outcome is everything that judges his life. It is obvious that Stevens remains epistemologically within the boundary of his narrow perspective, a condition that allows him to remain an idealist to the end of his narrative. Ishiguro does not veer away from the paradigm of idealism he sets upon his protagonist.

Stevens, a long-time lonely and reclusive professional, finds for the first time human warmth in his emotional conversation with the stranger as well as in the cheering sounds made by strangers gathered in the pier to see the lights come on (*Remains* 257). Stevens's rumination on the emotional warmth shared by the strangers should of course be considered in connection with a succession of his failures to display his true emotions in his career,

particularly towards his father and Miss Kenton, which turns out to be partly a cause of his present sense of sadness and loneliness. Although his very theoretical professionalism—depriving him of emotion—has long protected him from what he fears to be the fragility of emotion, Stevens here comes to realise that human warmth is essential to life. After all, he sheds tears in front of a total stranger. This means that Stevens breaks the principle of ‘dignity’ he has espoused (*Remains* 44): he allows himself to discard his professionalism in the public gaze. However, Ishiguro does not forget that Stevens nonetheless is still *within* his own perspective by letting him decide to develop his bantering skills with renewed commitment to ‘pleasantly surprise’ his present employer, Mr Farraday (*Remains* 258; italics added).

It is true that Ono and Stevens prioritise their professional idealism over morality. In Ishiguro’s view, it is realistically impossible to attain the perspective beyond the context in which we live; that is to say, the absolute worthiness of a life is unattainable. Whether what one does is useful to humanity or not is judged by the generations that follow us; but that does not imply that we cannot sustain our belief in the worthiness of life. If there is no absolute worthiness, justifying our own lives at the end of our lives is the only remaining option left to choose—even though the justification is merely to recall some specific episodes from the past and then retrieve a sense of pride and satisfaction from them for brief and ephemeral moments.

Ryder’s and Banks’s endings

The stories of Ryder and Banks share something in common in terms of addressing the moral relation between their professions and their families. But there is a difference between Ryder and Banks in their ways of dealing with their family matters at the end of the stories.

Like Stevens, Ryder, the protagonist of *The Unconsoled*, finds himself ‘sobbing’ before a total stranger, too. Let us look at how *The Unconsoled* ends and see its relation to *An Artist of the Floating World* and *The Remains of the Day*, two novels that chronologically preceded

it. The last and most pathetic disaster Ryder goes through in his stay at the unnamed city is Sophie's rejection of him at the end of the story which takes place in their tram ride. Sophie would not allow Ryder to follow her and her son, Boris, any longer, saying: 'Leave us. You were always on the outside of our love. Now look at you. On the outside of our grief [for Gustav's death] too. Leave us. Go away [. . .] No, it's useless. Leave him be, Boris. Let him go around the world, giving out his expertise and wisdom. He needs to do it. Let's just leave him to it now' (*Unconsoled* 532). Although Boris tries to convince his mother that they need to 'keep together' this time, in the end she took off the bus with her son, leaving Ryder behind alone on board.

After a while I turned and made my way back to my seat. The electrician smiled cheerfully as I sat down again in front of him. Then I became aware of him leaning forward, patting my shoulder, and I *realised* I was *sobbing*. (*Unconsoled* 532; italics added)

Ryder is not admitted into the circle of 'deep embrace' between Sophie and Boris over their grief for the death of Gustav, Sophie's father (531). Ryder has kept on saying that he has a different agenda to fulfil and that is why Sophie says to Boris, referring to Ryder: 'He needs to do it', whatever it is (although this 'it' begs a further analysis which Chapter 14 of this thesis will provide). Ryder feels sad, disappointed, and lonely. His initial unawareness of himself 'sobbing' suggests how much he is absorbed in his emotion. The electrician starts to console him this way:

'Listen', he was saying, 'everything always seems very bad at the time. But it all passes, nothing's ever as bad as it looks. Do cheer up'. For a while he went on uttering such empty phrases while I continued to sob. Then I heard him say: 'Look, why don't you have some breakfast. Just have something to eat, like the rest of us.'

You're bound to feel a little better then. Come on. Go and get something to eat'
 (*Unconsoled* 532-33)

The unexpected invitation from the electrician to go and fetch something to eat from the buffet changes dramatically Ryder's mood from disappointment to contentment:

I took a plate, glancing up as I did so through the rear window with its receding view of the city streets, and could feel my spirits rising yet further. Things had not, after all, gone so badly. Whatever disappointments this city had brought, there was no doubting that my presence had been greatly appreciated—just as it had been everywhere else I had ever gone. And now here I was, my visit almost at its close, a thoroughly impressive buffet before me offering virtually everything I had ever wished to eat for breakfast. (*Unconsoled* 534)

Even what seems to him to be a private matter involving Sophie and Boris is generalised in his mind as something similar to what he encounters in his usual visits to cities as a celebrity. Moreover, Ryder is entertaining a fantasy of coming back to the seat in front of the electrician to enjoy more conversation before getting off the tram: 'as the tram came to a halt, I would perhaps give the electrician one last wave and disembark, secure in the knowledge that I could look forward to Helsinki with *pride and confidence*' (*Unconsoled* 535; italics added).

Both the past and the present gave no consolation to Ryder, who then seeks it in the immediate future. Now he can feel himself looking forward to the future with 'pride and confidence'—a set of emotions he was completely deprived of just a few minutes earlier. This breakfast on the morning tram works as a magical consolation to uplift Ryder's feelings from sadness and disappointment to pride and confidence. This is, Ishiguro implies, what we need to have.

Ishiguro wrote several lyrics for Stacey Kent one of which is titled 'Breakfast on the morning tram'. The lyrics also describes the breakfast buffet you can enjoy on a morning tram.

Things ‘didn’t quite meet expectations’ and ‘with a shattered heart’ you come to this city and stay awake all through the night but in the morning you just get on the morning tram then, embraced by human warmth in the local people, you can enjoy ‘the most wonderful buffet’—like ‘scramble eggs and ham’ as well as ‘a cinnamon pancake’. Then ‘very soon you’ll forget your heartache’. You are in the midst of passengers ‘laughing and joking as they eat’ so ‘your night of heartache will soon seem far away’. To these locals ‘you’re a stranger’ but strangely ‘they’ll make you feel / Right at home’ because ‘they’ve seen many others just like you / And each one of them has had it happen, too’. Then ‘you’re bound to conclude upon reflection / There’s no reason you should give a damn’.

This morning tram gives human warmth to strangers who share the same fate of undergoing the ‘night of heartache’. Stevens’s conversation with the stranger who was a butler and his being impressed by the cheering sounds of the applause people around him give when they see the lights come on at the pier have both the same function to uplift the protagonist’s feeling. Personal sadness that cannot be consoled by families and friends is being shared with strangers in Ishiguro’s novels. Such a conversation that contains human warmth gives people renewed confidence in themselves as in the case of Ryder and Stevens, no matter how implausible it sounds to the reader.

The same thing can be said about Christopher Banks in *When We Were Orphans*. Banks, just like Sarah Hemmings, has not finished his mission of ‘chasing through long years the shadows of vanished parents’ (*Orphans* 313). It is the ‘fate’ that Christopher and Sarah share: ‘to face the world as orphans’. And ‘there is nothing for it but to try and see through our missions to the end, as best we can, for until we do so, we will be permitted no calm’. Of course, they are allowed no calm to the end, because they will never be able to accomplish the mission. Perhaps that is why at the end of his narrative Banks admits being indulged in leafing through the public records of his own achievements:

I do not wish to appear smug; but drifting through my days in London, I believe I can indeed own up to a certain *contentment*. I enjoy my walks in the parks, I visit the galleries; and increasingly of late, I have to come to take a foolish *pride* in sifting through old newspaper reports of my cases in the Reading Room at the British Museum. This city, in other words, has come to be my home, and I should not mind if I had to live out the rest of my days here. Nevertheless, there are those times when a sort of emptiness fills my hours, and I shall continue to give Jennifer's invitation serious thought. (*Orphans* 313; italics added)

This last paragraph of *When We Were Orphans* sums up the way Ishiguro's protagonists come to terms with their own idealism. As Sarah mentions in her letter to Christopher, 'You always felt you had a mission to complete, and I dare say you would never been able to give your heart to anyone or anything until you had done so' (312). It is the same with Ryder obsessed with his nostalgic memories of childhood which triggered him to compensate some sense of deprivation with his expertise of music.

Ishiguro's apparent shift of concern from idealism to nostalgia in *The Unconsoled* and *When We Were Orphans* does not mean that he has lost interest in idealism altogether. Rather, in those novels, Ishiguro starts to identify the link between idealism and nostalgia.

Part II NOSTALGIA

Nostalgia is one of the frequent words that appear in Ishiguro's novels. But there is a difference of use between his early novels and his recent novels. In his early novels, the use of nostalgia, examples of which we have occasionally glimpsed at in excerpts in Part I, is equivalent to just looking back on the days in the prime of one's life. In *The Remains of the Day* Stevens imagines that Miss Kenton has had 'a deep nostalgia for her days at Darlington Hall' (*Remains* 50). In the same way, Ono, in the last paragraph of *An Artist of the Floating World*, states that he feels 'a certain nostalgia for the past and the district as it used to be' (*Artist* 206). Both look back to the days when they actively engaged in their professions.

On the other hand, when nostalgia is mentioned in the novels that follow these early ones, it usually refers to the protagonists' childhood days. And to this latter use of nostalgia Ishiguro turned his creative interest as a central theme in the early 1990s, particularly in *The Unconsoled* and *When We Were Orphans*. In these works, Ishiguro depicts the irresistible obsession by the middle-aged protagonists with their own long-lost childhoods. Part II looks into how nostalgia works in Ishiguro's novels and thereby provides another insight into Ishiguro's view of life.

First of all, we will look into how Ishiguro initially set out on his creative journey into memories in Chapter 8, Embarking for memories. This chapter shows Ishiguro's initial attempt to deal with nostalgia and what motivated him to explore the nature of memory in his early works. In Chapter 9, Nostalgia for childhood bubble, we will see Ishiguro's view of nostalgia in contrast to a scholar's view of the vision. At the same time, we also examine what Ishiguro calls childhood bubbles in relation to his view of nostalgia. Indeed, Ishiguro's conception of childhood bubbles is based on his perception that they break in the end at some point of one's childhood, leading to the infliction of an emotional wound, which is the main theme of Chapter 10, Wound to caress. In this chapter Ishiguro's idea of wound is analysed in

the context of nostalgia. The impact of wound, in Ishiguro's psychological scheme, is so powerful that it returns to one in one's mid-thirties, an idea quite akin to so-called mid-life crisis. The examination of the timing of the return of this wound referring to the coiner of the term, Elliott Jaques's research on mid-life crisis is made in Chapter 11, *In their mid-thirties*. Obviously, Ishiguro and Jaques are similar in that people's view of life changes from an idealistic one to a pessimistic one, but we can see their difference comes to be clear when Ishiguro argues that the crisis in one's mid-life involves the flare-up of one's childhood wound. This distinct view of Ishiguro's is surely based on his own personal relation with his own wound. Thus, in Chapter 12, *Guilty wound*, we will look into Ishiguro's interviews to see what Ishiguro has said about his own wound, and identifies its source in his physical severance from his grandparents and his extremely unproportional sense of guilt towards them. This personal relationship with his own wound gives rise to Ishiguro's obsession with his Japan, or his nostalgic memories of Nagasaki, or his bubble world. The examination of the universal formation and destruction of childhood bubbles through a reading of several of Ishiguro's novels will be provided in Chapter 13, *Fantasy*. Chapter 14, *Staging wounds*, shows, on the other hand, how Ishiguro's idea of wound has been explored and developed focusing on two novels, *A Pale View of Hills* and *The Unconsoled*. The last chapter of this part, Chapter 15, *Reconciliation*, provides an interpretation of *When We Were Orphans* as fiction in which Ishiguro attempts to reconcile himself to his dead grandparents through the reconciliation between Christopher Banks and the protagonist's long-missing mother.

8 Embarking for memories

‘For many writers’, as Andrew Cowan, a novelist and the director of the Creative Writing Programme at the University of East Anglia, affirms, ‘their earliest experiences are not simply a resource for their writing, but the very source of it, the place from which it all springs. And like the unconscious, perhaps, that spring is inexhaustible’ (67). Ishiguro started setting off on his long backward journey into his childhood memories at the University of East Anglia in the autumn of 1979. Although this fact has been well known by academics, little had been known about how he got to writing fiction set in Japan in the first place, until the publication in 2000 of *Early Japanese Stories*, a book-form collection (in a limited edition with all the copies numbered to 250) of three short stories all set in Japan Ishiguro wrote between 1979 and 1982. The Introductory essay to the book, written by Ishiguro himself, brought a new perspective on the way those ‘Japanese’ stories assumed the forms they did.¹⁵ There Ishiguro recalls quite vividly the autumn of 1979 when he was in a highly restless and nervous state of mind writing one story after another in a rented room with the low ceiling in Norfolk, with the first day of class for the Creative Writing Course gradually approaching:

In fact, having previously made firm plans to become a rock star by the time I was twenty, my literary ambitions had only just made themselves known to me. The two stories I was now scrutinising had been written in something of a panic, in response to the news that I’d been accepted on the [Creative Writing] course. One was about a London adolescent who poisons his cat, the other about street fights in Glasgow (where I’d spent some time as a community worker). They were not good. I started on another story, about a suicide pact, set like the others in present day

¹⁵ The same essay is also included in *Body of Work: 40 Years of Creative Writing at UEA*, edited by Giles Foden and published from Full Circle Editions in 2011.

Britain. Then quite suddenly one night, during perhaps my third or fourth week in that little room, I found myself writing, with a new and urgent intensity, about Japan—about Nagasaki, the city of my birth, in the last days of the Second World War. (Introduction 6-7)

His sudden discovery of Japan as the stage for his fiction must have been something like a revelation to a young writer whose stories to that point had all been set in today's Britain. Encouraged by his fellow students as well as by his tutors—Malcolm Bradbury and Angela Carter—he kept writing a few more Japanese stories and managed in the next year to submit his MA thesis, which turned out to be the first half of *A Pale View of Hills*. With hindsight Ishiguro reflects on what exactly drove him to work on those Japanese stories with such 'intensity'. The most fundamental motivation behind writing those Japanese stories was, Ishiguro concludes, 'an urgent act of preservation' of his memories of Japan whose contours he found had been getting faded away (Introduction 8).

The general clarity of his memories of his childhood in Nagasaki made him recognise the gradual dilution of the vividness of those memories. In Introduction as well as in many other places, in fact, he repeatedly refers to the clarity of his memories of Nagasaki:

I always had my own store of memories—surprisingly vast and clear: of my grandparents, of favourite toys I'd left behind, the classically traditional Japanese house we'd lived in (I can still reconstruct it room by room), my kindergarten, the local tram shop, the fierce dog that lived by the bridge, the child's chair in the barber's shop equipped with a special steering wheel. (Introduction 10-11)

In the essay 'Bomb Culture', too, part of which we have read in Part I, Ishiguro gave a partial list of what he calls 'fragmentary scenes' from his early childhood: 'the veranda of my grandfather's house, a peeling film poster in an alley, a playground on a hot afternoon; I think of old colour slides and my mother's recollections'. These numerous individual pieces of

memory about his childhood days in Nagasaki had been preserved, despite the fact that he had never returned to his hometown ever since he left it with his parents and sister. Concerning the preservation of those memories, Ishiguro speculates that the very fact that he had never set his foot on his home country made his memories about Japan as clear and vivid as when he had left it (Introduction 11). In an interview by a Japanese journalist, Ishiguro mentions that when he returned home to Nagasaki for the first time in thirty years he got surprised at the accuracy of his own memories: ‘the street along which I went to my nursery school and the intersection in the main street were exactly as I remember them’ (Interview, 1990, Wada 102; my translation). Elsewhere, he surmises that the source of his interest in memory comes from these clear memories of Nagasaki: ‘I think part of the reason that I am drawn to memory and nostalgia is because in my own experience these things have been crystallized very sharply’ (Interview, 2000, Chapel).

But at the same time he finds that the Japan preserved in his memory is not the same as present-day Japan: ‘the Japan that existed in my head might always have been, to a large extent, an emotional construct put together by a child out of memory, imagination and speculation’ (Introduction 11). The Japan is clear and vivid in his mind, to be sure, but it is inevitably intangible and ‘terribly fragile, something not open to verification from outside’.

The innate fragility of memory is indeed an important motif in Ishiguro’s earliest novel, *A Pale View of Hills*. There Etsuko, the narrator, is afflicted with constant trouble of remembering and sometimes is acutely aware of the unreliability of her memories of the past: ‘It is possible that my memory of these events will have grown hazy with time, that things did not happen in quite the way they come back to me today’ (*Pale View* 41). Much later on, Etsuko ruminates on the unreliability of memory, concluding that memory is ‘heavily coloured by the circumstances in which one remembers’ (*Pale View* 156).

Ishiguro himself admits that part of his memories of Japan is complemented by ‘old

colour slides' and his 'mother's recollections'. It is highly possible that by listening to his mother's recollection of Japan over and over again he has appropriated some of her memories as his own. The appropriation of someone else's memory as one's own is not so unusual in Ishiguro's novels. Even in Ishiguro's latest novel, *Never Let Me Go*, we can find a good example of such appropriation of memory. One of Kathy H's donors asks her to tell him repeatedly anything she remembers about Hailsham, the school she went to. Initially puzzled at this request, Kathy comes to realise that by hearing her stories about Hailsham the donor tries to '*remember Hailsham, just like it had been his own childhood*' (*Never* 5; italics in original). As the donor's physical condition got worse and worse, 'the line would blur between what were my memories and what were his' (*Never* 6).

Sharing the past enables a person's memory to merge into others' and increasingly the mnemonic boundary gets blurred. No wonder that Ishiguro felt 'with each year that went by, this Japan of mine—this precious place I'd grown up with—was getting fainter and fainter' (Introduction 11). Ishiguro concludes that what he was trying to do at the beginning of his writing career was :

getting down on paper that world's special colours, mores, etiquettes, its dignity, its shortcomings, everything I'd ever thought about the place, before they faded forever from my mind. It was my wish to re-build my Japan in fiction, to make it *safe*, so that I could thereafter point to a book and say: 'Yes, there's my Japan, inside there' (Introduction 12; italics added).

The urge to reconstruct his version of Japan that was slipping away from his grip of memory and to 'make it *safe*' in the form of fiction was behind all that 'peculiar energy' and 'urgent intensity' with which he started writing his Japanese stories. Placing his Japan in the *secure* place of fiction before it would fade out of his memory was a vital mission for the young aspiring writer to accomplish. Ishiguro was wrestling with the iridescent, bubble-like fragility

of memory.

Ishiguro's discovery of the necessity of making his Japan 'safe' and his resultant urgent act of preservation of his own childhood memories through writing fiction anticipates Ishiguro's later interest in nostalgia. Indeed, Ishiguro has been interested not just in the fragile nature of memory itself but also in the psychological mechanism of human obsession with the preservation of memory of the past, particularly childhood memory.

9 Nostalgia for childhood bubble

The psychological mechanism of human obsession with the preservation of memory of childhood is very close to what Ishiguro comes to have interest in as a central theme from the 1990s onwards: nostalgia. This chapter looks into what Ishiguro means by nostalgia and its emotional implications as well.

Nostalgia in general tends to be regarded as something negative like escapism from reality. In the interview with Ishiguro, Brian W. Shaffer, one of the most renowned scholars on Ishiguro, refers to the view of nostalgia conceived by John S. Rickard on the basis of the etymology of nostalgia¹⁶:

[Rickard] reminds us that the word ‘nostalgia’ is drawn from the Greek words *nostos*, or ‘return’, and *algos*, or ‘pain’. Rickard goes on to describe nostalgia as ‘an obsessive return that cherishes the pain of absence’ and as ‘an orientation toward the past that freezes past existence, preventing rather than encouraging true investigation and dialectic’. He defines the nostalgist as one who ‘turns toward the past in order to avoid the present and future’. This all strikes me as somehow terribly relevant to [Christopher] Banks’s situation [in *When We Were Orphans*], as the entire novel hinges on his literal and figurative return to the Shanghai of his youth. (Interview, 2001, Shaffer 165-166)

Rickard himself analyses the nature of nostalgia in terms of its separation of the past from the present and future: ‘Nostalgia idealizes and romanticizes the past at the expense of the present and future, and, like habit, it calcifies the past, anesthetizing present experience by robbing it of its uniqueness and immediacy’ (*Joyce’s Book of Memory* 66). To this view of nostalgia

¹⁶ For Rickard’s view of nostalgia, see *Joyce’s Book of Memory: The Mnemotechnics of Ulysses* (esp. 66).

Ishiguro responds sceptically, saying that Rickard's sounds like 'a largely pejorative' definition of nostalgia (Interview, 2001, Shaffer 166), and offers his own version in several interviews.

For Ishiguro nostalgia is an orientation towards the more specific past than in Rickard's version: that is to say, towards childhood. Thus 'the pure, personal emotion of nostalgia is often the memory of childhood' (Interview, n.d. Shaikh). Childhood stands for 'more naive, more innocent days' (Interview, 2001, Shaffer 166). Ishiguro calls such days a 'childhood "bubble"' in which 'adults and parents led you to *believe* that the world was a better, a nicer place' (Interview, 2001, Shaffer 166; italics added).¹⁷ In other interviews, Ishiguro calls it a 'sheltered bubble' (Interview, n.d. Shaikh) or a 'protective bubble' (Interview, 2000, Chapel) where adults, 'not just our parents, but strangers in the street, all instantly enter into a conspiracy to make a small child *believe* the world is slightly nicer than it really is' (Interview, n.d. Shaikh; italics added). In short, a childhood bubble is maintained by conspiratorial deception on the part of adults. For children to be cradled in their bubble world there needs adults' trick. Suzie Mackenzie paraphrases what Ishiguro says in one of her interviews as follows: 'It is what every good parents offers their child—freedom to believe that the world is *a stable, safe and morally ordered place*—and offers knowing it to be a lie. Out of a kind of helplessness' (See Interview, 1996, Mackenzie 12; italics added). Stability, safety, morality are a set of privileges exclusively guaranteed in a bubble world.

In the same interview by Mackenzie, Ishiguro refers to such a guaranteed world in

¹⁷ The word 'bubble' first appeared in an interview in 1996 when Ishiguro explained the novel in progress he was working on then—presumably, *When We Were Orphans*: 'How you help a child out of that protective *bubble of childhood* and into the rougher world [. . .] And there's something challenging and sad about that' (Interview, 1996, Mackenzie 12; italics added).

which he himself used to be protected by his parents in his childhood. Mackenzie summarises it thus: ‘He grew up, he has said, without ever understanding the real significance of the atomic bomb that devastated Nagasaki, the city in which he was born in 1954. Believing it was normal “that every town had its own bomb”’ (Interview, 1996, Mackenzie 12). In ‘Bomb Culture’, an essay written as early as 1983, Ishiguro reminisced about how as a child he conceived the atomic bomb: ‘I had grown up without any conception of the significance of that bomb—indeed until quite a late age I *believed* every town had its bomb—and I had been *allowed the childhood security of believing* the adult world around me *safe, stable and morally ordered*’ (‘Bomb Culture’ 9; italics added). Obviously, as his word ‘allowed’ suggests, Ishiguro conceives his ‘childhood security’ to be a necessary, even beneficial one, but at the same time, as the repetition of the term ‘believing’ indicates, the structure of security, stability, and morality was entirely dependent on the restrictions of information, imposed by adult persons, especially by parents, to protect a little boy from confronting the harsh world outside as opposed to his bubble world. Ishiguro gives a good example of such information constraint from his memory: whenever his mother referred to some of her experiences of the war she did not fill him in on the tragic episodes the atomic bomb brought to her life—like the deaths of some of her friends—not until much later on.

The deception by adults to protect a childhood bubble appears as an important motif even in his first novel, *A Pale View of Hills*. The protagonist, Etsuko, tries to convince her friend’s daughter, Mariko, (though actually the girl represents her own daughter, Keiko, here) that everything will be going all right over there, and that if the girl doesn’t like it there, they can both come back home to Japan at any time, in spite of her own conviction that the daughter (meaning Keiko here) ‘wouldn’t be happy’ over there in England (*Pale View* 176). Indeed, their move issued in Keiko’s suicide in England. Uncle Philip, in *When We Were Orphans*, is more articulate about how he deceived—and thereby attempted to protect—the

young Christopher Banks, whom the old man used to call ‘Puffin’. Uncle Philip confesses to the grown-up Christopher thus:

Your mother and I discussed carefully what to *have you believe*. And it was more or less what you’ve just said. So we were successful. The truth, I’m afraid, Puffin, was much more prosaic. Your father ran off one day with his mistress. [. . .] She [Mother] would have told you eventually. But we wanted to *protect* you. That’s why we *had you believe what you did*. (*Orphans* 286-87; italics added)

Though it is obvious that Christopher’s initial childhood bubble was shattered by his parents’ disappearances, this confession of Uncle Philip’s, whose implication Christopher has been kept in the darkness of ignorance, suggests that up until this moment Christopher, far into his middle age, has been partially cradled in that protection of his childhood bubble he thought he had lost. All the while he ‘wants to go back into’ the bubble world as Ishiguro states (Interview, n.d. Shaikh), he finds he has actually still been kept in that bubble world by the adults’ deception with good intentions. In short, Christopher underwent the loss of his childhood bubble twice.

Normally, however, we cannot stay within this childhood bubble so long. When an appropriate time comes around, we ‘must all come out of’ that ‘protective bubble’ (Interview, 2000, Chapel), either ‘gradually, with guidance’ (Interview, 2001, Shaffer 167) or in such a traumatically abrupt way as Christopher was forced to do physically, if not psychologically, when his parents—one by one—disappeared (Interview, 2001, Shaffer 167).¹⁸ What awaits us

¹⁸ Christopher’s case of being thrown out of a bubble in so sudden a way by his parents’ disappearances recalls us to Andrew Motion’s reminiscence of his childhood *In the Blood* (2006). In the memoir Motion describes the way he felt he got thrown out of his childhood bubble when his mother fell off from a horse and turned into a different person: ‘I’m thinking that for most people

outside the precious bubble world is the harsher, more cruel world, to your ‘profound disappointment’ (Interview, 2001, Shaffer 167). We can identify a minor instance of such disappointment, albeit belated, in Ishiguro’s life, too. Ishiguro recalls how he was informed of what happened to his mother’s friends when the bomb was dropped in Nagasaki, after he brought out his first short stories in 1980, ‘A Strange and Sometimes Sadness’ and ‘A Family Supper’ (Mackenzie, ‘Between’ 14), and writes in his essay thus: ‘It was strange, then, to realise *in adulthood* the extent to which that same world must have been fraught with uncertainty and upheaval’ (‘Bomb Culture’ 9; italics added). In fact, his shock when he realised that the adults’ world was not working as he had always thought was so considerable that the fact ‘came as a curious revelation to’ him (‘Bomb Culture’ 9).

Even though we get out of that childhood bubble, however, we ‘carry with us some residue’ of our childhood (Interview, 2001, Shaffer 167). All of us share a certain amount of the residue in us: ‘some sense of looking back to that time when we thought the world was

childhood ends slowly, so nobody can see where one part of life finishes and the next bit starts. But my childhood has ended suddenly. In a day. No matter what happens to mum, nothing will be the same from now on. Then I’m thinking something else—no, not thinking. Wishing. I want to look into my head everything that’s happened in my life up to now, and make sure it never changes. If I can keep it *safe*, I’ll be able to look back and feel *safe* myself. [. . .] I just want everything as it was, when I saw the world for the first time’ (*In the Blood* 16; italics added). Martin Amis, too, recollects a similar kind of moment when his family found out his father Kingsley’s love affair: ‘Only when I came to write the present book [*Experience*] did I realise how much I lost and how far I fell in the course of that brief sentence: “You know your father . . .?” Childhood, the grandparents, the Partington, the village, the animals, the garden, innocence, even Eva herself: all wiped out. And my father, too, was gone or going’ (*Experience* 142).

slightly nicer' (Interview, n.d. Shaikh). In the emotional inclination towards imaginative remembrance of a better world Ishiguro finds 'a very humanizing thing', referring to 'many accounts of soldiers—hardened soldiers, after days of battle—hearing some tiny fragment of a song or finding some little object that suddenly reminds them of *this other life*' of childhood (Interview, n.d. Shaikh; italics added).

Moreover, in nostalgia Ishiguro finds a different form of 'idealism' (Interview, n.d. Shaikh). Both nostalgia and idealism are 'basically about picturing a more perfect world' (Interview, n.d. Shaikh). Noting the possibility that these emotions occasionally lead to 'destructive actions', nonetheless, Ishiguro emphasises the benefit of imagination that both nostalgia and idealism demand: 'imagining the possibility of a world that is actually purer, one less flawed than the one we know we must inhabit' (Interview, 2001, Shaffer 167). In that sense Ishiguro considers nostalgia to be fundamentally a 'valuable' and 'positive' thing. Hence nostalgia 'is a kind of emotional equivalent to idealism' or 'intellectual cousin of idealism' (Interview, 2001, Shaffer 167).¹⁹ Both nostalgia and idealism aspire to create through imagination time and space that do not exist in the present. Nostalgia is an emotional yearning through memory and imagination to the past, especially childhood, whereas idealism appeals to the intellect and inclines through imagination towards the future. But there is more to their link than Ishiguro implies here, which we will examine in detail in chapter 14.

This is not everything about Ishiguro's nostalgia, however. In fact, another aspect of it has yet to be examined which has been mentioned by Ishiguro in the interview with Shaffer: nostalgia is 'something [that] anchors us emotionally to a sense that things should and can be repaired' and 'we feel maybe that we *can* return to that world' (Interview, 2001, Shaffer 167;

¹⁹ '[. . .] what idealism is to the intellect, I think sometimes nostalgia is to emotions' (Interview, n.d. Shaikh).

italics in original). Ishiguro puts a stress on the word ‘can’ in this dialogue. But what enables one to feel convinced that one can *return* to and *retrieve* one’s childhood bubble?²⁰ What is it from one’s childhood that one feels compelled to *repair*? The rest of this chapter sees this puzzling aspect of Ishiguro’s nostalgia.

In the interview by Jessica Chapel, Ishiguro gives a more detailed account of confidence with which we feel we can return to our childhood bubbles. According to Ishiguro, while ‘there’s a part of us that knows that we can’t ever go back into that protective bubble’, at the same time ‘there’s an *irrational* part of us that hopes we can somehow *fix* things and we can make the world a much more enchanted place’ than it really is (Interview, 2000, Chapel; italics added). As examples of the irrationality of the conviction of being able to go back to one’s childhood and fix something out there, as well as of the embodiment of our inherent idealism (‘we can make the world a much more enchanted place’), Ishiguro refers to the protagonists of *The Unconsoled* (Ryder) and *When We Were Orphans* (Christopher Banks) and their obsession with their childhood experiences: ‘Both books are about people who want to think that they can *fix* something that’s *broken* in childhood, years ago’ (Interview, 2000, Chapel; italics added). What Ryder attempts to fix is ‘his parents’ marriage’ which the pianist convinces himself ‘wouldn’t have been the rather hellish thing that it was’ if ‘he had been a better pianist as a boy’ (Interview, 2000, Chapel). What compels Ryder now to go on travelling around the world as a renowned pianist is this motivation to fix the relationship of

²⁰ What the present director of the creative writing programme at UEA remarks on writing fiction—‘writing is an effort of *retrieval* or *rescue* [. . .] of something [that] has sunk into oblivion, or has been lost to us, and [. . .] the purpose of writing is to *return* this “something” to us’ (Cowan 68; italics added)—holds true of Ishiguro’s writing. What has been lost that Ishiguro apparently tries to retrieve from the past is the bubble world of his own.

his parents. Ryder fully believes that his parents come to see his performance one day, and that if they do, ‘everything will be happy again’ (Interview, 2000, Chapel). The same conviction can be said about Christopher Banks, a world-renowned detective as such he describes himself. Christopher ‘grows up believing that he can find’ his disappeared parents and ‘turn back the clock’, which means he believes that ‘they’ll carry on where they left off, and he’ll pick up a kind of happy childhood again’ (Interview, 2000, Chapel). That is why Christopher, in his mid-thirties, returns to Shanghai and starts looking for the very home he used to live in with his parents as a boy—he is even convinced that he has finally found it in a home owned by a Chinese family now.

But still the reader cannot understand the mechanism of the irrationality of these protagonists’ obsession with their childhoods. How can they convince themselves to assume that something emotionally broken in the past can be now fixable in the present? Of course, we now know what are broken things for Ryder and Christopher respectively—the deterioration of his parents’ relationship for Ryder and the quick succession of his parents’ disappearances for Christopher—but we have not been given any clue about why these protagonists feel *convinced* that these things are *fixable* now. Neither are we given any clue about the link between the emotion of nostalgia and the protagonists’ conviction about being able to fix things from the past. At this moment we can only surmise that nostalgia contains hope and obsession in itself, and that nostalgia is not something benign and idyllic as Ishiguro suggests it is in his interviews. Nostalgia, possibly, involves pain as well, as we have seen Rickard’s etymological explanation show. Pain may be related to Ishiguro’s concept of ‘wound’, which is what we examine from the viewpoint of creativity in the next chapter.

10 Wound to caress

How to cope with wound in fiction is another fundamental issue of writing to Ishiguro. It is fundamental because wound has a tendency of giving writers a real motivation to write in the first place. Only through their works do writers deal with their psychological wound from the past and in their works can readers face writers' version of wound as well as their vision of the world before receiving wound. Writers and readers alike find consolation in fiction.

The appearance of the idea of wound in Ishiguro's interviews dates back to the year 1990, sometime after the publication of *The Remains of the Day*. It appears in conjunction with another crucial term 'consolation'. The following excerpt is from the interview conducted by Don Swaim in 1990, which is one of the longest interviews with Ishiguro. There Ishiguro speculates that what makes writers untiredly engaged in their creative activity is 'not so much willpower' as 'obsession' universally witnessed in writers of fiction (107):²¹

But what keeps this whole writing thing going is [. . .] a very natural, deeply rooted mechanism that human beings have, that when the world appears just slightly out of balance, if there's something wrong somewhere, the only consolation you can give yourself is perhaps to try and create your own fictional alternative, or to present *your own vision of things*. (Interview, 1990, Swaim 108; italics added)

Just as Ishiguro's nostalgia refers to childhood memory, what Ishiguro considers to be writers' wound comes from childhood. Ishiguro finds the universal tendency of being obsessed with

²¹ Ian McEwan explains writers' obsession in an interview: 'One simply cannot account for everything one does as a writer. And as a writer I have a number of obsessions—some writers are allowed to call their obsessions "themes"' (16).

wound in ‘a lot of other writers’:²²

somewhere in their childhood, something didn’t quite match up, and they know there is nothing they can do about it now. And I think they *go over this wound over and over again in their writing*. Some do it through painting, some do it through music. But as I say, it’s the only kind of *consolation* people have when they realize that something has gone fundamentally wrong, some equilibrium has been lost somewhere way back, and they *can never retrieve it*. But there’s a consolation: you start to *build your own world*. You try to say, ‘Maybe the world is like this’. It’s your attempt to just *go over* something that can never really be *gone over*.

(Interview, 1990, Swaim 108; italics added)

It may be strange that while defining nostalgia as an ‘Eden-like memory’ of childhood (‘Interview, 2001, Shaffer 166) the same writer identifies in childhood the source of wound. But careful reading of the excerpted passages above will make us see that one receives wound when one gets thrown out of a childhood bubble. Artistic activity provides crucial opportunities for writers to ‘rebuild’ their paradise lost, giving them ‘the only consolation’

²² Some of Ishiguro’s contemporary novelists occasionally refer to this relation between wound and artistic creativity. Philip Hensher offers his view in an interview conducted in 1998 that ‘there’s some kind of psychic wound in artists’ which is ‘beyond either examination or cure’, and indeed says that ‘Kazuo Ishiguro’s last novel, *The Unconsoled*, really found out something about the motivations of artists—that they can’t be consoled’ (311). Martin Amis also maintains that writers tend to have ‘psychological’ wounds, which he says ‘broaden sympathy’ for others since ‘universality comes from a sense of suffering’ (‘Face to Face: Martin Amis (Part One)’). Amis, elsewhere, also remarks on the danger of writers being distracted from their preoccupation: ‘I think I know as well as anyone that writers are always nursing and protecting a preoccupation’ (Amis, *Experience* 223).

they can gain.

In the same year Ishiguro describes the impossibility of healing such wound in another interview: ‘The *wound* has come and it hasn’t *healed*, but it’s not going to get any worse; yet *the wound is there*’ (Interview, 1990, Vorda and Herzinger 85; italics added). Despite it being unhealable, we cannot but examine it. Hence Ishiguro calls creative activity ‘obsession’. Five years later, immediately after the publication of *The Unconsoled* in 1995, Ishiguro describes the way writers go over ‘some kind of wound deep in themselves’ in these terms: ‘you still want to kind of *play about with it*’ (Interview, 1995, Rose; my transcription and italics added); ‘*mucking about with this wound*’; ‘*caressing this wound*’; ‘*fiddle around with some area of experience that you know is broken*’ (Interview, 1995, Wachtel 33; italics added).

Of course, not only writers also artists in general go over their wound. A case in point can be found in Ishiguro’s interpretation of the songs by Stacey Kent, a Jazz vocalist. In his liner notes written—dated July 2002—for Kent’s seventh album, *In Love Again* (2003), Ishiguro identifies the ‘heart of [Kent’s] music’ in the ‘emotional’, rather than the technical, scale. Visceral sensation mounting inside those who listen to Stacey’s voice, Ishiguro writes, is being rendered possible by her ‘unusual power to hold your attention and control your emotions from the first note’. Ishiguro feels some emotion, tender yet at the same time introspectively obsessive in Kent’s singing voice, too: ‘[w]hat we get is someone *going over the broken pieces of her life, trying to coax from somewhere a little courage and perspective*’ (Liner Notes; italics added). Perhaps it is no mere stylistic coincidence that Ishiguro employs the phrase ‘go over’ here—the phrase we have seen in his interviews used more than once to describe artists’ tendency of caressing their wounds: ‘And I think they *go over* this wound over and over again in their writing’; ‘It’s your attempt to just *go over* something that can never really be gone over’ (Interview, 1990, Swaim 108; italics added). It can be conjectured that from the same angle Ishiguro is listening to Stacey, his wound sensor catching some

throbbing in the crooner's voice.

Ishiguro's references to wound continue up to the 2000s, with more emphasis on the consolatory aspect of examining unhealable wound from both artists' and consumers' points of view:

It is often the case that if you have a wound that you know will never heal, nevertheless you sometimes want to touch it or in some kind of interesting way examine the wound again from time to time, have a relationship with it. So it cannot heal, it cannot mend in art, but it can be a *consolation*. You have lost this thing, but just by creating something that makes sense of what has gone wrong, it is a *consolation*. I think when we value writers or value artists, it is because these people do this for us. That is why we are drawn to books, films, music that *strike a certain chord* with things that we have felt. [. . .] [Art] is often valued both by the consumers and by the producers as a kind of *consolation*. It is broken but let us look at it: here is a way, here is a perspective on this broken thing that helps us to come to terms with it more, or live with it more, and so for me it is a *consolation* in that sense, rather than in a sense it is going to make us feel better'. (Interview, 2003, Gallix, Guignery, and Veyret 6-7; italics added)

Concerning the universality of consolation gained by sharing wounds between writers and readers, Ishiguro offers his view in the same interview:

you are caressing a very personal wound in some way, and if other people respond to it, I suppose you feel less alone. It is a signal that it has *struck a chord*, and this is not something that has just happened to you or that you feel. So that in itself becomes a kind of *consolation*, the fact that there is *a community of people with these emotions, these kinds of wounds*. (Interview, 2003, Gallix, Guignery, and Veyret 20; italics added).

These statements in Ishiguro's interviews suggest that a certain type of psychological wound, when suffered by a certain type of people, predominantly in the earliest stages of their life, gnawing far into the depth of their emotion, is prone to be a kind of creative compulsion, irrational and irresistible, that can never be eliminated. The intensity of pain from wound is only lessened by the fabrication of imaginative alternatives to the world before they got wounded—a world all too beyond their reach to bring back and put right. Only within the aesthetic domain could such a deep-set wound be more freely and more delicately tended than it should be in the stark reality of everyday life.

This view of artists' obsession with caressing their wound can possibly be applied to Ishiguro's protagonists, especially Ryder in *The Unconsoled* and Christopher Banks in *When We Were Orphans*. Through their professions (pianist and detective) they try to console themselves for the wound they received when they were expelled from their bubble world. They have been suffering from the throbbing pain from the wounds since their childhood. Seen from this angle, we should go back to the Joyce scholar Rickard's definition of nostalgia based on its etymology introduced by Shaffer in his interview with Ishiguro and then reshape our view of Ishiguro's nostalgia into the one more compatible with, if not equal to, Rickard's version. For Ishiguro, too, nostalgia means 'obsessive return that cherishes the pain', though not of 'absence', but of presence—the presence of wound from one's childhood.

But there is one fundamental difference between Rickard's nostalgia and Ishiguro's. While the former assumes that nostalgia is an orientation towards the past 'at the expense of the present and future' (*Joyce's Book of Memory* 66), Ishiguro's nostalgia assumes that one's obsession with the past is inseparably linked to the present: 'the wound *is* there' (Interview, 1990, Vorda and Herzinger 85; italics added). But we should not assume that Ishiguro conceived this idea of wound right from the start of his career. Indeed, as I have already mentioned, it began to be referred to only in around 1990—when Ishiguro was in his mid-

thirties. In this respect, the 'return' part of the etymological meaning of *nostalgia* is as relevant to Ishiguro's view of wound as pain. What Ishiguro calls wound tends to *overwhelm* one and often suddenly at a certain stage of one's life, or more particularly, in one's mid-thirties.

11 In their mid-thirties

Mid-thirties of age have several psychological implications for Ishiguro as a writer. This chapter goes into the emotional effects of middle age on creative writers in general and Ishiguro in particular, for, in Ishiguro's life scheme, the age of thirty-five is a fundamental turning point in forming views of life. It would also seem worthwhile to look at this issue of middle age from a psychological standpoint, that is to say, a mid-life crisis, a concept relevant to Ishiguro's claim that views of life change in one's mid-thirties.

In the pioneering research of the mid-life crisis in the 1960s, Elliott Jaques defines mid-life crises as 'the crises which occur around the age of thirty-five' and is more clear about the range of the ages when he writes:

When I say that the mid-life crisis occurs around the age of thirty-five, I mean that it takes place in the middle-thirties, that the process of transition runs on for some years, and that the exact period will vary among individuals' (1).

Jaques finds a lot of examples of the mid-life crisis in artists, particularly writers: 'I first became aware of this period as a critical stage in development when I noticed a marked tendency towards crisis in the creative work of great men in their middle and late thirties' (2).

According to Jaques, the most typical factors that cause the mid-life crisis are a sense of getting old (10-11), a sense of 'the reality and inevitability of one's own eventual personal death' (11) oftentimes triggered by the deaths of one's elderly parents, and a sense of 'there being no more changing' (25). These factors change one's attitude towards life from an 'early adulthood idealism' (8) and 'optimism' (7) to 'a more contemplative pessimism' (7) and 'constructive resignation and detachment' (25). Jaques identifies many instances of changes

of attitude in the lives of classic writers like Dante, Shakespeare, and Dickens.²³

Although Jaques refers only to such classic writers, a contemporary version of the mid-life crisis can also be found in writers like Raymond Carver. Carver offers his impression about the change of views that tends to take place in middle age:

Failure and dashed hopes are common to us all. The suspicion that we're taking on water and that things are not working out in our life the way we'd planned hits most of us at some time or another. By the time you're nineteen you have a pretty good idea of some of the things you're *not* going to be; but more often, this sense of one's limitations, the really penetrating understanding, happens in late youth or early middle age. (*Fires* 46-47; italics in original)

The same realisation of limits to his own life, indeed, dawned on Carver to an utter despair:

Up to that point in my life I'd gone along thinking [. . .] that things would work out somehow—that everything in my life I'd hoped for or wanted to do, was possible. But at that moment, in the laundromat, I realized that this simply was not true. I realized—what had I been thinking before?—that my life was a *small-change* thing for the most part, *chaotic*, and *without much light showing through*. At that moment I felt I knew—that the life I was in was vastly different from the lives of

²³ 'The change may be seen in the more human, tragic and less fictitious and stage quality of Dickens' writing from *David Copperfield* (which he wrote at thirty-seven) onwards. It may be seen also in the transition in Shakespeare from the historical plays and comedies to the tragedies. When he was about thirty-one, in the midst of writing his lyrical comedies, he produced *Romeo and Juliet*. The great series of tragedies and Roman plays, however, began to appear a few years later; *Julius Caesar*, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, and *Macbeth* are believed to have been written most probably between the ages of thirty-five and forty' (7).

the writers I most admired. I understood writers to be people who didn't spend their Saturdays at the laundromat and every waking hour subject to the needs and caprices of their children. Sure, sure, there've been plenty of writers who have had far more serious impediments to their work, including imprisonment, blindness, the threat of torture or of death in one form or another. But *knowing this was no consolation*. At that moment—I swear all of this took place there in the laundromat—I could see nothing ahead but years more of this kind of *responsibility and perplexity*. (Carver, *Fires* 33; italics added)

It is not a mere coincidence that Carver uses the term 'idealism' in another interview to describe his youthful hope for the future: 'We had a lot of hope and *idealism* and we thought if we worked hard and did the right things, the right things would happen, things would work out. Well, as it turned out, we did the best we could and we worked as hard as we possibly could and things did not turn out. There was never enough money to go around and, finally, that kind of effort began to wear us down' (cited in Marshall 2C). The kind of inner torment Carver underwent overwhelms some people still in their twenties, like the protagonist of Julian Barnes's *The Sense of an Ending* (2011): 'There was a moment in my late twenties when I admitted that my adventurousness had long since petered out. I would never do those things adolescence had dreamt about. Instead, I mowed my lawn, I took holidays, I had my life' (93).

One of the factors of the psychological instability writers and their characters face is the sense of 'there being no more changing' (Jaques 25). Jaques explains the sentiment in more detail: 'Important things that the individual would have liked to achieve, would have desired to become, would have longed to have, will not be realized'. The result would be adopting 'resignation' towards one's life (25). It is the moment when one squarely faces 'the finitude of life' (12).

This newly acquired way of looking at one's life occasionally leads one to disappointment. Jaques speculates the link between the ages of mid-thirties and the rapid increase of suicide in those ages:

I had got the impression that the age of thirty-seven seemed to figure pretty prominently in the death of individuals of this category [artists]. This impression was upheld by taking a random sample of some 310 painters, composers, poets, writers, and sculptors, of undoubted greatness or of genius. The death rate shows a sudden jump between thirty-five and thirty-nine, at which period it is much above the normal death rate. (2)

The increase of the suicide rate in their mid-thirties has some correlation with the change of views of life that occurs from 'idealism' and 'optimism' to 'pessimism' and 'resignation'.

Ishiguro, too, takes a strong interest in the issue of the ages of mid-thirties, as he makes a number of remarks in interviews. But he does so from a different angle to Jaques. Ishiguro began to mention 'the age of thirty-five' in the 1990s. The interview below from 1995 is about how 'after the age of thirty-five' one starts getting a sense of the limitation of life and *at the same time* feeling the return of one's wound from childhood:

When we're talking about things that go wrong fundamentally, at the heart of somebody's life, we are often talking about *family and things early on*—something crucial to do with *emotional bereavement* or *emotional deprivation*. This isn't necessarily an overtly psychoanalytic view; I'm not a great subscriber to Freudian theory. It's just my observation of myself and people around me. Oddly enough, as I've got older I've started to feel this more. When you're *younger* you have a *certain strength* that comes from the very provisionality of life, you think things are going to shape up eventually. But things seem to *catch up on* people *somewhere after the age of thirty-five, from way back in their past*. You start to get

a sense of the limit of what you can do, or of what's going to happen to you in life. I don't necessarily mean any huge trauma, though in some people that is the case. It might have been a chronic thing, or something as simple as childhood coming to an end, discovering that the world is more complicated than the world of childhood. It's my feeling that a lot of creative people and those strongly motivated in politics derive a lot of that motivation and drive from something that's out of line way back. (Interview, 1995, Jaggi 115; italics added)

This excerpted passage is very complicated simply because Ishiguro combines two issues into one: the 'catching up' of things from the past and the confrontation with a sense of limit of life. Readers of this interview have to figure out how it is that things from the past 'catch up with' us after the age of thirty-five *at the same moment* when we start to feel our own limitation. Apparently, what Ishiguro calls 'a sense of the limit of what you can do' has much to do with 'things early on' which obviously refers to wound as we have seen it in the previous chapter. The only thing that is clear is the synchronicity between the relapse of childhood wound and the confrontation of the limitation of life, although Ishiguro gives no explanation as to its mechanism.

Five years later Ishiguro makes a similar comment in another interview in his discussion of *When We Were Orphans*, but in more detail.

Yes, the book [*When We Were Orphans*] moves from one kind of realism to another kind of realism. I remember now when I was devising the novel that this shift was partly promoted by my feeling that people are quite *strong emotionally* when they're *young*. When I was a young man myself I always *imagined* that you got stronger and stronger, emotionally speaking, as you aged. You got more and more stable; you worked out all these things in your life more and more successfully. So you would suffer less and less from *anything that life handed you*

early as you learned to assimilate and cope with these hardships. That's certainly how the adult world looked to me then. But as I've got older myself, I've noticed that's not the case. Around me, people I imagined were coping with their lives perfectly well in their twenties seemed to crash on some rocks. If you looked carefully, you could see that these problems were there right from the start. When you're young, there's the sense that your life can change, that you can become something else later on if you wish. This seeming open-endedness keeps people going for a certain time; but problems seem to catch up with them at that point when they realize their lives aren't going to change that much anymore. Life doesn't present an infinite series of twists and turns now. You've been dealt a certain hand and that's it. People's lives fall apart; they get depressed. I've seen quite a lot of this happen to people in their late thirties or so. Although until now they've been able to keep going on certain hopes and plans, suddenly all this baggage from the past comes in and overwhelms them. So it felt right to me that the earlier part of Banks's life should be relatively straightforward but that when he's narrating in his late thirties things should get pretty weird. (Interview, 2000, Shaffer 169; italics added).

The similarity between Ishiguro and Jaques is to the extent that they share the view that in early adulthood people tend to have a positive view of their own lives—‘a certain strength that comes from the very provisionality of life’, ‘this seeming open-endedness’, and ‘an infinite series of twists and turns’—while reaching the middle age the very view gradually changes to a more realistic and pessimistic one: ‘a sense of the limit of what you can do’ and ‘they realize their lives aren't going to change that much anymore’. Julian Barnes again has his narrator of *The Sense of an Ending* say:

When you are in your twenties, even if you're confused and uncertain about your

aims and purposes, you have a strong sense of what life itself is, and of what you in life are, and might become. Later . . . later there is more uncertainties, more overlapping, more backtracking, more false memories. [. . .] just as all political and historical change sooner or later disappoints, so does *adulthood*. So does *life*. Sometimes I think the purpose of life is to reconcile us to its eventual loss by wearing us down, by proving, however long it takes, that *life isn't all it's cracked up to be*. (*The Sense of an Ending* 104-105; italics added)

Disappointment in life is a sentiment commonly found in all these thinkers: Jaques, Ishiguro, and Barnes.²⁴ What sets them apart from one another, or rather what sets Ishiguro apart from the others is the unique assumption that the sense of disappointment in life that one tends to feel in one's mid-thirties involves the flare-up of one's childhood wound. Indeed, Ishiguro's protagonists of *The Unconsoled* and *When We Were Orphans*, both in their mid-thirties to their early forties in the crucial stages of the narratives, start to take an emotional journey into

²⁴ Martin Amis, too, recalls his own experience of undergoing a mid-life crisis and attributes part of its cause to the perception of death: 'I saw it [the mid-life crisis] was intrinsic and structural. It had to do with things that were already wrong and were not being faced. [. . .] But later you see that there was a realignment taking place, something irresistible and universal, to do with your changing views about death (and you ought to have a crisis about that. It is critical to have a crisis about that). [. . .] Only in adolescence do we hear the first rumours of our own extinction, these rumours remaining vague until the irrefutable confirmation of the mid life, when it becomes a full-time job looking the other way. *Youth has finally evaporated, and with it all belief in your own impregnability*' (Amis, *Experience* 63-64; italics added).

their childhood, despite their being in their prime in life—at least in terms of profession.²⁵

To see the connection between the mid-thirties and the return of childhood wound, it would be in order to note the fact that in all of the excerpts above Ishiguro is actually expanding his view on the nature of wound. Wound is paraphrased into ‘emotional bereavement or emotional deprivation’ echoing something ‘lost’ as we have already seen Ishiguro mention in the interviews (Interview, 1990, Swaim 108; 1995, Wachtel 33; 2003, Gallix, Guignery, and Veyret 6). But here Ishiguro is more articulate about the source as well as the persistency of wound: ‘family and things early on’; ‘chronic’; ‘there right from the start’; ‘childhood coming to an end, discovering that the world is more complicated than the world of childhood’. The last phrase reminds us of the fact that here Ishiguro is discussing wound in the larger context of nostalgia. Nostalgia, full of ‘Eden-like’ memories about childhood, necessitates a re-encounter with a painful wound from the very childhood.

From this analysis of Ishiguro’s remarks on wound, we can see the need to reshape our view of his nostalgia. Ishiguro’s nostalgia is not a feeling that you have if you want to, but something that grabs you into it. You cannot control your being drawn into the state of being nostalgic. Nonetheless, one issue remains still puzzling: why has this change of your views of life from adolescent idealism to midlife fatalism—‘you’ve been dealt a certain hand’—got to do with the particular point of time when your wound comes back to you? Why is it, as Ishiguro says, their ‘*problems seem to catch up with them at that point* when they realize their

²⁵ But it should be pointed out that Jaques also recognises the inevitable turn of attention from the future to the past at this stage of the middle age: ‘And because the route forward has become a cul-de-sac, attention begins its Proustian process of turning to the past, working it over consciously in the present, and weaving it into the concretely limited future. This consonance of past and present is a feature of much mature adult sculpting work’ (26).

lives aren't going to change that much anymore'? To make sense of this curious logic we need to look into what the novelist has to say about his own wound.

12 Guilty wound

Nostalgia involves two types of emotions as *The Oxford English Dictionary* shows. One is ‘a form of melancholia caused by prolonged absence from one’s home or country; severe homesickness’. The other is ‘regret or sorrowful longing for the conditions of a past age; regretful or wistful memory or recall of an earlier time’. Ishiguro’s nostalgia is comprised of both emotions—homesickness for his childhood Nagasaki and longing for the period before his eternal separation from his grandparents. It is obvious that these two kinds of feelings have been transformed into Ishiguro’s own emotional wound.

The year 1995 saw Ishiguro’s closest verbal approach to the wound of his own. Telling cases materialise in two of the most rewarding interviews: one by Eleanor Wachtel, the other by Maya Jaggi, each carried out in 1995, the same year as when *The Unconsoled* was published. In the interview by Eleanor Wachtel, exactly when Ishiguro finishes his explanation as to how Ryder ends up by prioritising his ‘personal agenda’ of healing his own emotional wound over his family to love and make happy, Wachtel puts quite an opportune biographical question to the novelist—‘Do you know *what wound* you’re addressing by locking yourself in a room and writing these bleak books?’ (34; italics added) To which Ishiguro responds in a cautious manner:

Well, here we’re getting quite *personal*. There is a part of me that remains quite *private*, and there’s a part of me that wants to invent when things start to touch on areas that might come *too close to me in a directly autobiographical way*. So when it comes to writing a novel, I shy away from tackling that head-on; I invent another wound for my characters. I have some ideas about it. *I don’t have any kind of trauma in my life*, but it probably has something to do with a sense of having left something unfinished, or having led a different sort of life from the one *I should have led*—that’s to say, not growing up in Japan and turning into

this Japanese person, but turning into something else. It could be something to do with that, but it isn't necessarily of any interest to anybody else, and that's not the bit that I particularly want to share because that's peculiar only to me. (Interview, 1995, Wachtel 34-35; italics added)

Ishiguro's self-analysis is illuminating in the sense of being a case study of his aesthetic obsession explained in his personal terms which are different from those used in his previous conceptual exegesis of the relation between writers and wounds in general. Here Ishiguro admits that his fiction has to do with dealing with some part of his private dimension, though not directly enough to expose it all in an obviously autobiographical way but by having his characters suffering certain invented wounds instead of his own. Ishiguro is cautiously reserved about going into the relationship between his autobiographical facts and his fiction, a reservation being highlighted in his remark that this 'private' part may well be of no interest to readers. What we can guess from the statement above is that his wound has to do with the fact that he left Japan and grew up in England. His phrase 'should have led' only gives an implication that there must have been a certain amount of expectation he seems to have felt when he was small.

In another interview by Maya Jaggi, conducted in the same year as the interview by Wachtel, however, Ishiguro is manoeuvred into an elucidation about the source of his own wound while discussing his motivation of writing fiction:

For me, the creative process has never been about anger or violence, as it is with some people; it's more to do with *regret* or *melancholy*. I don't feel I've regretted not having grown up in Japan. That would be absurd. This is the only life I've known. I had a happy childhood, and I've been very happy here. But it's to do with *the strong emotional relationships* I had in Japan that were *suddenly severed* at a formative age, particularly with *my grandfather*. I lived with my

grandparents for the first five years of my life; it was a three-generational family, and my father was away for three of my first five years. So my grandfather was the head of the household, the person I *looked up to*. It's only in the past few years that I've begun to appreciate the importance of what happened then. I've always been aware that there was *this other life* I might have had—not in terms of being happier in that society. But here was a very important *bond*. It *didn't get severed*, because I always thought I was going back, but it *faded away*. Then he *died* when I was *still* in England. (Interview, 1995, Jaggi 116)

The early bond he had established in Nagasaki with his grandparents, particularly his grandfather, whom he respected, was loosened first when he left for England with his parents, and before knowing, he found that their bond 'faded away'. But Ishiguro's memory of the bond began to torment his sense of responsibility and produce a sense of guilt in him. That is why he is obsessed with the notion that there was 'this other life' he might have led in Nagasaki, which he believes is what his grandparents expected him to do. It would be in order here to look in more detail into the relationship between Kazuo, his grandparents, and his father, relying on what Ishiguro himself has said in interviews.

Much of Kazuo's strong attachment to his paternal grandparents and 'particularly with [his] grandfather', Masaaki (for the name, see Hirai, 'Meiro'), is, as we have seen Ishiguro say above, ascribed to the absence of his father, Shizuo, at home for the latter's frequent research trips abroad including the ones to U.K. and U.S.A. Indeed, a few years after his son was born, Shizuo won a UNESCO fellowship to pursue his research in oceanography in England and was abroad unaccompanied for the subsequent two and a half years (Hirai, 'Watashitachi' 28). According to a UNESCO activity report of the Marine Sciences Programme, as well as a Programme Newsletter for the same period (1956-57), both of which can be perused on the website of the UNESCO, Shizuo studied from January in 1957 till

December of the same year at the National Institute of Oceanography, in Surrey. Kazuo, meanwhile, built a ‘strong emotional’ relationship with Masaaki (Interview, 1995, Jaggi 116). Ishiguro recalls the grandfather became his ‘father figure’ (Interview, 1995, Wachtel 24) and remained so until Shizuo was invited to the National Institute of Oceanography ‘to design an “Electronic Model” for tides and surges in the North Sea’ (Cartwright 183) and then left for England again in April 1960, but this time with his wife and family including Kazuo when, Ishiguro says metaphorically, the grandfather-grandson ‘bond’ was ‘suddenly severed’ (Interview, 1995, Jaggi 116). The abrupt severance of their physical contact is responsible for Ishiguro’s strong fixation with his own age when he left Nagasaki, for to Swaim’s confirmatory question in the 1990 interview, ‘You were about six [when you arrived in England]?’ Ishiguro replies by making a fastidious correction of it: ‘I was five and a half’ (92): he was born on the eighth of November in 1954. The age of five becomes so crucial a period that in *When We Were Orphans*, the soldier whom the protagonist comes across in the battlefield in Shanghai and believes to be his old childhood friend, Akira, mutters in broken English: ‘My son [. . .] Five years old. In Japan. He know nothing, nothing. He think world is good place. Kind people. His toys. His mother, father’ (*Orphans* 262).

Ishiguro has often claimed that his family were to stay in England only a year or two (see, for instance, Interview, 1990, Swaim 92). However, that appears to have been the case to them all except to his father, who looked back on the period of their departure from Japan from a different angle in an interview by *Shukan Shincho*, a Japanese weekly magazine. In the interview conducted in his mother tongue, Japanese, Shizuo reminisced about the time before he and his family had left for England: ‘It was the second time for me to go to England, and yet, at that time, I resigned from the Nagasaki Marine Observatory, *quite determined to work until retirement age* [at the Institute in Surrey]’ (34; my translation and italics). Indeed, a decade later, when offered an academic post in Japan, Shizuo turned it down at the last minute,

according to his son (Interview, 2000, 'Part'), continuing to be employed for over another decade and a half in the same institute in England (Cartwright 183). Of course it was the British government that decided to keep his research going there. But all the same his aforementioned recollection makes us suspect that Shizuo brought his family to England with no immediate intention of returning. Had it been the case, it would be possible now to surmise by logical extension that his son was somehow deceived into believing that the separation from his grandparents would be only temporary. Whether or not Shizuo told his son about his own initial determination is unknown—Shizuo passed on in 2007, according to Hirai ('*Watashitachi*' 31). Either way, the feeling remains perhaps in Kazuo's emotion that he let his father separate himself from his grandparents.

At all events, the family's sojourn in England was extended each year for as long as a decade. Meantime every month Masaaki sent his grandson 'a parcel' containing things children in Japan were absorbed in (like 'the comic strip about Oba-q') in order that he 'wouldn't feel lost among his friends when eventually he returned' (Interview, 2000, Mackenzie, 'Between' 10). On the other hand, Kazuo naturally found himself becoming accustomed to his English life as time went by and gradually came to hold ambivalent feelings about his expected future return to Japan: 'at some level I wasn't looking forward to going back' but at the same time 'at some deeper level' he was no less eager to return (Interview, 1995, Wachtel 22). In another interview Ishiguro recollects his suspended situation of those years as follows: 'Until I was 15 I lived in a kind of limbo, waiting to go back. This has a very profound effect on a child' (Interview, 1996, Mackenzie, 'Real' 12). These mutually exclusive emotions—a wish to stay in England as well as a wish to return home to Japan—nevertheless seem to have been all but settled when Masaaki died in 1970 or

thereabouts (when Kazuo was 15 or 16)²⁶ and irrevocably when the grandmother, Kayo, died in 1983 (Interview, 1987, Sinclair 36), ending in the indefinite postponement of their return. However hard it was for a 15-year-old boy to grasp the significance of his grandfather's death (Interview, 2000, Mackenzie, 'Between' 10), his grandmother's later, far less frequently mentioned death must have appalled him; for he was permanently bereft of an opportunity not only for seeing his grandparents but also for making amends for the fact that he 'didn't go back and become the kind of person [he] was expected to become' (Interview, 1995, Wachtel 24).

The following is from the interview by Wachtel where Ishiguro comes as near as he possibly can to the most vulnerable private part of himself:

When you're at that age, you don't think about the *responsibility* of things like saying goodbye. But at some deeper level it did leave me with a sense of having *let* my grandparents *down*, perhaps some sort of *odd guilt*. [. . .] I remember when I left Japan—the one thing I do remember—is promising that I'd bring a present back, as you do when you go on a little trip. I think I always held that as a kind of concrete thing, that I *never* went back and fulfilled this promise, that I *never* took back a little present from England, and I *never* came home.

In the meantime my grandparents grew old and died. Also that whole Japan that I had remembered seemed to *fade away*—not just in my head but perhaps in reality too. I didn't go back and become the kind of person I was *expected* to become. I sometimes think that by leaving Japan, leaving my grandparents, and turning into this odd sort of semi-Englishman, I've somehow *let* them *down*, and if

²⁶ None of his son's family members had seen Masaaki ever since their departure (Interview, 2000, Mackenzie, 'Between' 10).

they'd known, they might have been *disappointed*. There are all these kinds of feelings. (Interview, Wachtel 23-24)

If they'd known what?—the fact that he turned into an English man instead of a Japanese man his grandparents presumably expected him to be. The very same year when Kayo died Ishiguro acquired British citizenship; therefore, both of his grandparents had passed away without seeing him become naturalised in Britain. In the interview by Wroe, Ishiguro explains the reasons for having abandoned the Japanese citizenship: 'I couldn't speak Japanese very well, passport regulations were changing, I felt British and my future was in Britain. And it would also make me eligible for literary awards' (Interview, 2005, Wroe). There is no mention, however, of Kayo's death of the same year anywhere in the interview, but there might be a possibility that her death was as decisive a factor in his renunciation of the original nationality as the other more practical ones he referred to.

And above all, all these accounts by Ishiguro give us insight into his wound in relation to his explanation of nostalgia, childhood bubble, and the inner workings of certain creative activities rooted in emotional wounds. The bubble for Ishiguro corresponds obviously to his days in Nagasaki when he built an emotionally strong relationship with his grandparents there in the absence of his father. Ishiguro confesses that the early childhood he passed in Nagasaki stands for a 'more innocent, protected life', which is the 'ready-made emotional shorthand of Japan, standing for my early childhood—a more innocent, protected life'. On the other hand, Guildford, England, where he passed the rest of his childhood, stands for a life after the protection when he 'was older and had to face the world' (Interview, 2000, Chapel). The transition from his early childhood to his late one coincidentally involved his 'geographical move or cultural move', but he finds universality in the former transition: '[making] that very big move out of that protected world of childhood [into] the world that we have to live in [is] a universal thing' (Interview, 2000, Chapel). It is also possible to conjecture that the very

geographical move has intensified the extent of his psychological transition from his early childhood to his late one. What Salman Rushdie says about the intensified loss of the past experienced by writers who underwent the physical discontinuity from the country they were born into—the experience that enables such writers to ‘speak properly and concretely on a subject of universal significance and appeal’ (*Imaginary Homelands* 12) applies to Ishiguro.

However, the line between the two periods of his childhood cannot be so clear-cut; they are more seamless. Indeed, the process of his bubble world being disrupted and burst in the end seems abrupt (‘suddenly severed’) and at the same time gradual (‘didn’t get severed’; ‘faded away’). The family’s departure was of course a sudden occurrence to the young Kazuo, but their stay in England was supposed, as Ishiguro repeatedly tells us, to be only temporary and the whole family were prepared to go back to Japan in a few years. At the same time, the assumption that he would be returning to his home country was strong—so strong that the realisation that he would not any more must have been something of a shock as well as a revelation: he would not be able to go back to the Japan he had remembered since he left it, and so it ‘seemed to fade away’. Herein lies the essence of Ishiguro’s melancholia and sorrow. The feeling that he ‘left something unfinished’ echoes Ishiguro’s explication of wound in general: ‘something lost’. There was no determination on Kazuo’s part involved in the family’s departure for England. Neither was there any foreknowledge of what it meant ultimately to leave his grandparents behind in Nagasaki. The sense of something happening in an unexpected and unforeseeable way strengthened Ishiguro’s obsession with ‘this other life’ he might have had in Japan. And his obsession also derives from what he calls an ‘odd guilt’ for having failed to accomplish his duties as a grandson—a feeling of guilt which is expressed partly in hypotheses—‘led a different sort of life from the one I *should have led*’ and ‘didn’t go back and become the kind of person I was *expected* to become’—and partly in the repetition of negation: ‘I *never* went back and fulfilled this promise, that I *never* took back a

little present from England, and I *never* came home'.²⁷ But the guilt was most overtly expressed when he says he has had 'a sense of having let my grandparents down': 'by leaving Japan, by leaving my grandparents, and turning into this odd sort of semi-Englishman, I've somehow *let them down*, and if they'd known, they might have been *disappointed*'.

Of course, it seems irrational of him to feel any sense of guilt towards their long-deceased grandparents. It was Shizuo's decision, not Kazuo's, that brought the family to England. It was Shizuo's decision, not Kazuo's, that kept the family staying in England. Perhaps the irrationality of Kazuo's guilty feeling has to do with the strong sense of responsibility we can find in Kazuo, especially in his childhood when he grew up in England. The young Kazuo, according to his own recollection, was of a peculiar disposition with an enormous sense of responsibility. He recalls his own childhood thus: 'I could speak English better than [the rest of my family]. I understood British culture better than they. I took responsibility for keeping the family together. I kept us grounded in this uncertain situation. Everything my parents wanted to know about British society they had to ask. [I was required in that situation to develop] *a wildly exaggerated sense of responsibility*. I became their guide' (Interview, 1996, Mackenzie 'Real' 12; italics added). Elsewhere he also remarks that in a Japanese family 'moral obligations to parents' tend to be inculcated into children at their very early ages, and that he used to feel a 'terrible guilt' when he felt he let his parents down (Interview, 1987, Bigsby 17). This premature sense of *filial* obligation, combined with that of responsibility, must have provoked colossal disgrace when he thought that he failed to meet

²⁷ The repetition of negation recalls Niki's way of consoling her guilt-ridden mother, Etsuko, who remembers it in the opening part of her narration thus: 'she [Niki] had come prepared to tell me things were *no* different now, that I should have *no* regrets for those choices I once made. In short, to reassure me I was *not* responsible for Keiko's death' (*Pale View* 11; italics added).

their expectations. Hence his strong odd sense of guilt towards his grandparents, too.

Ishiguro's immense effort not to disappoint his parents (as well as his grandparents left behind in Nagasaki) is evidently transferred into *When We Were Orphans* as, to use John Carey's phrase, 'the burden of expectation' (45). When Christopher takes counsel with his friend about the parental discord—the marital tension certainly issues from Diana's opposition to the opium trade from which her husband's (Christopher's father) company gains vast profits²⁸—Akira offers such a paranoiac piece of advice to him: 'Christopher. You not enough Englishman It same for me Mother and Father, they stop talk. Because I not enough Japanese' (*Orphans* 72-73). Akira's point is rendered clearer by the narrator, Christopher: parents are 'deeply unhappy' when their child fails to behave 'sufficiently like' those in their homelands; thus, domestic harmony pivots upon a child, who holds his family all together 'like the twine that ke[eps] the slats of sun-blinds together' (*Orphans* 73).

Given this possible transference and Ishiguro's strong sense of guilt, it is also possible to consider the irrationality of Ishiguro's guilt to be one crucial element of nostalgia, for we remember Ishiguro saying that when nostalgic we *irrationally* hope 'we can somehow fix things' from the past. Sorrow and remorse are so deeply rooted in one's heart that one retroactively harks back to the past to put something right.

We also have to note Ishiguro's remark that 'it's only in the past few years that I've begun to appreciate the importance of what happened then'—in those days he spent with his grandparents in Nagasaki (Interview, 1995, Jaggi 116). Indeed, Suzie Mackenzie refers to this fact in her article: 'Ishiguro was *in his thirties* when he began to feel uneasy. As if something was hanging over him, something he had to *fix*. At first he couldn't work out what it was', but

²⁸ Ron Charles surmises that Christopher's failure to figure it out strengthens his sense of guilt (15).

with *The Unconsoled* ‘Ishiguro thought he had finally worked out what he thought was wrong and was *fixing* it’ (Interview, 1996, Mackenzie ‘Into the Real World’ 12; italics added). We do not know exactly when Ishiguro began to address his wound, but can surmise it from the frequency of the appearance of wound in interviews. It started in 1990, one year after the publication of *The Remains of the Day*. But why did it start appearing in 1990?

In the previous year, or more specifically in November 1989, Ishiguro visited Japan for the first time in thirty years ‘on the Japan Foundation Short-Term Visitors Program’ (Interview, 1989, Oe 52), though for only two weeks (Interview, 1987, Ikeda 148-49). In the interview with Timothy Mo which Ishiguro had conducted much earlier in 1982, the year when his first novel, *A Pale View of Hills*, was published, Ishiguro confessed he had avoided going back to Japan, even after he decided to write his first novel set in Japan (Interview, 1982, Mo 50), despite his parents’ suggestion that they would pay the airfare to Japan if he wanted to go there—the suggestion deriving, Ishiguro guessed, from their ‘guilty [feeling] about having planted me in this cold country’ (Interview, 1987, Sexton 33). The reason for his not returning to Japan for so many years seems to be complicated. In an interview Ishiguro says returning to Japan had been ‘intimidating’ to him: ‘Even though I spent the first five years of my life in Nagasaki, going to Japan can be really difficult. Even if they [Japanese people] know I’ve been b[r]ought up in the west they still expect me to understand all the subtleties of their culture and if I get it wrong it matters much more than if a British person gets it wrong. I find it intimidating’ (Interview, 2011, Sullivan). On the other hand, Ishiguro says it was to save his own version of Japan he remembered in his mind, not to be contaminated by the present Japan by his visiting it: ‘I wanted to make solid this Japan that I thought was becoming rather fragile in my own head, that country of memory and speculation and imagination’ (Interview, 1995, *Economist* 92). In another interview he expressed the reason more sentimentally: ‘in my head, all these people are still alive. Against all rational

knowledge, somewhere I believe that everything is running smoothly there, much the same way as it always did. The world of my childhood is still intact' (Interview, 2000, Mackenzie 'Between' 10). Actually, his first return to Japan in thirty years turned out to be 'quite a nostalgic visit', he recalls (Interview, 1995, Kenney 47). This was a nostalgic visit to him because his memories of Nagasaki correspond to the way the actual Nagasaki is—Ishiguro says in an interview conducted during his visit to Japan in 1989: 'Nagasaki turns out to be exactly as I remember it. [. . .] The house we used to live in was no longer there, but the street along which I went to my nursery school and the intersection in the main street were exactly as I remember them. I got surprised at the accuracy of my own memory' (Interview, Wada, 102-103; my translation). He then goes on to analyse the reason for the accuracy: 'People tend to forget what they don't have to remember. Despite that, I remember all these things—probably because there was some strong and emotional necessity to do so' (Interview, 1990, Wada 102; my translation). And then he provides his view of the relationship between memory and his creative activities thus:

I think my visit to Nagasaki has helped to confirm this. I needed to somehow make reconciled my early childhood in Japan and my experience of having grown up in a totally different society. I needed to create a new world through imagination. All this must boil down to my having been *taken away from Nagasaki*. If I had grown up in Japan I wouldn't have become a writer. (Interview, 1990, Wada 102-103; my translation and italics added)

This excerpt above shows how Ishiguro has seen his move from Nagasaki to England—'taken away from Nagasaki'. It is totally beyond his control that the separation happened, and naturally, he has developed a distinctly unique sense of vulnerability and passivity about the way human beings can cope with situations that they face in every crucial moment in life.

Also, the above excerpt spurs an inference that his visit to Japan induced a deep self-reflection

on his part, particularly about his childhood in Nagasaki. Walking on the roads and taking views of the scenery of his hometown prompted him to look into all the personal motivation for writing and reached the most perilous territory of his private wound: a rooted sorrow and remorse stuffed with an odd sense of guilt. It could be surmised from this that Ishiguro's apparent interest in wound which seems to have begun around 1990 came from his visit to Japan in the previous year, 1989, when Ishiguro was *thirty-five*. And this fact partly explains why Ishiguro is so obsessed with the age of *thirty-five*. The outstanding parallelism between Christopher Banks and Kazuo Ishiguro is enough evidence to help suspect the link between his return to Japan at the age of *thirty-five* and the start of his preoccupation with his emotional wound. Both return to the countries where they spent their early childhood—at the age of *thirty-five*: Banks in 1937 and Ishiguro in 1989. It is hard to think that this is simply a narrative coincidence.

In the works after Ishiguro's visit to Nagasaki, indeed, psychological focus begins to be shed on children. As Shonaka Takayuki shows in *Kazuo Ishiguro: From Between Japan and Britain* (2011; esp. see ch.4), one of the two research books written in Japanese on Kazuo Ishiguro,²⁹ a lot of descriptions of children in *The Unconsoled*, the first novel published after Ishiguro's visit to Nagasaki, are apparently based on Ishiguro's early memories of Nagasaki. Ryder, Boris, Stephan in *The Unconsoled* are all obsessed with their childhoods. The same thing can be said about the main characters of *When We Were Orphans*. Christopher, Jennifer, Sara have strong nostalgia for their childhood days before becoming orphans, too. In a sense, all of these characters, from Ishiguro's works written in his middle age, orient themselves towards their bubble worlds of their childhood and look back on how they came to an abrupt end.

²⁹ The other is by Kyoko Hirai's *Kazuo Ishiguro: The World without Boundaries* (2011).

In the next chapter, we will see how childhood bubbles are initially protected and eventually destroyed by looking at the formation and protection of childhood fantasies in Ishiguro's fiction from his early short stories to his latest novel. The chapter also provides a perspective on how wound is shaped in children's vulnerable heart as well as how they cope with it pathetically in Ishiguro's world.

13 Fantasy

Umpteen fantasies can be encountered in Ishiguro's fiction, and almost all of them are being created by children and challenged by either children themselves or adults around them. The main function of fantasies in Ishiguro's fiction is to maintain childhood bubbles. Fantasies enable children to stay in, or occasionally escape into, their bubble world separate from the harsh reality of the adult world which they cannot endure. When fantasies appear in Ishiguro's fiction, they imply either of the two conditions: one is that children are still allowed to be immersed in the Eden-like condition of humanity, free from the threatening adult world outside; the other is that children are actually being threatened to move out of their childhood bubbles, hence their clinging to their bubble world through fantasies. This chapter will look into many examples of fantasising on children's part to see how Ishiguro represents in his fiction the way children's fantasies help maintain their innately vulnerable bubble world.

In Ishiguro's fiction, typically, some adults protect children from the harsher, more sinister world, while others threaten children's vulnerable world of bubbles. One of his early Japanese stories, 'The Summer after the War', composed in 1982 and then published in 1983 in the first special issue of *Granta* (issue 7) for the Best of Young British Novelists, is about the adult narrator's reminiscence of his childhood in Kagoshima, Japan. The boy of seven, named Ichiro, who is now the adult narrator, apparently lost his parents in the war, and now lived at his grandparents' in Kagoshima. He has a tremendous respect towards his grandfather, who is physically strong and exercises 'judo sequences' every morning ('The Summer after the War' 121). However, Ichiro starts to feel something is wrong with his grandfather's past. His grandfather used to be a revered famous artist before and during the war, whose paintings were produced to aim at boosting the nation's enthusiasm for fighting in the war—which the narrator relates from his adult point of view. But now one of the grandfather's 'most splendid pupils' comes to visit him, with a request that the old man write a letter to the committee to

the effect that the young man did make a stand against him regarding a certain political issue during the war. Ichiro overhears from the veranda of the upstairs a very tense conversation between his grandfather and the visitor, although he did not make sense what the two of them were discussing, however accurately their whole conversation is represented in the narrative.

Unsurprisingly, Ichiro feels some danger approaching his grandfather in a psychological way. Contrasted with this dangerous atmosphere Ichiro is feeling is an innocent series of fantasies the same boy revels in alone after his grandfather's physical exercise in the garden. The boy's profound respect towards the grandfather forces him to create a peculiar form of fantasy in which he and his grandfather beat evil men down. In these fighting 'scenarios', Ichiro and his grandfather come across thugs who demand money of them on the street:

As soon as my grandfather had gone inside to change, I would go into the garden and attempt to reproduce the movements I had just seen. This would end with my constructing elaborate scenarios around the movements—scenarios which were always variations on the same plot. They always began with my grandfather and I walking home at night, along the alley behind the Kagoshima railway station. From out of the darkness would emerge figures, and we would be obliged to stop. Their leader would step forward—a man with drunken, slovenly speech—demanding we hand over money. My grandfather would quietly warn them they should let us pass or they would come to harm. At this, voices would laugh in the darkness all around us—dirty, leering laughs. My grandfather and I would exchange an unworried glance, then take up positions back to back. Then they would come, an unlimited number from all sides. And there in the garden I would enact their destruction; my grandfather and I, a smoothly co-ordinated team, rendering them harmless one by one. Finally, we would survey with gravity the bodies all around us. He would then nod, and we would go on our way. Of

course, we would show no untoward excitement about the matter and continue home without discussing it. ('The Summer after the War' 122).

This fantasy game was not impervious to occasional interruptions by the voice of the family's housemaid, Noriko, calling him for breakfast. The same maid, in fact, plays a role of partial revelation for the boy to come to learn about the dilemma his grandfather is undergoing at the moment. One day Ichiro and Noriko are in the Western room tidying up the books when he comes across one of his grandfather's paintings from the past: 'It showed a samurai holding up a sword; behind him was the Japanese military flag. The picture was set against a deep red background which gave me an uneasy feeling, reminding me of the colour of wounds when I fell and injured my leg' (134). Asked if the painting was really his Oji's, Noriko points to his signature in the corner of the painting, just saying 'It's very old. Before the war' (134).

Although Noriko says nothing other than this, she partially opens a symbolical door to the realisation that comes to Ichiro, possibly, much later on.

Of course, many adults make efforts to protect children from their own cruel world in Ishiguro's novels. A classic example occurs in *The Unconsoled*. Boris, as small as Ichiro in 'The Summer after the War', is proud of his own grandfather, Gustav, so much so that the boy boasts about his grandfather to Ryder thus: 'Grandfather's very strong. He's one of the strongest men in the town'; 'He's a good fighter. He was a soldier once. He's old, but he's still a better fighter than most people' (*Unconsoled* 36). Indeed, Boris plays with the same fantasy as Ichiro's: fighting with his grandfather against street thugs—the fighting scene runs more than four pages in *The Unconsoled* (218-222). The only difference between the two versions is the reason for their fighting: While Ichiro and his grandfather fight their enemies to protect themselves, Boris and Gustav do so to save the relationship of Boris's parents, apparently Ryder and Sophie.

That Boris revels in his fantasy world means that the boy is vulnerable to the reality.

Worried about this, Gustav, grandfather, attempts to protect Boris from the contagious morbid mood of Sophie, Gustav's daughter and Boris's mother. Gustav has some concern about his daughter, Sophie, who seems to have some problems. But he cannot help her with the problem because they have not been on speaking terms with each other since Sophie was little. Unfortunately, from Gustav's perspective, the little boy is beginning to notice something is wrong with his mother. Gustav says to Ryder thus:

In fact, sir, if Sophie doesn't get a grip on things soon, I'm afraid the boy will become seriously worried. And he's such a delight at the moment. So full of openness and trust. I know it's *impossible for him to go through the whole of his life like that*, perhaps it's not even desirable. But still, *at his age now*, I think he *should* have just a few more years of *believing* the world to be *a place of sunshine and laughter*. (*Unconsoled* 28; italics added)

The world in which Boris is allowed to inhabit at the moment is what Ishiguro calls a bubble world. As Gustav's word 'should' suggests, the old man (and of course the author himself) believes such a world should be protected by adults as long as possible until it becomes appropriate for adults to let children know the reality. In another place, Gustav also says to Ryder: 'We owe it to him [Boris] to keep his world *free* of such worries *for a little while longer*, don't you think so, sir?' (82; italics added). Gustav thinks at least now is not the best time for Boris to know the whole truth about the problem that his mother is facing now.

Despite the good intention of Gustav, Boris's bubble world starts to get cracked. Ryder, with Boris, encounters one of his old school friends, Geoffrey Saunders, on the street when Boris starts his explanation to Saunders about his favourite plastic toy figure called Number Nine, with much praise for it. Saunders, however, becomes irritated at the boy's enthusiasm for the toy and says to Boris without any reservation: 'You're talking nonsense' (*Unconsoled* 49). Then ensues the tense conversation between Ryder and Saunders. Ryder whispers to

Saunders with an angry voice:

‘But he’s young, just a small boy. Can’t you understand . . .’

‘No reason to fill his head with rubbish. Besides, he doesn’t look as young as all that. In my view, a boy his age, he should be making a proper contribution to things by now. Starting to pull his weight a bit. He should be learning about wallpapering, say, or tiling. Not all this nonsense about fantastical footballers . . .’

‘Look, you idiot, just be quiet! Be quiet!’ (*Unconsoled* 50)

Despite this, a few minutes on, Ryder inadvertently ended up repeating what Saunders had said to Boris before: ‘Boris. Sometimes things don’t happen as you expect. Even when someone tells you it will’ (*Unconsoled* 53). The pattern of someone trying to break a child’s bubble fantasy is seen elsewhere in the same novel. When Boris and Ryder visit the apartment to retrieve Boris’s favourite toy, Number Nine, where he and his mother (and presumably Ryder, too, though he obviously forgets it) once lived in, one of the neighbours—living next door—tells them the apartment is empty now and then keeps on complaining about the former occupants, despite Ryder’s repeated pleas for him to stop it. The neighbour goes on to say that the former occupants—husband and wife, possibly Ryder and Sophie—often shouted at each other late into the night. Ryder gets desperate to stop the neighbour by pointing the latter’s attention to Boris standing right in front of him. However, the neighbour retorts with nonchalance:

‘All right, he may be listening. So what? Children always hear these things sooner or later. [. . .] You can’t hope to protect your boy for ever, you know. How old is he? He doesn’t look so young. It’s not good to over-shelter them. He’s got to come to terms with the world, warts and all . . .’ (*Unconsoled* 215-26)

Then Ryder bursts into anger: ‘He doesn’t have to yet! Not just yet! Besides, I don’t care what you think. What is it to you anyway? He’s my boy, he’s in my charge, I won’t have this sort

of talk [. . .] I don't care what you think! *Not for a few years yet! He won't, he won't hear about such things*' (*Unconsoled* 216; italics added). The neighbour, however, counters:

'You're foolish. These things I'm talking about, it's just what happens in life. Even my wife and me, we've had our ups and downs. That's why I sympathised with him [the husband]. I know what it feels like, that first moment you suddenly realise . . . ' (216). Ryder takes Boris to leave the neighbour behind, with the man still shouting towards the backs of Ryder and Boris: 'You're fighting a losing battle! He has to find out what it's like! It's just *life!* There's nothing wrong with it! It's just *real life!*' (216; italics added). Taking Boris away from the shouting neighbour is all Ryder can do to maintain Boris's bubble world as intact as he can.

Father figures trying to protect boys from the adult world is a typical motif occurring again and again in *The Unconsoled* and *When We Were Orphans*. Ryder says to Boris: 'Boris, I want you to know that whenever you want to ask me anything, you can just ask me' (*Unconsoled* 157). In *When We Were Orphans*, similarly, Uncle Philip says to the young Christopher, who worries that he doesn't meet his parents' expectation: 'If you're ever worried how you should go about things, anything, if you're worried about the proper way to go about it, then just you come to me and we'll have a good talk about it. We'll talk it all through until you know exactly what's what' (*Orphans* 77).

Often enough, however, children's world is threatened by children themselves. When Ryder recalls his own childhood, the reader knows that part of his childhood was very fragile from the start. Having heard constant rows between his parents going on downstairs, just as Boris was to hear the rows between his parents, Ryder tried to protect his world by immersing himself totally into the pure fantasy of organising imaginary battles on the floor mat in his room. It is curious that the children we have seen—Ichiro, Boris, and Ryder—all revel in their *fighting* fantasies to escape from the adult world fraught with the *battles* of rows or strained conversations. Now Ryder, distinguished pianist, is staying at a hotel in an unnamed city in

Europe, and suddenly finds himself lying on the bed in the very same room, his ‘old childhood sanctuary’ (*Unconsoled* 17):

I reached down a hand and let my fingers brush against the hotel rug, and as I did so a memory came back to me of one afternoon when I had been lost within my world of plastic soldiers and a furious row had broken out downstairs. The ferocity of the voices had been such that, even as a child of six or seven, I had realised this to be no ordinary row. But *I had told myself it was nothing and, resting my cheek back down on the green mat, had continued with my battle plans.* (*Unconsoled* 16; italics added)

While he knew ‘this to be no ordinary row’, he ‘told’ himself that ‘it was nothing’. It is obvious that conscious efforts were being made on the boy’s part not to face the reality unfolding downstairs. What made it possible for him to do so was his fantasy world. But Ryder’s attempt to shelter this fragile world of fantasy maintained by his removing himself from what was happening downstairs was undermined at one point by a very casual remark his childhood friend, Fiona Roberts, made about his parents when both of them were hiding as usual under her parents’ dining table:

‘But you know, don’t you,’ Fiona had said to me that afternoon, her face close to mine in the darkness, ‘when *you* get married, it needn’t be like it is with your mum and dad. It won’t be like that at all. Husbands and wives don’t always argue all the time. They only argue like that when . . . when special things happen’.

‘What special things?’

Fiona had remained silent for a moment. I had been about to repeat my question, this time more aggressively, when she had said with some deliberation:

‘Your parents. They don’t argue like that just because they don’t get on.

Don't you know? Don't you know why they argue all the time?' (*Unconsoled* 172)

Fiona knows what Ryder does not at that point, although the reader is at a complete loss at this stage as to what it really is. Anyway, Fiona is interrupted by her mother who tells her daughter to shut up:

Then suddenly an angry voice had called from outside our hide-out and Fiona had vanished. And as I had continued sitting alone in the darkness under the table, I had caught the sounds from the kitchen of Fiona and her mother arguing in lowered voices. At one point I had heard Fiona repeating in an injured tone: "But why not? Why can't I tell him? Everybody else knows." And her mother saying, her voice still lowered: "He's younger than you. He's *too young*. You're not to tell him." (*Unconsoled* 173; italics added)

Fiona's mother tries to protect the bubble world Ryder is now allowed to be in, though the mere fact that he overhears this conversation seems to make it difficult any longer to keep himself within his imaginary world. Ryder's escape into his fantasy battles is obviously an attempt to protect his own childhood world from the tense relationship between his parents.

In *When We Were Orphans*, children conspire together to maintain their bubble world by indulging themselves in fantasy games. The young Christopher resides in his fantasy world together with his friend Akira, his age-fellow. A good example of their fantasies is the one involving Lien Tien's room. Ling Tien is an old Chinese resident servant working for Akira's family since the family started to live in Shanghai. The old servant was regarded by the two boys 'as an object of fear' (*Orphans* 90), the emotion being reinforced by Akira's repetition of telling the same fantasy about Lien Tien. According to Akira, the servant collects and stores a lot of 'hands' in his room, and the boy claims he saw 'heaped upon the floor the severed hands of men, women, children, apes'; so both of them should be careful about the

servant who ‘would not hesitate cut off [their] hands’ (*Orphans* 91). When asked by Christopher why his old servant collects so many hands, Akira replies that it is because the old man ‘had discovered a method by which he could turn severed hands into spiders’ (*Orphans* 91). Naturally, approaching the vicinity of Lin Tien’s room became ‘an obsession’ for Akira. One day—they were ten years old—during Lin’s absence for a six-day holiday, the boys steal into his room and takes a small bottle away that Akira claims contains magic lotion to change a hand into a spider. Christopher knows it is just a pure foolish fantasy, but somehow at this moment he ‘felt the need to *preserve*’ the fantasy for Akira (*Orphans* 96; italics added).

However, Akira’s triumphant confession to his older sister, Etsuko, concerning his adventure into Lien Tien’s room brought him into despair. Etsuko warns her younger brother that Lin Tien might call the police to investigate or take some personal revenge on them. On the bank beside the canal—their favourite spot—Akira starts to cry and Christopher tries to console his Japanese fellow:

I remember he had in his hands some piece of damp flaking wood from which, as he sobbed, he broke off bits to hurl into the water. I wanted very much to comfort him, but being at a loss for anything to say, I recall getting up to find more such pieces of wood to break off into pieces and hand to him, as though this were some urgent remedy. Then there was no more wood left for him to throw, and Akira brought his tears under control.

‘When parents find out’, he said eventually, ‘they be so angry. Then they not let me stay here. Then we all go to Japan’.

I still did not know what to say. Then, staring at a boat going by, he murmured: ‘I don’t ever want to live in Japan’.

And because this was what I always said when he made this statement, I

echoed: 'And I don't ever want to go to England'. (*Orphans* 99)

To lift Akira's mood, Christopher suggests that they get into Lin Tien's room again to put the bottle back in there to make sure everything looks untouched. However, on the very day they are supposed to undertake another adventure into the servant's room, Christopher's father suddenly disappears. Christopher has to remain the whole afternoon in his room upstairs, *playing with his soldiers on the rug on the floor* (*Orphans* 104), just like little Ryder did in *The Unconsoled*.

This incident turns the boy's roles into the reverse. This time Akira has to console his English fellow, Christopher. Naturally, the next fantasy the two boys create is a 'father rescue game'. Whenever he sees his English friend look preoccupied, Akira suggests that they start the game in which 'Akira and I had been taking it in turns to play the role of the legendary Inspector Kung' (*Orphans* 110). Indeed, they 'had been quite absorbed in the excitements of [their] fantasy' (110), and the narratives 'would always conclude with a magnificent ceremony held in Jessfield Park, a ceremony that would see us, one after the other, step out on to a specially erected stage—my mother, my father, Akira, Inspector Kung and I—to greet the vast cheering crowds' (111-112). Their fantasy game of being a detective seeking Christopher's father out continues for a while but comes to an abrupt end when Christopher's mother vanishes, too. It turns out to be the moment that Christopher's bubble world bursts throwing him out into the world of orphanhood.

Never Let Me Go, the novel that immediately follows *When We Were Orphans*, contains a more sinister implication of the formation and destruction of childhood fantasies. In the above examples, we have seen how fragile a childhood bubble is. Even with a delicate touch upon the film it bursts open, the boundaries between the inner space and the outer space vanishing sometimes in an instant, like Christopher's case, and sometimes in slow motion. The clones in *Never Let Me Go* follow the slow pattern but their final confrontation is not

with the reality of the adult world but with the destiny of their ephemeral, brief lives.

Although the cloned students have been snugly enveloped in their guardians' protection and deception as well as in their fantasy and ignorance, they get an inkling little by little of the fact that they are all predestined to donate most of their organs in their bodies to their 'possibles', or their human counterparts from whose embryos they were produced, and that they are totally powerless about the destiny.

Hailsham is a school completely quarantined from the world outside. The students living in it are strictly forbidden to go beyond the estate boundary by their guardians, who, teaching subjects like geography, fine arts, and hygiene, will not give their students any explicit clues about their bleak future. Indeed, the guardians' role is first and foremost to guard their students from approaching the very knowledge. Though sheltered in this claustrophobic way, the students on their side seek private spaces in which to indulge in weaving various fantasies of their own, and thus Kathy H. and her classmates enjoy their privacy in many such places as the 'pavilion' (*Never Let Me Go* 6-7), the 'dorm after lights-out' (15), the 'little footpath' (44), and other 'hiding places, indoors and out' (43). These sanctuaries are by and large not so safe, however, as to prevent them from being detected by their headmistress, who never fails to keep a wary eye on the movement of her students apparently to safeguard them even from their free-form fantasies.

Leona Toker and Daniel Chertoff compare Hailsham to a school panopticon where the students are under constant surveillance by their guardians (169). The students' fantasies, nevertheless, thread their way through the headmistress's vigilance into imagination on their part, thereby quickly spreading within Hailsham. The mechanism of the creation and the dissemination of their fantasies works this way: a metaphorical wall to shelter the students from the outside inevitably functions as a barrier to block their view of not only the outside

world but also how their inside world relates to the world beyond.³⁰ Hence, their narrow and obstructed vision, in turn, drives them into filling in information gaps by creating what Siddhartha Deb appropriately names ‘the mythology of Hailsham’ about familiarly unfamiliar persons and incidents as diverse as ghosts seen in the wood behind the Hailsham plot, Miss Lucy’s vaguely frightening warnings about their predetermined future, the possible existence of the so-called Gallery, to name only three examples.

But then fantasies are fantasies. The fantasies that reside in the students’ imagination are far from the harsh and hard fate that awaits them in the future. Indeed, all of them have a vague notion of this—the fear that their fragile fantasies might ultimately bring to them what they do not want to face is always hovering on the fringes of their minds. This vague disquietude appears in Kathy’s account of their Secret Guards fantasy, whose mission it is to protect their most favourite guardian from the conspiracy of some other guardians’ to abduct her. For all the Guards’ claim that they have accumulated enough evidence for the plot, they will not actually take any practical measures to prevent the abduction at all: ‘I think’, confesses Kathy, ‘we must have had an idea of how precarious the foundations of our fantasy were . . .’ (*Never* 51). They hesitate to go further simply because they are dimly aware not just that there is no such plot or ruse going on, but also that even the foundation of their own existence may be shaky—such is their fear that ‘those of us who’d grown close to her [Ruth, their leader], we each played our part in *preserving* the fantasy and making it last for as long as possible’ (*Never* 52; italics added).

Their belief that they *are* the guards of their favourite guardian, moreover, affords them

³⁰ The idea of the double function of a wall created to protect children as well as to obscure their vision is borrowed from Ronald Fraser’s analysis of his own childhood experiences in *In Search of a Past: The Manor House, Ammersfield, 1933-1945* (33).

a comfortable sense of being protected by their own fantasy, so much so that Kathy explodes at Moira B., a former member of the Secret Guards, when the latter mocks at their enterprise as silly and jejune. Kathy's own analysis from the perspective of the narrative present of her emotional explosion against Moira's ridicule is this: 'What it was, I suppose, is that Moira was suggesting she and I cross some *line* together, and I wasn't prepared for that yet. I think I sensed how beyond that *line*, there was something harder and darker and I didn't want that. Not for me, not for *any of us*' (*Never* 55; italics in original; underline added). Actually, Kathy makes numerous remarks upon how she and others are not yet prepared for going into other such territories: Madame 'territory' (37), Miss Lucy 'territory' (69), their possibles 'territory' (137), and their donation 'territory' (274)—all kept as fantasies at several removes from their reality.

Their Norfolk theory—all things lost can be recovered in Norfolk—is one of such dangerous territories. When in a geography lesson they learn that Norfolk is called 'a lost corner' (65), it naturally becomes 'like a fantasy world' to them; but then, understandably enough, they 'never bothered to examine [their] Norfolk theory in any detail' (66)—no doubt, lest it should incur the risk of crossing the crucial line between fantasy and reality. It goes without saying that Norfolk is where Ishiguro was from 1979 to 1980, attending the Creative Writing Course at the University of East Anglia, after he had relinquished his dream of becoming 'a rock musician' (Interview, 1998, Krider 126). It might possibly be worthwhile to imagine here, furthermore, that his nostalgia for the days when he began to pursue the totally different career of writing fiction may have induced the novelist to choose Norfolk as an imaginative treasure chest where anything you've lost can be retrieved, as he found another career replaced there in Norfolk.

Any line that divides one territory from another is there, nevertheless, to be crossed after all. Indeed, the cloned students, albeit inadvertently, do cross one of such lines when

they try ascertaining, by walking so close as to brush against their Madame, whether or not she really is scared of them:

. . . I glanced quickly at her face—as did the others, I’m sure. And I can still see it now, the shudder she seemed to be suppressing, the real dread that one of us would accidentally brush against her . . . Ruth had been right: Madame *was* afraid of us. But she was afraid of us in the same way someone might be afraid of spiders. *We* hadn’t been ready for that. It never occurred to us to wonder how we would feel, being seen like that, being the spiders. (35; italics in original)

Advancing into the forbidden territory brought them the sudden, icy shock. They caught a glimpse of what it really means to be Hailsham students to an outsider like Madame—the fact they have partly known but have been unable to confront squarely so far. This partial confrontation with who they really are—to put it more banally, their own identity—makes them feel as frightened as if walking ‘past a mirror you’ve walked past every day of your life, and suddenly it shows you something else, something troubling and strange’ (36). Cynthia F. Wong comments on this mirror metaphor that it ‘is particularly useful to Kathy as she links the events of childhood and young adulthood to make a startling revelation about the purpose of life for Hailsham students’ (*Kazuo Ishiguro* 98; see also 84, 115). Also, the feeling of strangeness in Kathy’s emotion and what Wong calls ‘a startling revelation’ cohabit together when, as we have already seen above, Ishiguro realised ‘in adulthood the extent to which that same world must have been fraught with uncertainty and upheaval’ (‘Bomb Culture’ 9). What Kathy does not know at this point, however, is the real thing that makes Madame almost shudder: it is Madame’s chilling knowledge of her students’ bleak future, a future quite insecure and dissimilar from what the students imagined it to be.

It is evident from the analysis above that apart from the guardians’ protective deception, the students’ well-wrought fantasies, with which they struggle to eke out their scanty

information, serve to inflate the Hailsham bubble, and that under their playing with their imagination lies hidden a motive for procrastinating as long as possible the critical moment of accepting their cruel fate. To put it contrapuntally, their *unwillingness* to confront what awaits them is the flip side of their ‘willingness to invent little private mythologies’ (Godwin 58).

Patricia Waugh summarises the working of fantasies in Ishiguro’s fiction when she writes:

Ishiguro’s novels explore how the imaginary worlds produced out of nostalgic longing may be the *necessary lies* that we tell ourselves in order simply to survive psychically. Like Hailsham, they are imaginary utopian spaces, built out of nostalgia and providing emotional sustenance and consolation [. . .]. (16; italics added)

What Waugh calls ‘the imaginary worlds’ is what we call fantasies—all the fantasies in Ishiguro’s fiction are the ones they recall from the past, not the ones being produced at the very moment they are narrating. Precisely because these fantasies are ‘lies’, no matter how necessary, they have to be exposed in the end to the hard reality of the world outside. When the exposure occurs, it involves the infliction of a psychological wound. The more abrupt the exposure (or the more abrupt the explosion of one’s bubble world is), the deeper the wound is. Many of Ishiguro’s characters cling to this long-lost bubble world even though it is not there. Hence their nostalgia: their incessant obsession with their fantasy world before they got wounded. What is unique about Ishiguro’s fiction is that the characters’ fantasies survive childhood, intruding far into adulthood.

Indeed, even when they grow up and then prematurely face their own imminent deaths the clones never cease to indulge themselves in creating a fantasy—the fantasy that they can extend their lifespan in some way. That fantasy is entertained by Kathy and Tommy. Tommy undergoing several of his donations with his death gradually approaching, the two of them—Kathy and Tommy—convince themselves that if they manage to show their love with one

another to Miss Emily and Madam they may possibly be given the postponement of offering their organs: the extension of their lives. But their conviction proves to be just another fantasy, and their last bubble gets shattered. They quietly accept the fate of their early mortality. In due course Tommy dies. Left alone at the end of the narrative, Kathy allows herself to enjoy the final fantasy of her own thus:

That was the only time, as I stood there, looking at that strange rubbish, feeling the wind coming across those empty fields, that I started *to imagine just a little fantasy thing*, because this was Norfolk after all, and it was only a couple of weeks since I'd lost him. I was thinking about the rubbish, the flapping plastic in the branches, the shore-line of odd stuff caught along the fencing, and I half-closed my eyes and *imagined* this was the spot where everything I'd ever lost since my childhood had washed up, and I was now standing here in front of it, and if I waited long enough, a tiny figure would appear on the horizon across the field, and gradually get larger until I'd see it was Tommy, and he'd wave, maybe even call. (*Never* 282; italics added).

On the very moment when she sees Tommy appearing in this last fantasy, however, she stops it then and there: 'The fantasy never got beyond that—I didn't let it—and though the tears rolled down my face, I wasn't sobbing or out of control' (*Never* 282). Kathy is here able to bring her emotion under control now because she accepts her fate very calmly. Now it is Kathy's turn to offer her organs and then to 'complete' like Tommy and Ruth. The above is her last because what awaits her is death. In this quiet acceptance of the inevitable Kathy's nostalgia is sublimated into her silent fatalism.

The fantasies children create in order to protect consciously or unconsciously their own bubbles in which they are allowed to stay, though temporarily, are somehow equivalent in nature to what some writers including Ishiguro are doing with their fiction. The act of

weaving stories is for writers to re-experience and retrieve their lost game of fantasising. In Sigmund Freud's apt terms, fantasising in the form of fiction could be 'a continuation of, and a substitution for, the earlier play [of fantasising] of childhood' ('The Creative Writer and Daydreaming' 32). While Freud focuses on the similarity of creativity in both children's and writers' acts of fantasising, Ishiguro reveals that both acts presupposes either the infliction of or the inflation of wound, instances of which we will see in detail in Chapter 14.

14 Staging wounds

Before seeing how wound is staged in Ishiguro's fiction, the thematic reverberations that his first novel *A Pale View of Hills* was to produce in his succeeding works should be considered. It is often said that many of the consequential issues a writer of fiction deals with in every stage of his creative career can be traced back to his first debut novel. As Ishiguro himself recalls his apprentice days as a writer (Interview, 1986, Mason 6), a novice writer tends to lose thematic control while squeezing all the things that interest him at a particular moment into his work, as we have seen in the opening part of Chapter 6 'Ethics' in Part I.

Ishiguro relates this episode as an example of the pitfalls immature writers tend to fall into. But seen from another point of view, this episode reveals something not only about his first novel but also about what was thematically significant to him from the start of his professional career. Indeed, the view that many of the important issues for a writer can be found in his first novels applies to Ishiguro's debut novel, *A Pale View of Hills*.

Academics have already noted the similarities between *A Pale View of Hills* and *The Unconsoled* in some respects: most notably, the distortion of time (Hirai 'Tooi' 83) and 'extensions, versions, or variations' of the protagonists (Villar Flor 162). Also, Brook Allen's observation that Ryder in *The Unconsoled* repeats 'the cycle of familial sickness' (qtd. in Villar Flor 167), that is, repeating the parent's neglect of his or her child, is reminiscent of what Fumio Yoshioka writes about the relationship between Sachiko and Mariko on one hand, and Etsuko and Keiko on the other, in *A Pale View of Hills*: 'the victims of fatherlessness now turn themselves into perpetrators, and thereby the plight of a broken family is recycled from mother to daughter, from one generation to another' (Yoshioka 83-84).

All these points of similarity between the two novels suggest that Ishiguro's technical immaturity as a writer at the time of writing his first novel helps him to incorporate unconsciously his deeper concern into it, that is, childhood wound inflicted by parents.

Actually, the thing that thematically binds the two novels, *A Pale View of Hills* and *The Unconsoled*, together is the motif of wound.

From the perspective of wound Fuhito Endo examines Ishiguro's first two novels, *A Pale View of Hills* and *An Artist of the Floating World*, focusing on the unnaturally excessive repetition of Japanese proper names, ones of places and characters in particular, and then argues that the repetition shows Ishiguro's obsession with his Japan, obsession with attempting to translate his Japan, consisting of his memories of childhood, into the English language (99-100). And in these two novels Endo finds the intensity of Ishiguro's literary creativity that Endo argues is somehow lacking in Ishiguro's later works (105), and the intensity, according to Endo, lies in the textual connotations that each repetition has in the works: a character's name 'Ogata-San', for example, is repeated in *A Pale View of Hills* to imply erotic, political, and generational implications reverberating with some Japanese film, the political ideologies prevalent in the period the novel is set in, and one of Ishiguro's short stories. Endo furthermore emphasises that the repetition of Japanese proper names in the two novels was driven by the remains of what psychopathologist Hisao Nakai calls 'childhood traumatic memories'—Ishiguro's childhood memories whose traumatism was created by his move to England (102-103).

Endo then defines 'trauma' in his own way: that is, 'a mental condition where something traumatic is repeated (threatening a subject) irrespective of the subject's will, in spite of / because of the fact that the same subject cannot verbalise the "something" directly' (104; my translation). This definition is quite illuminating in our understanding of what Ishiguro calls wound. In Chapter 12, *Guilty wound*, we have seen Ishiguro displaying his ambiguous attitude towards delving into and sharing his wound. After some point in his career, especially after the publication of *When We Were Orphans*, he began to question the validity of the type of criticism that examines the relationship of his wound and his fiction. In fact what brought

out such a critical tendency is Ishiguro's description in his mid-1990s interviews of a possible source of his wound in terms of his physical severance from his grandparents. Indeed, his reference to his wound is preceded by his creative attempt to verbalise a more general wound in *The Unconsoled*. Comparing Ishiguro's first two novels with *The Unconsoled*, Endo also maintains that the latter, though containing Ishiguro traumatism in it, lacks much of the intensity and excessiveness of the repetition Endo found in Ishiguro's early novels. And this is where my view comes to be different from Endo's. In Endo's scheme, the repetition of Japanese proper names are considered to function as an indicator of Ishiguro's obsession with coping with his childhood traumatism. On the other hand, *The Unconsoled* is set in an unspecified European country. It is natural that Japanese names do not appear in the novel. In my view, however, *The Unconsoled* is the more excessive and more universal version of Ishiguro's tackling the theme of wound. The repetition of Japanese proper nouns cannot be seen but instead we can identify the repetition of the idea of wound (not any specific proper names), or more precisely, the tense relationship between parents and children—the relationship that causes a wound of childhood.

Indeed, many of the wounds that come up in *A Pale View of Hills*, *The Unconsoled*, and *When We Were Orphans*, concern children there. The little girl Mariko (*Pale*) constantly allows herself to be wounded physically near the river; Leo Brodsky (*Unconsoled*) had one of his legs cut off due to the accident as a boy; Keiko (*Pale*), severed when small from her father Jiro, was brought to England by her mother ending in her suicide; Ryder (*Unconsoled*) and Christopher Banks (*Orphans*) have both been obsessed with their parents since their childhood.

Many of their wounds come from their relationship with their parents: Mariko's mother, Sachiko, constantly neglects her daughter, being preoccupied with herself and her future; Etsuko's daughter, Keiko, apparently misses her Japanese father, Jiro, which can be detected

in her shying away from her new English father, Mr Sheringham; Ryder the adult finds himself recalling some episodes from his childhood in the background of which his parents' rows are constantly overheard; Banks the adult, too, remembers when he passed his happiest years with his parents in Shanghai as well as the days of the sudden and successive disappearances of his parents leaving him behind as an orphan.

Memory works to accentuate the tenacity of their obsession. While some kids, Mariko and Keiko, disappear from the story as they are children, others, like Ryder and Banks, grow up with memories of their childhood into adults obsessed with those memories themselves.

There is no surprise about all this when we remember what Ishiguro has said about wound: 'When we're talking about things that go wrong fundamentally, at the heart of somebody's life, we are often talking about family and things early on' (Interview, 1995, Jaggi 115). Ishiguro himself said the same thing about *The Unconsoled* in another interview: 'this book [*The Unconsoled*] is about somebody for whom it is too late to mend something that was wrong in his family. His parents have a very unhappy marriage' (Interview, 2003, Gallix, Guignery, and Veyret 7). The wound Christopher Banks carries around with him in *When We Were Orphans* is also about his family—his parents' disappearances. The wound that Etsuko in *A Pale View of Hills* alludes to only occasionally as her own concerns a family matter, that is, the loss of her parents (and fiancé) in the war and then of one of her daughters for suicide.

We are going to focus on the repetition and representation of wounds in two of Ishiguro's novels: first *A Pale View of Hills* and then *The Unconsoled*.

Wounds in *A Pale View of Hills*

Etsuko, the narrator of *A Pale View of Hills*, avoids going into some details of her past while telling us about something else in much detail. What she evades is obvious from the

beginning of her narration, since she is articulate about her reluctance to go into too much detail of the past of her elder daughter:

For recent years she [Niki, Etsuko's younger daughter] has taken it upon herself to admire certain aspects of my past, and she had come prepared to tell me things were no different now, that I should have no regrets for those choices I once made. In short, to reassure me I was not responsible for Keiko's death.

I have no great wish to dwell on Keiko now, it brings me little comfort. I only mention her here because those were the circumstances around Niki's visit this April, and because it was during that visit I remembered Sachiko again after all this time' (Pale View 11; italics added).

Indeed, every time she makes reference to her past linked in one way or another to Keiko and her Japanese husband, Jiro, in her narratives she does so with a digression, suggested and followed by some kind of digressive marker (which I have italicised in the following) to it:

Jiro worked hard to do his part for the family and he expected me to do mine; in his own terms, he was a dutiful husband. And indeed, for the seven years he knew his daughter, he was a good father to her. Whatever else I convinced myself of during those final days, I never pretended Keiko would not miss him.

But 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. (Pale View 91)

Both [Keiko and Niki] had fierce tempers, both were possessive; if they became upset, they would not like other children forget their anger quickly, but would remain moody for most of the day. And yet, one has become a happy, confident

young woman—I have every hope for Niki’s future—while the other, after becoming increasingly miserable, took her own life. I do not find it as easy as my husband [Mr Sheringham] did to put the blame on Nature, or else on Jiro. *However, such things are in the past now, and there is little to be gained in going over them here. (Pale View 94)*

I can see now, with hindsight, how typical this was of the way Jiro faced any potentially awkward confrontation. Had he not, years later, faced another crisis in much the same manner, it may be that I would never have left Nagasaki. *However, that is by the way. (Pale View 126)*

Indeed, exclusively through these digressions, which amount to four times in the whole of her narrative, she reveals some part of the period deeply repressed in her storyline.

Her digressions suggest the extent to which she wants to avoid the topic of Keiko in her narrative, though it appears what drives her into telling is obviously a sense of guilt towards Keiko which afflicts the narrator incessantly. In fact, it is a story of a mother tormented by a sense of guilt regarding ‘those choices’ she once made, especially her responsibility ‘for Keiko’s death’ (*Pale View 11*). Keiko, the protagonist’s elder daughter, actually killed herself in the apartment in Manchester, and she is the one Etsuko brought from Nagasaki to England after, apparently, divorcing her Japanese husband Jiro, who ‘was a good father to’ Keiko (*Pale View 91*). Indeed, the narrator Etsuko admits that ‘whatever else I convinced myself of during those final days, I never pretended Keiko would not miss’ her Japanese father (91). Keiko’s suicide therefore carries two implications: first, it was attributable to the psychological wound inflicted on Keiko by her separation from her father, whom she liked; secondly, it makes her mother’s guilt-ridden wound doubly painful, since not merely did she ignore the daughter’s tender will in the past, but that decision of hers consequently led to

Keiko's suicide. Etsuko's feeling of remorse for her lack of foresight regarding the outcome of her row with Keiko—articulated thus: 'But then I never imagined she could so quickly vanish beyond my reach' (*Pale View* 88)—constantly brings her imagination back to the dreadful picture of her dead daughter hanging in the room:

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 the shock—was to wonder how long she had been there like that before they had found her. [. . .] 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. (*Pale View* 54; italics added).

This confessional passage illustrates the way a wound is inflicted and then metamorphosed into the familiar thick scab one finds oneself obsessively scratching at.

Etsuko's wound, however, dates farther back in her past. Just as her daughter received wound when she was separated from her father, Etsuko, too, lost her parents in the war. Although she never goes into any detail of her days before and during the war, she once recalls the conversation she had with Ogata-San. According to him, for the first few days after she came to stay with the Ogatas, the young Etsuko 'used to play [violin] in the dead of night and wake up the house' (*Pale View* 57). Highly embarrassed, Etsuko asks Ogata-san:

'What was I like in those days, Father? Was I like a mad person?'

'You were very shocked, which was only to be expected. We were all shocked, those of us who were left. Now, Etsuko, let's forget these things. I'm sorry I ever brought up the matter' (*Pale View* 58)

Like many other Japanese people who lived in the war, Etsuko lost her parents and fiancé, too. Although she never dwells on their loss in her narrative, she lets herself mention it every now and then. At one time when she visits Mrs Fujiwara's noodle shop in the Nakagawa district, she confesses her mixed feelings about her hometown:

In those days, returning to the Nakagawa district still provoked in me mixed emotions of sadness and pleasure. It is a hilly area, and climbing again those steep narrow streets between the clusters of houses never failed to fill me with a deep sense of loss. Though not a place I visited on casual impulse, I was unable to stay away for long' (*Pale View* 23).

Strolling along the streets in the area reminds her of the days she passed with her parents—before the war. At another time when Etsuko visits Mrs Fujiwara again, their conversation moves on to the latter's son who has lost and still mourns his fiancée, Michiko, and then to Etsuko's deceased fiancé, Nakamura-San:

'But that's all in the past now,' said Mrs Fujiwara. 'We've all had to put things behind us. You too, Etsuko, I remember you were very heartbroken once. But you managed to carry on'.

'Yes, but I was fortunate. Ogata-San was very kind to me in those days. I don't know what would have become of me otherwise'.

'Yes, he was very kind to you. And of course, that's how you met your husband. But you deserved to be fortunate.'

'I really don't know where I'd be today if Ogata-San hadn't taken me in. But I can understand how difficult it must be—for your son, I mean. *Even me I still think about Nakamura-San sometimes. I can't help it. Sometimes I wake up and forget. I think I'm still back here, here in Nakagawa . . .*' (*Pale View* 76)

Part of her still remains in Nakagawa, a Nakagawa still intact before the war broke. Part of her wants to remain in that world that exists only in her memory. Mourning the loss of people important to one is ubiquitous stories immediately after the war. Sachiko, a woman whom Etsuko met in those days, lost her husband, too, for the war.

But Etsuko's conversation with Mrs Fujiwara is replete not only with nostalgic feelings but with alarming presentiment as well. As if predicting the future of Keiko, who was then carried in Etsuko's womb, Mrs Fujiwara refers over and over again to Etsuko's appearance that looks 'miserable' or 'unhappy':

'But I meant you looked a little—*miserable*'

'*Miserable?* I certainly don't feel it. I'm just a little tired, but otherwise I've never been happier.'

'That's good. You must keep your mind on happy things now. Your child. And the future'.

'Yes, I will. Thinking about the child cheers me up'.

'Good', she nodded, still keeping her gaze on me. '*Your attitude makes all the difference. A mother can take all the physical care she likes, she needs a positive attitude to bring up a child*' (*Pale View* 24-25; italics added)

When they meet again, Mrs Fujiwara returns to the same feature she cannot fail to identify in Etsuko's looks:

Mrs Fujiwara looked at me closely for a moment. Then she said: 'You've everything to look forward to now, Etsuko. What are you so *unhappy* about?'

'*Unhappy?* But I'm not unhappy in the least'.

She continued to look at me, and I laughed nervously.

'Once the child comes', she said, 'you'll be delighted, believe me. And *you'll make a splendid mother*, Etsuko'.

‘I hope so’.

‘Of course you will’.

‘Yes’. I looked up and smiled. (*Pale View* 77-78; italics added)

Despite Etsuko being the narrator, she is very discreet about displaying her emotion. What she shows to the reader is the conversation she had with people. Her true feelings on particular moments are thus unknown and only guessed at. But the reader gradually figures out the link between Etsuko as a mother and her story about Sachiko and the latter’s daughter. Indeed, what she will not reveal about herself comes to be exposed through her story of Sachiko, whom she met in Nagasaki in those days.

A number of critics and scholars, and even the author Ishiguro himself, have already referred to the parallelism between Etsuko and Sachiko, on one hand, and Keiko and Mariko, on the other. Both the mothers meet foreigners (British and American) then make decisions to leave Japan with their daughters to live in foreign countries. Both the daughters withdraw themselves from their mothers as well as their new fathers (Mr Sheringham and Frank). The lines in their conversations often appear to be parallel with one another. Just as Sachiko confesses to Etsuko towards the end of the narrative that she knows the difficulty of moving to America—‘I realize we may never see America [. . .] And even if we did, I know how difficult things will be. Did you think I never knew that?’ (*Pale View* 170); ‘Do you think I imagine for one moment that I’m a good mother to her [Mariko]?’ (*Pale View* 171)—Etsuko, too, admits to Niki, her daughter from her marriage to Mr Sheringham, thus: ‘But you see, Niki, I knew all along. I knew all along she [Keiko] wouldn’t be happy over here. But I decided to bring her just the same’ (*Pale View* 176).

One of the most typical parallelisms of theirs is Etsuko’s projection of Keiko onto Mariko. A case in point is the oft-quoted riverside scene where at first Etsuko is apparently trying to reassure Sachiko’s sulky daughter about her future overseas:

‘What’s the matter with you?’ I said. ‘Why are you sitting here like this?’

The insects were clustering around the lantern. I put it down in front of me, and *the child’s* face became more sharply illuminated. After a long silence, she said: ‘I don’t want to go away. I don’t want to go away tomorrow.

I gave a sigh. ‘But *you’ll* like it. Everyone’s a little frightened of new things. *You’ll* like it over there’.

‘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’, I said, angrily. We stared at each other for a moment, then she looked back down at her hands.

‘*You* mustn’t speak like that’, I said, more calmly. ‘He’s very fond of *you*, and he’ll be just like a new father. Everything will turn out well, *I promise*’.

The child said nothing. I sighed again.

‘In any case’, I went on, ‘if *you* don’t like it over there, *we* can always come back’.

This time she looked up at me questioningly.

‘Yes, *I promise*’, I said. ‘If *you* don’t like it over there, *we’ll* come straight back. But *we* have to try it and see if *we* like it there. I’m sure *we* will’. (*Pale View* 172-173; italics added)

Etsuko’s sudden change of pronouns from ‘you’ to ‘we’, as well as her repetition of ‘we’ and ‘I promise’, together with no mention of the girl’s name ‘Mariko’ but ‘she’ and ‘the child’ in this conversation, hints subtly that there the narrator here is actually reconstructing a conversation she must have had later with her own daughter Keiko. It turns out that Keiko neither liked England nor her new English father, only to seclude herself from the rest of her family ending up killing herself in the solitary apartment in Manchester. Although we are given no information about what happened to Mariko, numerous descriptions of the girl in the

narrative prompt us to speculate that she must have taken the same path in the end as Keiko did. The rest of the conversation above between Etsuko and Keiko/Mariko goes on like this:

This time she looked up at me questioningly.

‘Yes, I promise’, I said. ‘If you don’t like it over there, we’ll come straight back. But we have to try it and see if we like it there. I’m sure we will’.

The little girl was watching me closely. ‘Why are you holding that?’ she asked.

‘This? It just caught around my sandal, that’s all’.

‘Why are you holding it?’

‘I told you. It caught around my foot. What’s wrong with you?’ I gave a short laugh. ‘Why are you looking at me like that? I’m not going to hurt you’ (*Pale View* 173)

What Etsuko holds here is unknown to the reader, but what it is seems obvious because of the refrain of a similar line uttered earlier on by Mariko in the same place: ‘Why have you got the rope?’ (*Pale View* 84). So a connection is being implied here between the rope Etsuko is holding and the fact that Keiko hang herself in her room in Manchester. It is true that Keiko killed herself in the room using a rope but Etsuko’s sense of guilt for bringing her daughter to England connects her daughter’s death and her own complicity in it—her guilty feeling helps produce the image of the rope in her hand in her conversation with Mariko/Keiko.

In Etsuko’s narrative, Mariko is repeatedly described as a girl constantly *hurt*. Mariko’s self-abusive acts and her resultant physical wounds appear persistently. When Etsuko meets Mariko for the first time on the river bank, Etsuko mistakes a smudge of mud on Mariko’s face for ‘a cut’ (*Pale View* 15) or ‘a wound’ (16), then calls out to Sachiko who is leaving for the city centre for some unmentioned errand. Despite Etsuko’s expressing her concern about Mariko’s situation—Etsuko assumes that the ‘wound’ on Mariko’s face derives from some

fighting with other children—Sachiko shows no interest in the matter, thanking Etsuko for her concern about her daughter. In another scene, when Sachiko leaves her daughter in the hand of Etsuko to complete some private affairs with her American boyfriend, Frank, Etsuko sees Mariko catching a big grotesque spider in the darkest corner of a room in the old house and then moving it up to her little mouth, scaring Etsuko off. In the next moment Mariko is gone. Etsuko and Sachiko later finds Mariko lying by herself on the grass near the river bank. Sachiko says ‘the cut’s nothing’ (*Pale View* 42), but there is no question Sachiko and Etsuko are witnessing a wound on Mariko’s body this time: ‘The blood was coming from a *wound* on the inside of her thigh’ (*Pale View* 41; italics added). Mariko is, furthermore, described here as ‘a fragile, but senseless doll’. And as if deprived of life, the girl’s eyes ‘move’ and ‘stare up at us with a peculiar blankness’ (41). According to Sachiko, her daughter ‘was climbing a tree and fell’ and then ‘got her cut’ (42). This episode echoes other relevant incidents occurring in Nagasaki then that Etsuko herself mentions at some points of her narrative about one child after another being found dead hanging from the tree with a rope around its neck.

The fact that Etsuko mistakenly took the smear of mud on Mariko’s face for a wound has multiple implications. Indeed, the connection between mud and wound has more dire intimations than it may appear at first. *A Pale View of Hills* is abound in descriptions of mud: ‘the muddy ground’ (21, 39, 167); ‘the muddy furrows’ (37); ‘the muddy slope’ (166). And all these descriptions are offered in connection with Mariko or Sachiko: the ground and slope of the riverbank where Etsuko meets Mariko for the first time; the ground under the veranda to Sachiko’s old house; the vast expanse of ground towards the river. The mud ground, in short, links Mariko’s house to the river. The mud functions to symbolise the girl’s emotional scars stemming from neglect on her mother’s part leading to the act of self-abuse and, by metaphorical extension, her future death (as accomplished by her double, Keiko). True to form Mariko sees her own mother drowning the little girl’s favourite kittens in the river:

[Sachiko] put the kitten into the water and held it there. She remained like that for some moments, staring into the water, both hands beneath the surface. She was wearing a casual summer kimono, and the corners of each sleeve touched the water.

Then for the first time, without taking her hands from the water, Sachiko threw a glance over her shoulder towards her daughter. Instinctively, I followed her glance, and for one brief moment the two of us were both staring back up at Mariko. The little girl was standing at the top of the slope, watching with the same blank expression. On seeing her mother's face turn to her, she moved her head very slightly; then she remained quite still, her hands behind her back. (*Pale View* 167)

The kittens struggle to be freed from Sachiko's grasp, scratching her on the wrists. The riverside is very wet and muddy. Indeed, Sachiko 'held up her wrists to show [Etsuko] the scratch-marks' (167) and complains that 'this water's so dirty', brushing 'the mud' off her knees (168). Muds are resonant with wounds beside the river. Mariko's attachment to her kittens which produces wounds on Sachiko's wrists shows the extent of her yearning for the missing protection by her mother, Sachiko, who is drowning the kittens.

Etsuko herself tries to protect her own daughter, Keiko, when the latter decides to leave home. But it turns out to be beyond her control. And it is too late, for Keiko is doomed from the moment she was forced away from her Japanese father to land in an unknown country with her mother. The parallelism between Sachiko and Etsuko incites us to put Sachiko's failure to protect Mariko *back* into the context of Etsuko's sense of guilt towards Keiko. When at one time Mariko rushes out of the house after a row with her mother about Frank, Etsuko starts to worry about the girl, saying to Sachiko:

'Should we go and look for her now?' I said.

‘No’, Sachiko said, still looking out. ‘She’ll be back soon. Let her stay out if that’s what she wants’.

This brief exchange between two mothers is immediately followed by a paragraph where the narrator Etsuko reminisces about the period her own daughter left home.

I feel only regret now for those attitudes I displayed towards Keiko. In this country, after all, it is not unexpected that a young woman of that age should wish to leave home. All I succeeded in doing, it would seem, was to ensure that when she finally left—now almost six years ago—she did so *severing* all her ties with me. But then I never imagined she could so quickly vanish beyond my reach; all I saw was that my daughter, unhappy as she was at home, would find the world outside too much for her. It was for her own *protection* I opposed her so vehemently. (*Pale View* 88; italics added)

The narrator’s sense of guilt resounds on her narrative. The fact that Keiko hangs herself in the flat in Manchester turns her mother’s mind many years into the past to the possible cause of her death, the narrator’s own choices and decisions that have been referred to both at the beginning and at the end of the story: ‘I should have no regrets for those choices I once made’ (11); ‘But I decided to bring her just the same’ (176).

Fumio Yoshioka notes ‘the perpetual absence of fathers’ (83) in *A Pale View of Hills* and argues that all the woman characters are ‘bound together by the same chain of plight’:

The mothers first suffer: Sachiko ‘never saw a great deal of [her] father, [who] was abroad much of the time, in Europe and America’; and Etsuko became *fatherless* when the ‘bomb’ exploded over Nagasaki. Then, their second ordeal, *loss of a husband*, brings about to their daughters the same tragedy as they had to endure as a small girl: *the victims of fatherlessness* now turn themselves into perpetrators, and thereby the plight of a broken family is *recycled from mother to daughter*,

from one generation to another. [. . .] The mothers moan in a quandary between pursuit of happiness and qualms of conscience, but their daughters give an unheard shriek under the burden of their selfishness and irresponsibility. (83-84; italics added)

The ‘perpetual absence of fathers’, as well as the perennial restlessness of mothers in ‘a quandary between pursuit of happiness and qualms of conscience’, is, as Yoshioka acutely points out, ‘recycled’ from mothers to daughters. And in those relationships, daughters tend to be helpless and depend entirely on the decisions and choices their mothers make. What the daughters can do is just to terminate the vicious cycle by depriving themselves of their own lives—metaphorically (Mariko) and literally (Keiko)—when they crash under the burden of their own wound inflicted by their mothers.

Of course, we should not forget the background in which this story unfolds. The wound overshadowing the characters of *A Pale View of Hills* may derive from some of the emotional experiences they went through during the war, as Shigeatsu Nosaki notes in his article (66-68). Although Ishiguro himself repeatedly says that he did not write about history or culture about Japan in his early so-called Japanese novels, the relationship between his characters’ emotional trauma and the atomic bomb actually looms large. Indeed, Ishiguro himself, inadvertently, admits its relevance in the essay cited previously: ‘Before long, however, I found the atomic bomb which fell on that city figuring larger and larger in everything I wrote. The more I tried to imagine the lives of the people of Nagasaki around the time of my birth, the harder it became to believe the bomb would not have cast a heavy shadow over them’ (‘Bomb Culture’ 9).

Nonetheless, it would be improper to attribute all the wounds in this novel to the psychological shock or the aftermath of the war, for as we have seen in the opening part of this chapter, a first novel has a tendency of embracing one big theme significant and

substantial to the writer, which is, in Ishiguro's case, wound. Indeed, the same subject matter reappears in another more important novel, *The Unconsoled*.

Wounds in *The Unconsoled*

After an interval of thirteen years, the wound theme reappears in *The Unconsoled*.³¹

While *A Pale View of Hills* is narrated from a mother's point of view, *The Unconsoled* is narrated from several perspectives, though the narrator himself is of middle age: perspectives of a boy, of a young man, of a father, and of an old man. The protagonist of *The Unconsoled*, Ryder, has been obsessed with his parents who had continual rows with each other even in the presence of their son. Now a world-known pianist Ryder still expects his parents to come to see his performance, while he himself is constantly absent from his home where Sophie and Boris are waiting for his return.

The Unconsoled is quite similar to *A Pale View of Hills* in several ways. First of all, some important characters function as projected figures of the protagonist. We have seen Etsuko projecting part of her past onto the pair of mother and daughter she met in the past. The same strategy is employed in *The Unconsoled*, according to Ishiguro, albeit in a much larger and more complex scale. The protagonist's emotional projection is explained by Ishiguro in connection with *The Unconsoled*:

I was using dream as a model. So this is a biography of a person, but instead of using memory and flashback, you have him wandering about in this dream world where he bumps into earlier, or later, versions of himself. They are to some extent other people, but he gives a reading of their life in such a way that they're

³¹ The same theme is to be addressed by *When We Were Orphans*, too, which will be dealt with in the next chapter.

memories of how his own childhood was, or projections of how he fears he might end up. I don't want to say literally that Stephan is Ryder when he was young, and Boris was Ryder as a kid, but I wanted to create a world where you could get all these different points in his life. Essentially, you're only dealing with one person. For me, this method gives me a lot of freedom. (Interview, 1995, Jaggi 114)

Elsewhere he uses the term 'appropriation' for a similar elucidation:

It's like in a dream when you use—when you might see somebody—your milkman, whoever, your grocer, somebody who pops up in your dream but actually that person is standing for somebody much more important from your past. In other words, you are *appropriating* people you run into in the present to stand for somebody deeper in your psyche, in your past, in your personal history. That's partly what's happening here. These people that he runs into, they do exist in their own right, in this city, to some extent, but he's using them, in this kind of strange way, to tell you the story, about his own life, so you really learn about him, and his parents and his childhood and indeed what he fears what he might become.

(Interview, 1995, Oliva 123; italics added)

In more simple terms: 'everything is an expression of his past and his fears for the future' (Interview, 1998, Krider 132). Boris, Stephan, Leo are all some distinct 'versions' (Interview, 1995, Wachtel 31) or 'echoes' (Interview, 2000, Feeney) of Ryder at some key stages in his life. 'In this way, you would actually get a picture, if not the literal history of a person's life, then at least the big emotional history. All the things that he fears and that he regrets and he remembers' (Interview, 2000, Feeney). Appropriation is Ishiguro's own way of describing a narrator's whole life whose emotional dimensions are mirrored in other people he encounters.

Another part of *The Unconsoled* that has similarity to *A Pale View of Hills* is the fact that the main characters have been tormented by certain psychological wounds. Indeed, it

could be said that their wounds cause the projections and appropriation that are going on in each narrative. Etsuko, instead of dwelling on Keiko in her narrative, recalls Sachiko and Mariko from her past, and by reminiscing them, she is actually talking about her relationship with Keiko as well as delving into the depth of her wound and Keiko's. In much the same way, other apparently minor yet thematically crucial characters like Fiona Roberts, Ryder's childhood friend, and Geoffrey Saunders, his friend from school, appear so suddenly in Ryder's narrative in *The Unconsoled*, as we will see, that their utterance is linked in Ryder's mind to his wound. As long as he is preoccupied with his wound, the people he comes across represent others who have been connected to the wound. In other words, all this projection or appropriation is out there in the novel to show the protagonist's psychological struggle with his own emotional wound. And this wound—this is another point that links *The Unconsoled* to *A Pale View of Hills*—can be traced back many years into the past to the protagonists' relationship with their parents.

What then does Ryder do with his wound? Ishiguro explains thus:

this book is about somebody for whom it is too late to mend something that was wrong in his family. His parents have a very unhappy marriage. As a boy, he feels in some sense responsible for making this marriage happier, for stopping all this suffering. He is somebody who later on in his life becomes a great pianist because somewhere he thinks that by some strange logic, if he becomes a good enough pianist, perhaps the greatest pianist in the world, somehow his parents will start to love each other. But of course in reality it is much too late for that. His parents have long ago died or something. But this is the reason why he continues, the reason why the impetus is still there, the artist is still left. So that is what he does with his life. Because somewhere, in a[n] almost illogical, irrational way, that is a motivating force. [. . .] In a sense that is why Ryder is unconsoled. He can never

quite fulfil what he wishes to fulfil with his music. It will never mend things.

(Interview, 2003, Gallix, Guignery, and Veyret 7)

Ishiguro's explanation above implies that the mental wound inflicted on Ryder by the broken relationship between his parents drove him to train his piano skill to the extent that by that skill he had confidence in repairing their relationship. In other words, Ryder's idealism concerning his mission to save cities across the globe by his piano performance has long been nourished by his very private agenda to caress his emotional wound from his childhood. The wound transpiring after the shattering of his childhood bubble world creates his idealism for grand contribution to humanity, though the idealism contains in itself the oozing wound from the childhood. That is why, for Ryder, his grand idealism of making contribution to humanity and his private agenda of attempting a reconciliation between his parents is one and the same thing. But the sameness of these two contrasting agendas means that it is impossible for Ryder to accomplish each of them. Ironically, the cause-and-effect structure of a wound producing strong idealism demands that idealism itself is destined to doom, simply because the wound is never to be fixed.

Let us now look into the formation of people's wounds in *The Unconsoled* and Ryder's in particular. Part of his parents' unhappy marriage is referred only briefly to at the end of the opening chapter of *The Unconsoled*. While Ryder is looking around the room in the hotel he has just checked in, the recognition gradually dawns on him that it is the same room as the one in his aunt's house where he and his parents stayed when he was little (*Unconsoled* 16-17). In Ryder's memory of this room, his parents' row heard from downstairs is described as something going on in the background, while up in front is the world of his plastic soldiers and his organisation of battles on the green floor mat. But as Ryder calls that imaginative world of his own 'my old childhood sanctuary' in retrospect (17), it is obvious that his apparent complete absorption in his imaginary world is a proof that it is the only sanctuary

world for him to escape into from the reality of his parents' unhappy marriage. Ryder can, or rather has to, be absorbed in his own imaginative world because it is the only world to him in which he can do what he cannot in the real world of the parental discord. It is a way of escapism to him, of course, but essential in handling his situation beyond his control.

There is another sanctuary place for Ryder to hide himself in. That is the car his parents owned in his childhood, the old car that Ryder reencounters at a parking lot when he arrives with Sophie and Boris at the Karwinsky Gallery. Leaving Sophie and Boris standing alone, Ryder gets into the car where he recalls the day he and his parents went on a trip across the country to look for a second-hand bicycle for him. He remembers that at one time they visited an old woman who had advertised her late husband's bicycle in the newspaper. She invited them in to have a cup of tea with her with much affection because 'it had dawned on [little Ryder] that to this old woman my parents and I represented an ideal of family happiness' (*Unconsoled* 264). This realisation made Ryder feel restless and embarrassed:

It was not that I had feared my parents would fail to keep up their usual show—it was inconceivable they would have started even the most sanitised version of one of their rows. But I had become convinced that at any second some sign, perhaps even some smell, would cause the old woman to realise the enormity of her error, and I had watched with dread for the moment she would suddenly freeze in horror before us. (*Unconsoled* 264)

Then again this episode reminds him further of how he often hid himself inside the car, out of the range of the voices of rows between his parents heard from inside the house. One afternoon:

I had come out to the car, to the *sanctuary* of this rear seat, while the troubles had raged on inside the house. On that afternoon, I had lain across the seat on my back, the top of my head squeezed under the arm-rest. From this vantage point, all I had

been able to see from the windows had been the rain streaming down the glass. At that moment my profound wish had been that I would be allowed just to go on lying there undisturbed, hour after hour. But experience had taught me my father would at some stage emerge from the house, that he would walk past the car, go down to the gate and out into the lane, and so I had lain there for a long time, listening intently through the rain for the rattle of the back door latch. *When at last the sound had come, I had sprung up and begun to play. I had mimicked an exciting tussle over a dropped pistol in such a way as to make clear I was far too absorbed to notice anything.* Only when I had heard the wet tread of his feet go right to the end of the drive had I dared to stop. Then, quickly kneeling up on the seat, I had peered cautiously out of the back windscreen in time to see my father's raincoated figure, pausing by the gate, hunching slightly as he opened his umbrella. The next moment he had stepped purposely into the lane and out of view.

(Unconsoled 264-65; italics added)

Inside the car did he feel so secure in imagination that he even wished to 'be allowed just to go on lying there undisturbed, hour after hour', just like Mariko whom two mothers find more than once lying alone in the mud in the riverside. Children are trying to protect themselves, presumably unconsciously, from their parents' world in which decisions disregarding children's wish tend to be made and where rows between adults rage on whether children are in the presence or not. And the most pathetic part of the paragraph above is Ryder's pretence of not noticing his parents' quarrel by busying himself in a battle with his imaginary enemy while his father walked past the car of his retreat.

The story of a child pretending to be ignorant of his parents' troubles but at the same time being fully informed of what is going on is shared by Ryder's school friend, Geoffrey Saunders, too, whom the protagonist encounters on a street in this unnamed city he now stays

in. Saunders reminds Ryder of the story the former related when both were still in school. Saunders says he told the story to Ryder to console him, and now attempts to retell the same story about a pathetic fantasy he created on his family's trip to some beach. The following is a long quotation but deserves a second reading:

And I [Saunders] started telling you [Ryder] about that time when I was *seven or eight*, when we'd gone on one of our family holidays, my parents, my little brother and I. We'd gone to one of those English seaside resorts, Bournemouth, some place like that. Perhaps it was the Isle of Wight. The weather was fine and all that, but you know, *something wasn't right, we just weren't getting on*. Common enough on family holidays, of course, but I didn't know that then, I was *only seven or eight*. Anyway *it just wasn't working out* and one afternoon Father just stormed off. I mean just out of the blue. We'd been looking at something on the seafront and my mother was in the middle of pointing out something to us and suddenly, off he went. Didn't shout or anything, just walked off. We didn't know what to do, so we just started following him, Mother, little Christopher and I, we followed him. Not close up, always thirty yards or so behind, just enough so we could still see him. And Father kept walking. All along the seafront, up the path with the cliffs, past the beach huts and all the people sunbathing. Then he went towards the town, past the tennis courts and through the shopping areas. We must have followed him for over an hour. And after a while we started to make a sort of game of it. We'd say: 'Look, he's not angry any more. He's just playing about!' Or we'd say: 'Look, he's got his head like that on purpose. Look at that!' and laugh and laugh. And if you looked carefully, you *could believe* he was doing a funny walk. Christopher, he was only little, I told him that, I told him Father was doing the walk just to be funny and Christopher laughed and laughed, like it was all a great game. And

Mother too, she was laughing, saying: ‘Oh your father, boys!’ and laughing some more. And we kept on walking like that, and *I was the only one*, you see, even though I was *only seven or eight*, *I was the only one who knew* Father wasn’t really doing it for a joke. That he hadn’t got over it at all and was perhaps getting angrier and angrier because we were following him. Because perhaps he wanted to sit down on a bench or go into a café somewhere, but couldn’t because of us. You remember all this? I told it all to you that day. And I looked at Mother at one point because I wanted it all to stop, and that was when I realised. I realised she’d *convinced* herself, *convinced* herself utterly that Father was doing it all for fun. And little Christopher, he was all the time wanting to run up. You know, run right up behind Father. And *I had to keep making excuses*, laughing all the time, saying: ‘No, that’s not allowed. That’s not part of the game. We’ve got to keep a long way back or it won’t work.’ But Mother, you see, she was saying: ‘Oh yes! Why don’t you go and pull his shirt and see if you can get back before he catches you!’ And I *had to keep saying*, because *I was the only one*, you realise, *I was the only one*, I *had to keep saying*: ‘No, no, let’s wait. Stay back, stay back. (*Unconsoled* 437-39; italics added)

The young Geoffrey Saunders is trying to *pretend* not to be aware of his father’s emotion, despite the fact that he knows that it’s only him who knows what is really going on in his father’s mind. He gets complicit in making his father’s hurried walk some kind of joke on his father’s part, though he repeatedly claims that he knows that is not true. And the point he makes again and again is the fact that he is only ‘seven or eight’ at that time, and that for all he was young he was compelled to be in complicity with his mother’s laughing and keep his younger brother, Christopher, in ignorance from the knowledge of the emotional crevice widening between his parents. As we have seen the working of fantasies in Ishiguro’s novels

in Chapter 13, we should note that Saunders is creating the fantasy of a joke being played by his father in front in order to protect the bubble world of his younger brother, possibly as well as his own.

But this kind of absorption in a fantasy game usually demands solitariness and loneliness on children's part. Ryder's preference for the solitary space instead of getting himself within shouting distance of his parents is shown by what he calls 'training sessions' to get himself accustomed to being on his own. The extent of Ryder's emotional struggle is shown by his remark that he constantly practices being 'lonely'. Ryder recalls some conversation he had with Fiona Roberts when they were kids, in which Fiona would not understand Ryder's preference for loneliness:

'You're just being silly again. No one likes being lonely. *I'm* going to have a big family. Five children at least. And I'm going to cook them a lovely supper every evening'. Then, when I did not respond, she had said again: 'You're just being silly. No one likes being on their own'.

'I do. I like it'.

'How can you *like* being lonely?'

'I do. I just do'.

In fact, I had felt some conviction in making this assertion. For by that afternoon it had already been several months since I had commenced my 'training sessions'; indeed, that particular obsession had probably reached its peak just around that time. (*Unconsoled* 171; italics added)

Ryder's 'training sessions' started 'unplanned' one day. '[A]bsorbed in some fantasy, climbing in and out of a dried-out ditch running between a row of poplars and a field—when I had suddenly felt a sense of panic and a need for the company of my parents'. But precisely at that moment:

for some reason—perhaps I had quickly associated the sensation with immaturity—I had forced myself to delay my departure. There had not been any question in my mind that I would, very soon, start to run across the field. It was simply a matter of holding back that moment with an effort of will for several more seconds. The strange mixture of fear and exhilaration I had experienced as I had stood there transfixed in the dried-out ditch was one that I was to come to know well in the weeks that followed. For within days, my ‘training sessions’ had become a regular and important feature of my life. (*Unconsoled* 172)

That he deliberately delays his rush to go home to his parents, despite the mounting panic assaulting him at the moment, is suggestive enough to show that he is afraid of seeing as well as hearing their rows which he has to face once he goes in. At the same time, this obsession of Ryder’s with being alone or lonely is highly linked to the condition of his parents’ marriage. That is why Fiona said what she did to Ryder in their conversation (*Unconsoled* 172), though we don’t get any inkling of what Fiona is referring to, because at that point their conversation is interrupted by her mother (*Unconsoled* 173). What is being described and referred to by Fiona’s mother is metaphorically Ryder’s childhood bubble—a bubble where a child should be allowed to be protected from the harsh reality of the adult world.

Despite such protection, wound is inflicted on children. Children is so vulnerable to wound inflicted by their parents that they think in such a strange way that they are responsible for the discord between their parents. Such a feeling of responsibility is being felt by a young pianist named Stephan, the son of the hotel manager, Hoffman. Stephan tells Ryder how his parents suddenly stopped talking to each other when he was twelve years old, when he restarted to practice playing the piano, after a blank of two years—two years had passed since he stopped going to piano lessons at Mrs Tilkowski’s. But somehow he noticed he could not play piano as well as he used to. Then ‘something suddenly dawned on’ him: ‘I mean, that’s

when I realised. That my mother and father had barely spoken to each other for months. [. . .] I can tell you, Mr Ryder, it was a very *strange* feeling, that *realisation* coming over me. And almost at the same time this terrible other thing occurred to me—that this change must have dated back to when I'd lost Mrs Tilkowski' (*Unconsoled* 73; italics added). This led to Stephan's obsession with his piano performance. Only by his own performance does he believe he can make his parents reconciled to each other. Stephan is, in other words, undergoing the same type of expectation from his parents as Ryder has been.

Silence invades not only the relationship between husband and wife but also the one between father and daughter. At his first meeting with Ryder, Gustav admits that he has not been in speaking terms with his daughter for a very long time—since Sophie was 'eight or nine' (*Unconsoled* 82). According to Gustav's recollection, he decided not to speak to his daughter just for a few days, and indeed during that time he would not talk or, when spoken, would not reply to Sophie for no particular reason: 'I maintained my silence, sir, I *maintained* it completely. [. . .] But it was what I had *decided* and I had to be *firm*' (*Unconsoled* 82; italics added). However, when three days had passed and then Gustav tried to talk to his daughter, the latter refused to get into any conversation with him. Since that day on they have not spoken directly to each other: 'I admit, sir', says Gustav, 'I didn't at that stage imagine the thing going on for as long as it has' (83). Then when she was 'eleven' another incident happened. For several weeks Sophie's little hamster, Ulrich, had been missing and then one day Sophie found him dead in her 'little gift box' (84); she had forgotten having left him there in the box. Although Gustav 'became aware that in the living room Sophie was sobbing uncontrollably', he failed to go into the room to console his daughter:

I remained in the bedroom, my ear close to the door, the concert playing behind me. I did of course think several times I'd go through to her, but then *the longer I stood there at the door, the more odd it seemed that I should suddenly burst in*. You see,

sir, it wasn't as though she was sobbing so loudly. For a little while, I even sat down again, tried to *pretend* to myself I'd never heard her. But of course it just tore me up inside to hear her sob like that and I soon found myself standing at the door again, stooped over, trying to listen to Sophie over the sound of the concert. *If she calls for me, I told myself, if she knocks or calls for me, then I'll go in.* That's what I *decided*. If she shouts: 'Papa!' then I'll go in, I'll explain I hadn't heard her before because of the music. I waited, but she neither called me nor knocked.

(*Unconsoled* 84; italics added)

And the same night Gustav 'realised that there was no doubting it, [. . .] Sophie *knew* I'd been listening. And what was more, she wasn't resenting me for it' (85; italics added). Then they went on maintaining the silence between themselves. The curiously obstinate decision Gustav was making not to enter unless summoned by his daughter while standing right in front of the door recalls the uncompromising professionalism of Stevens the butler as well as Stevens's cowardice in the face of sharing emotions with then Miss Kenton. Actually, a similar scene from *The Remains of the Day* immediately comes to our mind—Stevens hovering about in front of the door of Miss Kenton's room, undecided whether he should go in to console her for her loss of her aunt:

I paused out in the corridor, wondering if I should go back, knock and make good my omission. But then it occurred to me that *if I were to do so, I might easily intrude upon her private grief*. Indeed, it was not impossible that Miss Kenton, at that very moment, and only a few feet from me, was actually crying. The thought provoked *a strange feeling* to rise within me, causing me to stand there hovering in the corridor for some moments. (*Remains* 186; italics added)

The feeling of sympathy Stevens is having here towards Miss Kenton is *strange* to him because he is so obsessed with maintaining professionalism in his relationship with her that he

does not want such emotion to creep into their relationship. In other words, Stevens needs some *pretence*. That is why Miss Kenton asks him: ‘Why, Mr Stevens, why, why, why do you always have to *pretend*?’ (Remains 162; italics in original). In the same way Gustav privileges his professionalism over his family matter, causing him to ‘pretend’ to do what he really doesn’t want to. He wants to talk to his daughter, Sophie, but he cannot, because he has to stick to what he *decided* to do, in short, to his own professionalism.

Both Stevens and Gustav have to pretend to be what they are really not, not because they want to but simply because they cannot help doing so. They need some control over their lives. They need to protect themselves from the emotional world that is hard to control; both keep their own extreme versions of professionalism, privileging his professional world over its emotional counterpart. The world of emotion is the only obstacle for them to maintain their professional principles. We hear Stevens and Gustav preaching about their professionalism at the beginning of the two narratives respectively at the expense of shattering their emotional relationship with a woman or a daughter. But the sacrifice is too huge in both cases. The men’s idealism prevents them from showing their natural feelings to those close to themselves. And in Gustav’s case, he wrought wound on his daughter, at the same time shattering her bubble world.

Both Gustav and his daughter, Sophie, want to talk to each other, but their old ‘arrangement’ to maintain silence prevents them from doing so. Therefore, although Gustav notices that there must be something wrong with Sophie, he cannot help her to solve it. So he asks Ryder to do it on his behalf, telling him about some tendency on his daughter’s part: ‘Perhaps it was the way she was brought up, who can say? But it’s always been there. That’s to say, she has this tendency to *let things overwhelm her* sometimes’ (*Unconsoled* 28; italics added). Gustav is not specific about what ‘things’ really are or what he means by saying ‘overwhelm’. But these terms have been familiar to us, because we have already come across

them in Ishiguro's interviews: '*things* seem to catch up on people somewhere after the age of thirty-five, from way back in their past' (Interview, 1995, Jaggi 115; italics added); 'all this baggage from the past comes in and *overwhelms* them' (Interview, 2000, Shaffer 169; italics added). Thus the reader knows that the *things* can be traced back to Sophie's childhood and that the *things* are now catching up on Sophie 'in [her] early middle age' (*Unconsoled* 32). To be more precise in guessing, the things bedevilling Sophie seem to concern her own father, Gustav, as well as her relationship with Ryder, who Sophie claims is her husband. So when Ryder says to Gustav that 'Sophie's worries, whatever they are, may well relate to family issues [. . .] such problems tend to be very deeply enmeshed' (*Unconsoled* 29), he is right. But he is wrong when he says, 'these things are often too complicated for an outsider' (*Unconsoled* 30), because he is not entirely an outsider—that does not mean that he is Sophie's husband; nobody can say that for sure. All of them are connected to one another on several layers in the narrative but all are bound into 'the whole tangled net of family issues' (*Unconsoled* 29). Such issues lead to the creation of wounds in the members.

The nature of wound is metaphorically analysed in some part of *The Unconsoled*, particularly through the physical wound of Leo Brodsky, a former conductor but now a drunken old man. When Brodsky and Ryder come across a group of mourners at St Peter's Cemetery, Brodsky consoles the widow weeping for the loss of her husband, saying: 'This is a precious time. Come. *Caress your wound now. It will be there for the rest of your life. But caress it now, while it's raw and bleeding—Come*' (*Unconsoled* 372; italics added).

Indeed, Brodsky himself claims that he carries some kind of wound to which he only refers in general terms when meeting Ryder for the first time:

Mr Ryder. I'm very pleased to make your acquaintance at last'.

'How do you do, Mr Brodsky', I said. 'I hope you're well'.

'Oh . . . ' He waved his hand in a vague gesture. 'I can't say I feel well. I have,

you see, a pain’.

‘Oh? A pain?’ Then, when he said nothing, I asked: ‘You mean an emotional pain?’

‘No, no. It’s a wound. I got it many years ago and it’s always given me trouble. Bad pain. Perhaps that’s why I drank so much. If I drink, I don’t feel it’
(*Unconsoled* 308).

Every time Brodsky refers to his wound, he also mentions its pain as well as its incurability (*Unconsoled* 309). Also, even though he thought he could get ‘the measure’ of his own wound, he finds it starts to ‘grow again’ the older he gets (*Unconsoled* 309). And then the conversation between Brodsky and Ryder—specifically when Brodsky asks Ryder if the latter has any wound on him: ‘Mr Ryder, you don’t have a wound?’ (313)—turns to Brodsky’s narcissistic preoccupation with his wound:

‘In Poland, Mr Ryder, when I was a conductor, even then, I never thought the wound would heal. When I conducted my orchestra, I always *touched my wound, caressed it*. Some days I *picked at its edges, even pressed it hard between the fingers*. You realise soon enough when a wound’s not going to heal. The *music*, even when I was a conductor, I knew that’s all it was, just a *consolation*. It helped for a while. *I liked the feeling, pressing the wound, it fascinated me. A good wound, it can do that, it fascinates*. It looks a little different every day. Has it changed? you wonder. Maybe it’s healing at last. You look at it in a mirror, it looks different. But then you *touch* it and you know it’s the same, *your old friend*. You do this year after year, and then you know it’s not going to heal and in the end you get tired of it’ (*Unconsoled* 313; italics added)

The morbid description of how Brodsky has been obsessively poking at the wound all these years demonstrates the sheer amount of his fascination with it. He cannot help feeling,

touching, and worrying it. Even his music cannot heal it, but it is only a consolation to him. This is what Ishiguro explains again and again in his interviews about the caressing of wound. Brodsky's obsessive preoccupation with his own wound reminds us of how Etsuko describes her obsession with the picture of her daughter Keiko 'hanging in her room for days on end' in *A Pale View of Hills*: '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' (*Pale View* 54; italics added).

Brodsky also seeks a consolation in his possible reconciliation with Miss Collins, saying 'My wound's so painful now' (*Unconsoled* 498). However, his divorced wife accuses him of his obsession with the wound:

'Your wound', Miss Collins said quietly. 'Always your wound'. Then her face contorted into ugliness. 'Oh, how I hate you! How I hate you for wasting my life! I shall never, never forgive you! Your wound, your silly little wound! That's your real love, Leo, that wound, the one true love of your life! I know how it will be, even if we tried, even if we managed to build something all over again. The music, too, that would be no different. Even if they'd accepted you tonight, even if you became celebrated in this town, you'd destroy it all, you'd destroy everything, pull it all down around you just as you did before. And all because of that wound. Me, the music, we're neither of us anything more to you than mistresses you seek consolation from. You'll always go back to your one real love. To that wound! And you know what makes me so angry? Leo, are you listening to me? Your wound, it's nothing special, nothing special at all. In this town alone, I know there are many people with far worse. And yet they carry on, every one of them, with far greater courage than you ever did. They go on with their lives. They become something worthwhile. But you, Leo, look at you. Always tending your wound.

(*Unconsoled* 498-99)

The reason why Miss Collins's anger is being directed at her former husband, Brodsky, not only comes from his total obsession with his own wound, but also from the fact that he has been more obsessed with the wound than with his possible future with her, then making her realise how painful her own wound is. Indeed, two other persons—by the way, they are a son and a father—refer to her wound in relation to Brodsky. Stephan, young pianist, when asking Miss Collins to talk to Brodsky, says this: 'Miss Collins, I realise what I'm saying might well be opening up *old wounds*' (*Unconsoled* 60). On the other hand, Hoffman, hotel manager and Stephan's father, tries to convince Miss Collins of the utter nonsense of seeing him again: 'Miss Collins, *all those old wounds* will be re-opened. They will hurt, they will give you agony. It will break you down, Miss Collins' (*Unconsoled* 431).

Ishiguro's characters left something behind in their past; they hope to bring back and fix it but in the end they realise it is impossible to do so simply because it remains in the past and irretrievable in the present. Boris, Sophie's son, explains to Ryder: 'Mother forgot to pack him [Number Nine]. But she said we could go back soon. To the old apartment and he'd be there. I can *fix* him, we've got the right sort of glue now. I've got a bit saved up' (*Unconsoled* 42; italics added). But in reality Ryder and Boris cannot find Number Nine there in the apartment. Number Nine Boris left behind in the old apartment is a non-existent iconic figure in the narrative, functioning as it does as a symbol of the characters' obsession with home. Indeed, it is more than once that Ryder finds himself in the same room or house as the one he remembers from his childhood (just as he did in the hotel room):

as I continued to look at it, this same rear section seemed in itself strongly reminiscent, and after a moment I realised this was because it resembled exactly the back part of the parlour in the house my parents and I had lived in for several months in Manchester. [. . .] To me, a nine-year-old, the house quickly came to

represent not only an exciting change, but the hope that a fresh, happier chapter was unfolding for us all'. (*Unconsoled* 214)

The house is associated with something that helps repair his parents' relationship, conjuring up in Ryder's mind some desperate hope. There in the house alone you find some hope so that you find yourself returning metaphorically and emotionally to the house. Hence their nostalgia for their houses. When the atmosphere becomes tense between him and Sophie, Ryder indeed tries to console her by saying 'Look, there's no need to worry. We'll have everything ready soon. A home, everything' (*Unconsoled* 259). Sophie, too, shows a strong obsession with acquiring a house where the family can live on happily, and tends to associate the future house with the old house she remembers from the past, as well as with some hope for the future, while talking about the house she wants to purchase for her, Boris, and Ryder:

When I was listening to that Mr Mayer, the way he was describing the living room of the house, I kept getting these pictures in my mind, of the apartment we lived in when I was small. All the time he was talking, I kept getting these pictures. Our old living room. And Mother and Papa, the way they were then. It's probably nothing like that. I'm not really expecting it to be. I'll get there tomorrow and I'll find it's completely different. But it made me hopeful. You know, a sort of omen.

(*Unconsoled* 38)

How much important a house is to them is illustrated by the tenacious imaginative fantasy Boris is engaged in before the apartment about his fighting against the thugs to protect Ryder and Sophie, as we have seen. Boris roars to the evil men in his fantasy:

You must all have had *homes* once. Mothers and fathers. Perhaps brothers and sisters. I want you to understand what's happening. These attacks of yours, your continual terrorising of our apartment, has meant that my mother is crying all the time. She's always tense and irritable, and this means she often tells me off for no

reason. It also means Papa has to *go away for long periods, sometimes abroad*, which Mother doesn't like. This is all the result of your terrorising the apartment.

(*Unconsoled* 220-221; italics added)

Boris's intense sense of responsibility for protecting his parents from the attackers in his imagination comes from his wish not to let his parents down.³² Also, 'Papa' referred to may indicate Ryder but can be inferred echoing Ishiguro's father, Shizuo, as well as Ishiguro himself as a writer. Shonaka points out that Papa can be read as an autobiographical version of Ishiguro as a father, who constantly leaves his family behind in England for his book promotion tours across the world, as well as that of his father, Shizuo, frequently absent from their home in Nagasaki for the first few years of Kazuo's life (*Kazuo Ishiguro* 106).

Almost all characters in this novel are obsessed with the fear of letting someone else down. Stephan, young pianist, says to Ryder, 'I don't want to *let* him [his father, Hoffman] *down*' (*Unconsoled* 25; italics added) for his performance on Thursday, while Mr Hoffman apologises to his son for his failure to inform him of his mother's favourite piece of music which turns out to be different from the one his son has selected for his performance: 'Really, Stephan, I've *let* you both *down*' (*Unconsoled* 131; italics added). Mr Hoffman is even expected to take responsibility for making the whole procedure towards Thursday night run smoothly by assisting Leo Brodsky, once a conductor. Pedersen, a member of the civil council of the city, proudly says to Ryder that Mr Hoffman promised the council that he would 'take personal charge' on this issue, vowing them 'not to *let* the community *down*' (*Unconsoled* 113; italics added). Ryder's old childhood friend, Fiona—the girl who pricks at Ryder's bubble world under the kitchen table by pointing out the abnormality of the incessant

³² Shonaka interprets this scene to be an authorial projection of Ishiguro's strong sense of responsibility as the only interpreter in his family in England (*Kazuo Ishiguro* 105).

rows between Ryder's parents—now accuses him thus: 'you really *let me down* last night' referring to his failure of showing up in the meeting she set up with her friends (*Unconsoled* 170; italics added). Ryder also sees through Boris's thought that his journey to the old apartment to get his Number Nine back with Ryder may not occur and that he may 'be *let down*' (*Unconsoled* 199; italics added). Last of all, Sophie's sister warns Ryder: 'don't *let her* [Sophie] *down* again, Ryder' (*Unconsoled* 227; italics added). Many characters expect Ryder to do something for them but ultimately find they get disappointed with him. Ryder is burdened with too many expectations beyond him.

If all these feelings of fear of letting someone else down are multiple versions of Ryder's, it could be due to his extreme sense of responsibility for living up to his parents' expectation from his childhood. Confronted with the schedule for Thursday night, Ryder gets shocked at total negligence on his part about his 'parents' imminent arrival in the city'; and at the same time, he 'felt a strong sense of protectiveness towards' them (*Unconsoled* 176). Indeed, he tries to convince himself of the very possibility that they will come: 'My parents, they're coming tonight. That's right! They're coming at last, tonight!' (*Unconsoled* 444). But when on Thursday Miss Stratmann asks Ryder, 'Are you certain they are coming to this town?' something crucial collapsed inside Ryder, a feeling he described thus: 'a number of doubts had passed through my mind and suddenly I felt something inside me beginning to collapse' (*Unconsoled* 511) and he eventually 'collapsed into a nearby chair and realised [he] had started to sob' (*Unconsoled* 512). What is it that 'collapsed' inside him? It must be all his motivation for pursuing his professional career at the expense of leaving his family behind: to put it simply, to meet his own parents' expectation. For he had told Boris about his own mission to fulfil earlier on:

Boris, I know you must be wondering. I mean, why it is we can't just settle down and live quietly, the three of us. You must, I know you do, you must wonder why I

have to go away all the time, even though your mother gets upset about it. Well, you have to understand, the reason I keep going on these trips, it's not because I don't love you and dearly want to be with you. In some ways, I'd like nothing better than to stay at home with you and Mother, live in an apartment like that one over there, anywhere. But you see, it's not so simple. I have to keep going on these trips because, you see, you can never tell when it's going to come along. I mean *the very special one, the very important trip, the one that's very very important, not just for me but for everyone, everyone in the whole world*. How can I explain it to you, Boris, you're so young. You see, *it would be so easy just to miss it*. To say one time, no, I won't go, I'll just rest. Then only later I'll discover that was the one, the very very important one. And you see, *once you miss it, there's no going back, it would be too late*. It won't matter how hard I travel afterwards, it won't matter, it would be late, and all these years I've spent would have been for nothing. I've seen it happen to other people, Boris. They spend year after year travelling and they start to get tired, perhaps a little lazy. But that's often just when it comes along. And they miss it. And, you know, they regret it for the rest of their lives. They get bitter and sad. By the time they die, they've become broken people. So you see, Boris, that's why. That's why I've got to carry on for the moment, keep travelling all the time. It makes things very difficult for us, I realise. But we have to be strong and patient, all three of us. It won't be much longer, I'm sure. *It'll come soon, the very important one, then it will all be done*, I'll be able to relax and rest then. I could stay at home all I wanted, it wouldn't matter, we could enjoy ourselves, just the three of us. We could do all the things we haven't been able to do. It won't be long now, I'm sure of it, but we'll just have to be patient. Boris, I hope you can understand what I'm saying. (*Unconsoled* 218-29)

Of course, the time of their company will never come around, for, as Ishiguro himself implies, Ryder's parents have long been dead. But even though Ryder finds that his parents haven't come this time, he still keeps believing that they will next time. Hence his optimistic view at the end of his narrative as we have seen in Chapter 7. The similar logic is used when with urgency detective Christopher Banks attempts to convince the amah of his adopted daughter, Jennifer, about the necessity and justification of his leaving the girl behind for a while in *When We Were Orphans*: 'After all, how will Jennifer ever be able to love and respect a guardian who she knew had turned away from *his most solemn duty when the call finally came?*' (146; italics added).

Unsurprisingly, Ishiguro concludes that Ryder's obsession with his wound prevents him from getting true consolation:

I suppose in the end he remains unconsolated. If we take this slightly bleak view that sometimes we can never put right this thing, whatever it is, often even the consolation isn't there. We look for consolation in work, in a career, or in a relationship, but sometimes the very fact that you are obsessed with trying to heal this thing actually stops you getting a lot of the true consolation. I think Ryder ends up emotionally somewhat bound because of this need to fulfil his own personal agenda, and he is rather unable to love. (Interview, 1995, Wachtel 34)

So what Sophie says to Ryder—'Leave us. You were always on the outside of our love. Now look at you. On the outside of our grief too. Leave us. Go away' (*Unconsolated* 532)—suggests the formation of a new wound inside his son-figure, Boris, who says to his mother, Sophie: 'No, no. We've got to *keep together*' (532; italics added).³³ The vicious cycle of a wound

³³ This phrase of Boris' reads as echoing the young Kazuo's: 'I took responsibility for *keeping* the family *together*' (Interview, 1996, Mackenzie 'Real' 12; italics added).

being passed down on to the next generation gets started, just as Etsuko's was passed down to Keiko and Christopher's wound to Jennifer by making her another orphan. And the motif of the absence of father, or fatherlessness, as noted by Yoshioka in *A Pale View of Hills* does reappear here. At the same time, what should be noted here is the logic running in these novels: Idealism whose drive derives from one's receiving an emotional wound in one's childhood in turn creates another wound: the unbroken cycle of infliction of wounds on children through adult idealism.

This approach of Ishiguro's to wound in *The Unconsoled* explains in part why Ishiguro sets this novel in an unspecified country, instead of Japan, the country to which Ishiguro's own wound and his obsession with it is tightly linked. While the motif of wound appears in *A Pale View of Hills* against Ishiguro's initial will, Ishiguro tries the same motif again in *The Unconsoled* but this time more consciously. *A Pale View of Hills* may have more of what Endo calls literary intensity but it is a result of Ishiguro's unconscious obsession with his wound. On the other hand, *The Unconsoled* is a more mature attempt to stage wound in general to scrutinise. But whether or not *The Unconsoled* has more universal appeal to the reader than his first novel does is known only to readers of the two books.

But the emotional pendulum is to swing from generality to specificity again. In an interview, Ishiguro referred to the necessity of writers writing 'out of some part of themselves' when he explains writer's obsession with going over their own wound from childhood (Interview, 1990, Vorda and Herzinger 85). Taken literally, Ishiguro's statement induces us to surmise that some attempt has been made by Ishiguro to caress his own wound through his fiction. Ishiguro's attempt at caressing his own wound is what will be examined in Chapter 15, the last chapter of Part II.

15 Reconciliation

When We Were Orphans is the novel through which Ishiguro attempts to reconcile himself to the past, his grandparents, and his wound in a manner unknown to those who never read Ishiguro's interviews. In this respect alone, *When We Were Orphans*, Ishiguro's fifth novel, deserves to be read decidedly differently from any other of his fictions.

Cognisant of Ishiguro's dual cultural background, not a few critics and scholars touch upon the obvious projection of the novelist's childhood self either upon the English protagonist, Christopher Banks, or his old Japanese friend, Akira Yamashita, or both of them.³⁴ Their stress on the authorial projections in terms of biographical correlation will be much in place in this case. For it is in what they consider their own homelands that both Ishiguro and the two characters passed their idyllic early childhood, for one thing— incidentally, Kazuo's father, Shizuo, was also brought up in Shanghai from the 1920s to the early 30s—and, for another, as the two boys were supposed to return to their respective real fatherlands, so was the young Kazuo while in England, with the duration of his expectation

³⁴ For example, Hideo Furukawa sees Christopher as Ishiguro's *doppelgänger* (533-34), while Naomi Matsuoka finds in Akira the author's 'alter ego' ('Shanghai' 104). On the other hand, many consider them both the authorial projections (Hirai, 'Sokou' 82; 'Watashitachi' 29; Jaggi 8; Jones 14). The comparatively larger number of Japanese scholars concerned with this projection motif in *Orphans* may be partly accounted for by the possibility that they take a stronger interest in Ishiguro's Japanese background and hence biographical aspects of the novel—notably so with Hirai, who has a direct knowledge of the novelist's hometown in Japan. Anyhow, the somewhat lopsided domination of Japanese academics over their non-Japanese counterparts in this field of biographical studies of *Orphans*, it should be noted, has conditioned the present chapter's more frequent and more detailed references to the former than to the latter, exclusive of interviewers.

prolonged till the age of fifteen. Nevertheless, even all the critics who read this novel from the biographical scope only cover the range of how Ishiguro's cultural background overlaps that of Akira and Christopher—'a hybrid of East and West' (Jones 14), for instance—stopping short of establishing a concrete, subtler interrelation between them, apparently except the Japanese scholar Kyoko (Nori) Hirai.

In fact, Hirai duly scrutinises the delicate superimposition of Ishiguro's obsessive preoccupation with his memories of Nagasaki upon Banks's of Shanghai ('*Watashitachi*' 27). She also makes a remarkably astute observation that *When We Were Orphans* constitutes a fictional homage to his paternal grandfather, Masaaki—who was engaged in business in Shanghai in the 1920s—in the shape of what Ishiguro himself dubs an 'emotional autobiography', into which his Edenic years spent with the grandfather are incorporated ('Sokou' 81). Hirai's studies, in short, show that Ishiguro's personal history pertaining to Nagasaki is integrated into *When We Were Orphans*, producing Banks's obsession with his Shanghai childhood.³⁵

And yet the very parallelism of their childhood obsessions seems to carry an otherwise more poignant implication in the novel in question than Hirai, not to mention other critics, presumes. That implication no doubt emanates from a far more personal, ulterior, perhaps even subconscious motive on the novelist's part: that is to say, to have his childhood wound caressed, if not exactly healed, by reconciliation.

As we have seen a brief biographical account of Ishiguro in Chapter 12, in his Nagasaki years with his paternal grandparents living with his parents, sister, and him, Kazuo was very

³⁵ Hirai also makes visible biographical correlations between Ishiguro's childhood and his first two novels, *A Pale View of Hills* and *An Artist of the Floating World* ('*Tooi*'; '*Meiro*'). For a similar discussion, see also Matsuoka 'nihon'.

much attached to the grandparents, especially Masaaki, so much so that many of his nostalgic memories of Nagasaki have been condensed into those about the grandparents (Interview, 2005, Rothenberg). This prelapsarian period was abruptly discontinued, however, before he turned six, by the family's move to England, followed a decade later by his permanent loss of Masaaki, and then more than another decade later of his grandmother, Kayo, on account of their deaths. And the fact that not once while his grandparents were alive did he return home, along with the fact that he became an Englishman, instead of a Japanese man he was supposed to become, resulted in his entertaining an obsessive notion that he might have disappointed them, to whom additionally he had made a parting promise that he would return soon with a gift (Interview, 1995, Wachtel 23-24).

Thus, a very acute sense of guilt remained and still partially remains unassuaged in him. Both to assuage this personal guilt of Ishiguro's and to reconcile him with the deceased grandparents, Ishiguro *appropriates* the protagonist, Christopher Banks, just as Etsuko and Ryder *appropriate* those they remember from the past to console their wounds. Therefore, Christopher and his mother, Diana, in my view, play intermediary roles in the narrative. Christopher mediates between Ishiguro's childhood and adulthood so as to fulfil, through the very apology the protagonist makes to his mother in their culminating reunion, the novelist's long-cherished wish to apologise to the grandparents. Diana's baffled response to Christopher's apology, on the other hand, superficially implicating her motherly love, genuinely represents the possible pardon which Ishiguro's grandparents, had they been alive when he eventually returned home to Nagasaki, might have granted to their grandson.

Yet Christopher is not the only among Ishiguro's protagonists who atones. If anything, almost every one of his principal characters has made amends for his or her past misdeeds, fallacious assumptions, or irretrievable loss of the past, though to no avail. Barbara Ohno notices Ishiguro remarking on several occasions to the effect 'that people are going to have to

atone for past wrongs', despite his statement that 'he is not religious' (142). Ohno's puzzlement as to by whom and in what way 'he thinks' one's misdeeds could be 'corrected' makes sense and has a direct bearing on our reading of *When We Were Orphans*.³⁶

For the very first task of what Ishiguro apparently regards as his own atonement has been committed to Christopher Banks: among his protagonists it is he alone who does atone *for* the author's own past. Thus the theological implication of Christopher's mission as well as Diana's is this: none of the *confessional* stalls available in which to own up to his sin of the non-fulfilment of his obligations to the grandparents, all that is to Ishiguro is a *fictional* stall where, by way of one character's Christ-like sacrifice (though not of his life itself but of much of his lifetime) and the other's priest-like forgiveness, they make it possible for the writer to manage in fiction to do what he is in reality incapable of.³⁷ Accordingly, here, Christopher's apologising and Diana's pardoning are for their vaguely theological connotations termed as 'atonement' and 'absolution' respectively (both of which, however, should be regarded strictly as limited to interpretive use). And the main argument of this chapter is that these religious flavoured missions of theirs, feasible with fiction by virtue of its availability of authorial projection, have been accomplished to bring about a filial—filial enough—reconciliation between Kazuo and his grandparents, and that, equally important, their successes have enabled Ishiguro to unshackle himself somewhat from the guilty conscience to

³⁶ Ohno is astute enough to identify in *The Unconsoled* 'a redemptive end' on the author's as well as the reader's part (142). See also Shonaka's analysis of *The Unconsoled* in his *Kazuo Ishiguro* (Ch.5).

³⁷ This tactful manoeuvre of his reminds us of that of Briony, the embedded author of Ian McEwan's *Atonement*, by means of which she, as an act of atonement for having utterly ruined Robbie's life, rewrites his unalterable past in her own fiction, aside from verbally apologising to him.

which he was chained for so many years.

In common with a majority of other novelists, Ishiguro looks askance at atavistic urges on critics' part to forage for autobiographical elements in any work of fiction:

In profiles of that sort [referring to the articles written by Suzie Mackenzie: see her two interviews with Ishiguro] there is always a tendency to find echoes and parallels between the author's life and work. I am not utterly convinced that this is where all of my stories arrived from—that I feel some sort of nostalgia for the Japan of my childhood, therefore I write about these things. It's a little too neat'. (Interview, 2000, Chapel)

His disapproval of this tendency is best expressed by this comment about *When We Were Orphans*: 'none of the things I describe [in the novel] happened directly to me' (Interview, 2000, Feeney). In the same interview, moreover, he becomes more specific when he says that, though the little Christopher 'moves from the East to the West' as he once did, the protagonist is 'not really me' (Feeney). His wariness of being arbitrarily linked to his *dramatis personae* is quite rational: as he hints at his misgivings upon it (Feeney), the reading exclusively pinpointing authorial projections is likely to make readers' first-hand contact with books rather superfluous, encouraging them instead to head straight for interview columns.

But even so, a certain kind of fiction demands that way of reading, especially one on which an author projects himself, like some of Ishiguro's novels to varying degrees. In the same Feeney interview he concedes that if he had to define his fiction in terms of autobiography it would be as 'a kind of emotional autobiography'—obviously in that the emotional spectrum of one's past is shifted into one's fiction. Thus, while cynically saying that it is 'a little too neat' for a critic to argue that his nostalgic obsession with his memories of Japan prompted him to incorporate them into *When We Were Orphans*, he nonetheless admits that that kind of argument is 'not entirely untrue either . . . because in my own

experience these things have been crystallized very sharply' (Interview, 2000, Chapel). These statements of compromise prepare the way for speculation that the psychological dimension of those memories has been projected in part onto his fifth novel.

What then is the point of all this, however, if a novelist just cuts his or her childhood memories in amongst works of imagination? Why is it that the form of autobiography has not been chosen for that? What is it about such an authorial projection that makes it so congenial to the form of fiction? For these questions to be answered, to review the argument exhibited by the late novelist L. P. Hartley in his *The Novelist's Responsibility* will be of great use.

There Hartley proclaims that though '[not] all novelists project themselves into their novels . . . the majority do, either from the wishful or fearful-thinking' (28), and that a writer's 'wish-fulfilment' tends to be more satisfactorily represented in fiction than in 'pure autobiography' (3). Hartley's latter claim concerning the great advantage of fiction over autobiography as a medium for an authorial wish-fulfilment is fairly self-explanatory. For fiction in general, except an autobiographical novel proper, provides the illusion of its being an invention behind the veneer of which writers will be able with more ease and with less restriction to become self-revealing than otherwise possible. His former view will also be generally applicable of the wishful or fearful thinking being what is truly projected upon fiction, as long as a novel has any authorial projection at all. And such is the sort of novel *When We Were Orphans* is that Hartley's creative principles perfectly apply to it. Actually it contains at once fearful and wishful thinkings of the author's own that arose from the deaths of his grandparents: by reneging on his parting promise he must have disappointed them; if really so, he could only have atoned for it.

Evidently, so much of such wish-fulfilment has to do with a writer's childhood wound, as we have seen. Ishiguro himself affirms that behind writers' obsession with the energy-consuming activity of writing commonly lurks some emotional wound that has its possible

root in their childhood but which it is often too late to heal; all they can do is console themselves by ‘build[ing] [their] own world within their own fiction’ (Interview, 1990, Swaim 107-108). Hence ‘a lot of activity’, he sums it up in another interview, ‘is about caressing this wound’ (Interview, 1995, Wachtel 33).

The wound Christopher Banks in *When We Were Orphans* has been afflicted with has to do with his missing parents. Since his parents’ mysterious disappearances Banks has been beset with the fantasy of rescuing them, who he believes were kidnapped for ransom or something of that sort. The critic James Wood adequately verbalises his perennial obsession: ‘It is he who has really been kidnapped, kidnapped by his memories’ (*The Unconsoled* 48). His father actually abandoned him, whereas Diana was abducted for other reason than mere ransom. But his childhood version of those incidents has always been ‘alive in the present’ (Sutcliffe 49) in the form of memory and fantasy. His eventual return to Shanghai as a professional detective in search of them indicates his preoccupation with the ‘wounds of his childhood’ (Hartigan 637) the deepest among which is about the loss of his mother.

It created the megalomaniac delusion in Christopher that his absence caused it; had he not gone out with Uncle Philip, his mother would now remain safe with him. So profound is his regret that he feels that even taking London buses would make him go through that vulnerable experience of losing his mother (*Orphans* 66). Pico Iyer analyses his paranoia into ‘the response . . . of dislocation, of losing time, of being swept up in something outside one’s control’ (4). Probably, ‘separated too early in the life of a child’, as Cynthia F. Wong argues, ‘a parent’s absence can never be compensated’ (96). In novel after novel such as *A Pale View of Hills*, *The Unconsoled*, *When We Were Orphans*, Ishiguro thus describes a psychological wound from childhood the unabatable pain of which continues to torture the wounded far into their adulthood.

Just as we have seen the narrators’ self-projections on characters in their narratives in *A*

Pale View of Hills and *The Unconsoled* in the form of what Ishiguro calls ‘appropriation’, the same projection motif marks *When We Were Orphans*, too. Plainly, Christopher’s adopted daughter, Jennifer, performs his exact parallel as a deceived child, as seen by their mutual plight of being betrayed by their *uncles* (Uncle Philip; Uncle Christopher) in their formative ages. His erstwhile friend, Akira, meanwhile, falls into this parallel category as a ‘cultural orphan’ severed, like Christopher, from ‘his mother country’ (Matsuoka, ‘Shanghai’ 104)—and so does Ishiguro. Indeed, what sets *When We Were Orphans* apart from his other novels is, as some critics argue from cultural points of view,³⁸ that several characters most clearly converge not simply on the protagonist but on the author as well, especially with Akira and Christopher as Kazuo’s childhood selves.

A classic case of symmetry between Banks and Ishiguro, as Hirai notes (‘Watashitachi 27’), is their sheer obsession with their boyhood memories. Under their obsession there is an anxiety that these memories might eventually be unavailable (*When We Were Orphans* 67; Interview, 1990, Swaim 96). But some memories remain vivid in their minds nonetheless. Among Christopher’s many delightful remembrances of Diana, one of his fondest must be of his mother sitting on a swing singing ‘at the top of her voice’ (*When We Were Orphans* 62), for it leaps to his mind both immediately and vividly when he is reunited with her in Hong Kong (304).³⁹ With Ishiguro such a memory will be that of his ‘standing on the pavement with my grandfather looking at a film poster’ (Interview, 1995, Wachtel 20), an image referred to elsewhere (Ishiguro, ‘Bomb Culture’ 9). Notwithstanding their anxiety these clearly-cut mnemonic images lend a hand to their engraving these cherished memories deep

³⁸ For studies of *When We Were Orphans* from cultural perspectives, see, for instance, Barrow 44-45; Hartigan 637; Hooper 1974; Hwang 72, 77, 79; Iyer 6; and Tamazaki 93-97.

³⁹ For detailed examinations of Banks’s memory, see Mimura 139-42 and Reich 43.

into their minds.

Ishiguro's obsession with his Nagasaki days is partially revealed by his apparent projection of the age of five when he left Nagasaki onto the son of the soldier, the latter Christopher believes to be Akira. The soldier tells of the pathetic naivety of the five-year-old son he left behind in Nagasaki (*Orphans* 262). Ishiguro's obsession with the age of five may come from his 'regret or melancholy' that he claims has been born of the very sunderance of his 'bond' with the 'grandfather' (Interview, 1995, Jaggi 116). This initial separation unequivocally formed the deepest layer of his wound.

At the same time, Ishiguro carries a strong sense of guilt towards his grandparents. Kazuo's inevitable lack of clairvoyance about the consequences of leaving them behind in Nagasaki—their permanent separation—resonates with Keiko's (Etsuko's self-killed daughter in *A Pale View of Hills*) in regard to her eternal separation from her Japanese father, and is furthermore essentially equivalent to Christopher's failure to anticipate the outcome of leaving his mother behind in their Shanghai house. As to Christopher, ironically, just as he 'lowered [his] guard that day and followed' Uncle Philip (*Orphans* 118), so later on, despite having his newly adopted Jennifer 'let [her] guard down' (132), he in turn deserts her, albeit temporarily, to accomplish his mission of finding his own parents though with some pang of guilt—'she [Jennifer] appeared excited and happy; she knows nothing yet of my plans, or of the things Miss Givens [Jennifer's *amah*] and I discussed last night' (*Orphans* 145). Indeed, Banks tries to convince himself by a far-fetched logic—that Jennifer is 'a child of remarkable spirit, and there is no reason to suppose she would be so devastated just on account of my departure' (*Orphans* 146). This vicious cycle of orphanhood has perhaps been created out of the novelist's possible suspicion that his own father might have determined to pursue his research only at the expense of the perfect happiness his son could have continued to enjoy

with his old man,⁴⁰ although it will be fairer to the late Shizuo to say that initially he must have been as unsure as his son what denouement his own decision would entail, just in the same way Uncle Philip, Banks speculates now, ‘had no more inkling than I did of the course things would take’ when the man took the boy by carriage to some street far off from home and left him behind there totally alone (*Orphans* 77).

Kazuo’s guilt remains with and inside him, however. Hence that confession of his:

it did leave me with a sense of having let my grandparents down, perhaps some sort of odd guilt [. . .] I remember [. . .] promising that I’d bring a present back, as you do when you go on a little trip [. . .]. I never went back and fulfilled this promise, that I never took back a present from England, and I never came home. [. . .] by leaving Japan, leaving my grandparents, and turning into this odd sort of semi-Englishman, I’ve somehow let them down, and if they’d known, they might have been disappointed’ (Interview, 1995, Wachtel 23-24).

This confession, though sounding of maudlin sentimentality, reveals itself to be another example of Ishiguro’s fear of failure, which we observed in connection with the symmetry between him and Akira, to meet filial obligations—filial enough considering Masaaki *was* a de facto father to him. His persistent use of such phrases as ‘never went back’ and ‘never took back’ is itself evidence that the constant feeling of guilt has gnawed him. The fact of having lost both his grandparents to deaths while he was away in England makes his guilty feeling much more intense, a guilty conscience neatly epitomised in the last subjunctive clause of the quoted passage above: ‘if they’d known, they might have been disappointed’. His scruples have been exacerbated by the fact that every month Masaaki had sent him ‘a parcel’

⁴⁰ In Shonaka’s view, this suspicion may have partially exerted a Freudian Oedipus complex effect on the relationship between Banks and his parents (‘Kazuo Ishiguro no sakuhin’ 84).

containing things children in Japan were absorbed in then (like ‘the comic strip about Oba-q’) in order that he ‘wouldn’t feel lost among his friends when eventually he returned’ (Interview, 2000, Mackenzie, ‘Between’ 10).

Ishiguro’s sense of guilt concerning his absence both at his grandparents’ funerals is, indeed, transferred into characters’ absence from the funeral of members of their family. The adolescent protagonist of ‘A Family Supper’ failed to attend his mother’s funeral because he was in America at that time. Also, in *A Pale View of Hills*, obviously due to their strained relationship, Keiko did not attend her stepfather, Mr Sheringham’s funeral, while his daughter, Niki, in turn was absent from Keiko’s funeral. It is only natural that all these guilty feelings of Ishiguro’s lingered on for years and were eventually fossilised into a stiffened wound (Interview, 1995, Wachtel 35).

In this sense, the ‘orphans’ of the title of *When We Were Orphans* alludes to, apart from Ishiguro’s cultural orphanhood (Luo 69-70; Matsuoka, ‘Shanghai’ 108), his autobiographical twofold loss of his grandparents: first by his move to England and then by their deaths. Ben Howard proposes a resonant connection between the novel’s title and that of Louis MacNeice’s poem, ‘When We Were Children’, indicating the parallel times each work is set in (411). This proposition would have carried more critical weight had it been further coupled with the fact that MacNeice’s mother was confined, like Christopher’s mother, in a nursing home for her mental depression where she expired. Ishiguro himself defines the ‘orphans’ in *When We Were Orphans* in a more general sense; as ‘a metaphor for that condition of coming out of that [childhood] bubble in an unprotected way’ (Interview, 2001, Shaffer, 168).

For one’s wound to be caressed in psychological terms, it has perforce to be transferred to another. Ishiguro’s remorse of conscience for having made a perfunctory parting gesture towards his grandparents discernibly re-emerges in Banks’s rueful reminiscence about the separation in which he ‘waved casually’ to Diana—‘Uncle Philip grasped me by the shoulder,

saying: ‘Look! Wave to your mother!’ despite my already having done so. But I thought nothing of it at the time, and turning as bidden, waved once more to mother’s figure, elegantly upright in the doorway’ (*Orphans* 120). As a consequence of his failure to find her in Shanghai at the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War, it is not until a decade and a half later that he achieves his reunion with his mother, whose insanity has landed her in a mental institution in Hong Kong.

Many readers, above all those familiar with *A Pale View of Hills*, may well have a strange sense of déjà vu when they reach the description of the sweeping view Banks sees from the hill on which stands the sanatorium his mother has been taken to: ‘When I stood in the breeze and looked across the harbour, I could see right into the distance to where a cable-car was climbing a faraway hill’ (*Orphans* 301). For this description bears a curious resemblance to the following: ‘Inasa is the hilly area of Nagasaki overlooking the harbour, renowned for its mountain scenery’; ‘The sounds of the harbour, carried in the wind, still reached us as we sat on a bench in the forecourt of the cable-car station [at the foot of Inasa]’ (*Pale* 103). Naomi Matsuoka, referring to the title of Ishiguro’s first novel, ventures a surmise that the pale view of the hills afforded by Etsuko’s apartment stands for the archetypal image of Nagasaki which abides in his memory (‘nihon’ 238). Matsuoka’s speculation must be right on the mark; indeed, that treasured image is also represented in the very view from where Christopher is standing, which quite precisely corresponds to an actual view commanded by Shin-Nakagawa, an area where Ishiguro’s family lived till before leaving for England: four or five miles away to the west beyond the harbour rises the hill whose slope a little cable car is seen to be making its way up and down.⁴¹ A plausible inference drawn from these scenic

⁴¹ Hirai, also from Nagasaki, writes that many of the city landscapes depicted in *A Pale View of Hills* are more accurately represented than generally assumed. Indeed, Ishiguro’s parents, from whom

overlaps will be that the depicted view of a hill and a harbour of Hong Kong would form a projection of Mount Inasa and Nagasaki Harbour as Ishiguro remembers them.

Interestingly, his protagonist Christopher detects a similar overlap between his hometown and Hong Kong. He is strolling around the latter when he recognises ‘some vague echo of Shanghai’ in it—an echo which seems ‘as though I . . . [came] upon . . . a distant cousin of a woman I once loved . . . who remains, overall, an awkward, even grotesque parody of a much-cherished *image*’ (*When We Were Orphans* 299; my italics). His perception that Hong Kong appears an outlandish parody of his old Shanghai image somehow parallels our view of it as a topographical projection of Nagasaki as imprinted on Ishiguro’s memory. To put it diagrammatically, Hong Kong occupies the locational vertex where Kazuo’s Nagasaki and Christopher’s Shanghai intersect with each other. From this, it is perfectly conceivable that, if Christopher’s reunion with his mother is occurring in Hong Kong, then, in the very same place, Ishiguro’s with his grandparents must be.

“‘Mother,” I said slowly, “it’s me. I’ve come from England. I’m really very sorry it’s taken so long. I realise I’ve let you down badly. Very badly. I tried my utmost, but you see, in the end, it proved beyond me. I realise this is hopelessly late”’ (*When We Were Orphans* 304-305). Christopher’s emotionally charged apology is apparently due to his knowledge of Diana’s self-sacrifice: she succumbed to the abduction so that her son would be comfortably provided for. But then that is not all his emotional intensity is about. In fact, his contrite expression, ‘I’ve let you down badly’, is highly reminiscent of Ishiguro’s, ‘I’ve somehow let them down’, suggesting a like repent mood on their parts. Additionally, just as Christopher

Hirai obtained much valuable information about their son’s childhood, told her that shortly before leaving Nagasaki the family had all gone up to the top of Mt Inasa in a cable car, and that their son still remembered the episode (*Tooi* 80).

could not prevent Diana's abduction and took more time to find her than he expected, so the move of Ishiguro's family to England with the ensuing decade of his parents' decisions to extend their stay, precluding him from being present at Masaaki's deathbed,⁴² proved totally beyond him. But there remains a palpable distinction: where Christopher succeeds in reuniting himself with Diana, Ishiguro didn't with his grandparents. This profound disparity, when considered with their emotional parallels, leads to the inescapable conclusion: Christopher's belated apology serves as the vicarious atonement for one of Ishiguro's 'past wrongs', viz. his failure of filial duties to his grandparents, Masaaki and Kayo.

As far as the narrative is concerned, the protagonist's atonement is not enough, however. Absolution seems to be necessary as well. In the dialogue above, Christopher, desperate to remind his mother of who he is, calls himself by his old nickname, 'Puffin', in exactly the same way she used to. Even though Diana remembers the nickname is her son's, she still cannot recognise him. So Christopher resorts to the use of hypothesis:

'Excuse me. Supposing this boy of yours, this Puffin. Supposing you discovered he'd tried his best, tried with everything he had to find you, even if in the end he couldn't. If you knew that, do you suppose . . . do you suppose you'd be able to *forgive* him?'

My mother continued to gaze past my shoulder, but now a puzzled look came into her face.

'*Forgive* Puffin? Did you say *forgive* Puffin? *Whatever for?*' Then she beamed again happily. That boy. They say he's doing well. But you can never be

⁴² This regrettable failure of Kazuo's to fulfill the most essential of his filial duties to his once father figure probably recasts itself into the butler Stevens's deliberate *failure* for the sake of what he calls professional priorities to sit at his dying father's bedside in *The Remains of the Day*.

sure with that one. Oh, he's such a worry to me. You've no idea'. (*Orphans* 305; italics added)

His tentative hypothesis with the aid of the third person pronoun is aimed at extracting his mother's forgiveness since she is unable to place him but at the same time is subsumed into another's obsessive though unprovable conjecture: *supposing he really wanted to return to you but in the end he couldn't, and if you knew that, do you suppose you'd be able to forgive him?* The *you* has of course to be interpreted as the second person plural. Ishiguro's first appropriation of his protagonist's hypothesis colludes with his second of Diana's bemused reply, 'Forgive Puffin? . . . Whatever for?' For, as much as it is the manifestation of her 'unconditional love' for her son (Interview, 1995, Jaggi 8), her reply does function as the administration of absolution—a declaration that the author's sin has been forgiven. Hence Diana's verbal worry for her son—'That boy. They say he's doing well. But you can never be sure with that one. Oh, he's such a worry to me'—reads as if it were an evocation of the constant feeling of anxiety Masaaki and Kayo had about their grandson. It is true that there is no undoing one's past. Nevertheless, the building of his own world imbued with atonement and absolution has enabled both of his duties and wishes to be vicariously fulfilled via authorial projection, which as a logical sequence effects a filial, if fictional, reconciliation between Kazuo and the grandparents, allowing the novelist as much as he pleases to caress his own chronic wound of loss and guilt.

But one thing has intrigued us—Christopher's reunion with Diana occurs in Hong Kong for all that they were separated from each other originally in Shanghai. Why is it that the former city has pre-empted Christopher's hometown for their reunion? Or to put it another way: what is it about Christopher's Shanghai that makes it unsuitable for the site of their reunion? One possible answer to this question might be provided.

One major clue to it would be Christopher's obsession or what Ishiguro terms the

‘emotional logic’ that has governed his protagonist’s thinking since childhood (Interview, 2000, Hogan 157). This logic allows him to assume that he can ‘replay something that went wrong in the past and do it right this time’ (158). Indeed, he completely believes that he can not only rescue his parents, but recover their own ‘big, white house’ in Shanghai which appeared ‘grand’ and of which even after these years he is still ‘able to bring back that picture very vividly’ (*Orphans* 51). Once he arrives in Shanghai, he immediately looks for it, finding it is being owned by a rich Chinese family whose master, like a character in a fairy tale, kindly offers to give it up for the detective to restore it as it was so that he can live there with his parents once he finds them. The moment naturally comes, however, when this logic cracks: it is when his parents are nowhere to be found in a private house (different to his old house) in which he believes they have been cooped up—‘My mother, my father! Where are they? . . . Where are they? Where are they?’ (273). Situated right in the midst of the war zone it is badly damaged with a big hole in the roof, a description pregnant with the implication that his long-nursed childhood fantasy is beginning to collapse like a card-house.

In the way Christopher harks back to his Shanghai house can be found a nostalgic echo of Ishiguro’s reminiscences about his Nagasaki house. That house in which he used to live together with his grandparents, too, was ‘a rather grand and beautiful thing’, and even now he has ‘a very vivid picture of it in [his] mind’ (Interview, 1987, Sexton 34). Moreover, the ‘grass mound’ and ‘maple tree’ we find in the garden of the Bankses’ plot could be glimpsed in the former garden of the Ishiguros’, according to Hirai, as of her writing in 2003 (‘Nagasaki’ 17). The house itself became unoccupied after Kayo’s death and for its dilapidation demolished shortly before Ishiguro returned in autumn 1989. A couple of years previously he had visualised it thus: ‘if I went back [the house] would be rather shabby and horrible’ (Interview, 1987, Sexton 34). This rueful visualisation is in turn parallel to Christopher’s description of the sanatorium where his mother is: ‘Turning to the house itself,

however, I saw it had been allowed to grow shabby; the paint on the window ledges and door frames in particular had cracked and peeled' (*Orphans* 301). Little wonder the sentimental dialogue between the son and the mother which has been opened outside the sanatorium is powerfully evocative of its emotional parallel between Kazuo and his grandparents.

Thus, unsurprisingly, a similar logic to Christopher's operates in Ishiguro's thinking. Even after he returned to and saw the actual Nagasaki he has been subject to this logic: 'in my head, all these people are still alive. Against all rational knowledge, somewhere I believe that everything is running smoothly there, much the same way as it always did. The world of my childhood is still intact' (Interview, 2000, Mackenzie, 'Between' 10). In reality, most of them together with his grandparents are no longer alive, nor does his old house stand in the family's former plot. And yet, for him, his *Nagasaki* remains even now 'still intact', carefully preserved as a non-existent sanctuary which must not be violated in any way and which, in so far as it is within the realm of memory and imagination, will be protected hereafter. This is a fantasy of Ishiguro's own.

During his stay in Hong Kong, despite 'Jennifer's suggestion that we try and extend our journey to Shanghai', Christopher evidently declines it on the grounds that 'Shanghai today is a ghostly shadow' of what it once was (*Orphans* 300). Christopher's Shanghai, like the author's Nagasaki, no longer exists. In the conversation with Kenzaburo Oe, Ishiguro states that he can 'never return to this particular Nagasaki' (Interview, 1989, Oe 53). It is impossible for him to return to it, simply because the Nagasaki is nowhere to be found in its complete form except in his memory and imagination. The same is true enough of Christopher's Shanghai: however desperately he attempts to replay his childhood there, both his old Shanghai and his blissful childhood, once lost, are lost forever. This, and Ishiguro's longing to maintain intact Christopher's childhood Shanghai at least in the latter's memory, possibly resulted in the novelist's decision *not* to have his reunion with his mother occur in 'Shanghai

today’—nor, by implication, in Nagasaki of today.

All this reconciliation gets started with recalling. Remembering thus enables one to do these: the caressing of one’s psychological wound, the coming to terms with something and someone long lost, and the imaginative reminiscence of a better and nicer world that remains intact only in one’s memory. The deeply injured Japanese soldier, whose ‘wounds’ Banks ‘examined’ with his Sherlockian ‘magnifying glass’ (*Orphans* 254), and whom Banks himself believes to be his old childhood friend, Akira, mutters almost to himself in broken English:

Nos-tal-gic. It is good to be nos-tal-gic. Very important [. . .] Important. Very important. Nostalgic. When we nostalgic, we remember. A world better than this world we discover when we grow. We remember and wish good world come back again. So very important. Just now, I had dream. I was boy. Mother, Father, close to me. In our house’ (*Orphans* 263)

And this statement by the Japanese soldier is a paraphrase of what Ishiguro has said in his interviews about nostalgia. One finds oneself being nostalgic when one wants the better world one remembers from the past to appear before one’s eyes—the better world but lost evermore. In this sense, what William Trevor says about guilt and melancholy, crucial elements that constitute the idea of Ishiguro’s nostalgia, will be true of Ishiguro’s fiction:

I think guilt is a good thing; I’m not against guilt, I think people should feel guilty. People used to say, especially about twenty years ago, that *guilt* is insidious, that it destroys people’s lives. It needn’t destroy people’s lives. It can in fact refresh people. It can give them *very perspectives*. It can *make them see themselves*. Guilt’s not so bad. *Melancholy* is not so bad . . . this little compensation of being able to *come to terms with the inevitable*. That’s part of the human spirit. (Trevor 68)

Part III FATALISM

Idealism and nostalgia coalesce to form fatalism. Both idealism and nostalgia are desires for something that is not fulfilled in the present time; thus, these emotions are inevitably followed by the quiet acceptance of the impossibility of fulfilling. But this summary of the relation among idealism, nostalgia, and fatalism provides a slightly distorted view of Ishiguro's fatalistic view, which can actually be traced far back into his early novels. And readers encounter Ishiguro's fatalism in various forms. Ishiguro depicts the inability of many characters to get out of their perspective, whose vision of society, family, and future has only a very narrow range. The impossibility of attaining a bird's-eye view on life has strong correlation with uncontrollability in life. Ishiguro's characters are increasingly losing their control with their own lives. That one cannot control one's life suggests outside forces at work such as randomness, or fate that is totally beyond control. It is a natural consequence from this realisation to reach fatalism as the destination of his philosophy. Part III sees the last vision of Ishiguro's, fatalism, from three angles: perspective, uncontrollability, and fate.

Ishiguro's fatalistic vision is represented persistently in the motif of perspective, whose variations appear throughout his fictions. Ishiguro's idea of perspective, or rather a narrow perspective, is quite fatalistic in that he considers that it can never change throughout our lives. His deterministic view that our vision is quite narrow and myopic is shown by the examination in Chapter 16, Perspective, of many symbols of the distortion, limitation, or even absence of perspective. This pathetic view of the impossibility of our gaining a broad perspective of our life is strengthened in later works because of Ishiguro's mature realisation that life increasingly gets out of control as one gets older. Chapter 17, Out of control, sees this sense of uncontrollability in particular reference to *Never Let Me Go*. The feeling that one is losing control over one's life manifests itself in a most bleak way at the end of the novel. Chapter 18, Fate, sees not only how Ishiguro uses the term 'fate' in his interviews as well as

in his works, but also how his two visions idealism and nostalgia strengthen and are subsumed into his fatalism.

16 Perspective

Ishiguro's works from the first one to the latest have addressed the nature of perspective available or unavailable to us. Ishiguro's interest in perspective may have something to do with his unfailing use of first-person narrators. As Mariko Matsuoka pertinently remarks, a story whose narration is provided by a first-person narrator is limited in perspective or vision precisely because the narrator him/herself functions as one of the characters in the story (1). Indeed, the limitation, distortion, or even absence of perspective is a recurrent theme running through his works. This chapter provides an insight into Ishiguro's view of perspective first by looking at the novelist's statements concerning perspective and then by offering my interpretation of the functions of symbols for perspective incorporated into several of his works as illustrating crucial aspects of perspective, together with the examination of several scholars' readings of the same symbols.

Perspective: individuals and society

Idealism and scepticism have cohabited in Ishiguro's view of life since the early period of his career, particularly in terms of possession of a broad perspective. In an interview conducted one year after the publication of *An Artist of the Floating World*, a novel which concerns the political and aesthetic implications of idealism, Ishiguro refers to the difficulty of our gaining such a perspective in our real lives:

I am very conscious, and have become more so since my more idealistic days, that it is awfully *difficult not simply to be at the mercy of the prevalent social or political climate. Very few of us seem to possess that kind of special perspective*, that insight into the situation that surrounds us, which enables us to make decisions over and above what the crowd around us is buying for. (Interview, 1987, Bigsby 21-22; italics added)

Ishiguro's point lies in the tendency of our being swayed around by the circumstances that are generally unpredictable. *An Artist of Floating World* and *The Remains of the Day* are, as seen in Part I, about the protagonists who turn out to be at the mercy of the prevalent social and political climates in which they spent most of their idealistic years, and who realises on reflection that what they have done with idealistic enthusiasm proves not only worthless but also harmful to some people. Ishiguro confesses that he wrote these two novels as a warning to his future self, a reflection of his fear of the future we have discussed in Chapter 3:

it's very difficult to see what one actually is doing and I suppose in all these books that's partly what I'm trying to say to myself. It's a kind of warning to myself, most of the time, when I write these stories. They're really little messages, little memos to myself to remind me not to get too complacent and not to get too smart and pleased with myself. Other people at other times have been very pleased and self-satisfied with themselves and very sure that they've been doing very worthwhile things, and *just a small little blip in history has suddenly shown them that they were profoundly wrong.* (Interview, 1999, Gallix 153; italics added)

Given this stance Ishiguro took for writing these early novels, it is very natural that the author adopted an ironical attitude towards the protagonists in them. We have seen many examples of the irony in our reading of the two novels in Chapters 6 'Ethics' and 7 'Optimism in the denouement'. For the sake of discussion another instance may well be given here from *An Artist of the Floating World*. It is an episode from during the war in which Ono, a distinguished artist, emphasises towards his disciples the importance of seeing beyond their immediate surroundings. Ono preaches a lesson he learned from his decision to leave Takeda's firm before the war where he and other painters produced one painting after another quite mechanically without any artistic consideration:

The Takeda experience taught me *never to follow the crowd blindly*, but to

consider carefully the direction in which I was being pushed. And if there's one thing I've tried to encourage you all to do, it's been to *rise above the sway of things.* To rise above the undesirable and decadent influences that have swamped us and have done so much to weaken the fibre of our nation these past ten, fifteen years. (*Artist 73; italics added*)

At present, Ono himself knows in hindsight that he ultimately followed the crowd 'blindly' through participating in the propaganda of the war through his profession of painting. Ono's remark above is therefore represented ironically by the author to contrast with the situation Ono led himself into. Indeed, his failure to 'rise above the sway of things' leads to his public apology in front of the Saitos at the marriage meeting for his younger daughter, Noriko.

But at the same time, Ishiguro shows ambivalent feelings about this lack of insight shown by Ono the painter. Indeed, the author is not only ironical but also sympathetic to the same protagonist, a feeling of sympathy which can be glimpsed at in the following remark by Ishiguro on Ono in an interview conducted in the same year as the novel's publication:

To a large extent, the reason for Ono's downfall was that he lacked the perspective to see beyond his own environment and to stand outside the actual values of his time. So the question of this parochial perspective was quite central to the book, and I tried to build that into the whole narrative. At the same time, I'm suggesting that Ono is fairly *normal*; most of us have similar parochial visions. So the book is largely about the inability of *normal* human beings to see beyond their immediate surroundings, and because of this, *one* is at the mercy of what this world immediately around one proclaims itself to be' (Interview, 1986, Mason 9; italics added)

In this interview the inevitability of Ono's parochial view is being stressed by Ishiguro's repetition of 'normal', which is partly reflected in Matsuda's terms in *An Artist of the*

Floating World: ‘We at least acted on what we believed and did our utmost. It’s just that in the end we turned out to be *ordinary* men. *Ordinary* men with no special gifts of insight. It was simply our misfortune to have been *ordinary* men during such times’ (200). Indeed, a few pages earlier Setsuko, Ono’s eldest daughter, points her father to the importance of seeing ‘things in a proper perspective’, and seen from the perspective, which is equivalent to her view, ‘Father’s work had hardly to do with these larger [political] matters of which we are speaking. Father was simply a painter’ (193). Ono is just a man of ordinariness and mediocrity without a proper perspective about his place in the world. Ishiguro’s point is that Ono’s condition is inevitable and applicable to many of us. Hence Ishiguro’s use of a generic ‘one’ in the last sentence in the cited passage above.

Ishiguro’s sympathy towards our common inability ‘to see beyond’ our immediate surroundings are represented in a more balanced way in the conversation between Ogata-San, a former school teacher, and Shigeo Matsuda, his son’s childhood friend, in *A Pale View of Hills*. Unlike Ono, Ogata-San is just a supporting character in the novel, though it is obvious that these two characters resemble each other in a crucial respect. Both are criticised by younger generations for what they did during the war. Ogata-san was a teacher at primary school, and according to Shigeo Matsuda, the old man involved himself in ‘the sacking and imprisoning of the five teachers at Nishizaka’ apparently for the sake of those teachers’ unpatriotic remarks (*Pale View* 148). Matsuda then confronted Ogata-san:

‘I don’t doubt you were sincere and hard working. I’ve never questioned that for one moment. But it just so happens that *your energies were spent in a misguided direction, an evil direction*. You weren’t to know this, but I’m afraid it’s true. It’s all behind us now and we can only be thankful’.

‘This is extraordinary, Shigeo. Can you really believe this? Who taught you to say such things?’

‘Ogata-San, be honest with yourself. In your heart of hearts, you must know yourself what I’m saying is true. And to be fair, *you shouldn’t be blamed for not realizing the true consequences of your actions. Very few men could see where it was all leading at that time* [. . .].’ (*Pale* 147-48; italics added)

Apparently, this conversation may come down to a generational gap or a matter of changed values. But this kind of reading would not be in order here. Indeed, the last remark by Shigeo reflects most precisely what Ishiguro has been saying about our inability of attaining a special perspective: ‘*Very few of us seem to possess that kind of special perspective*’ (Interview, 1987, Bigsby 21-22; italics added). Given this, our focus should be directed not towards which party is right (Ogata-San or Shigeo Matsuda), but towards the implication of this conversation.

The conversation between Ogata-San and his son Jiro implies that Shigeo Matsuda has joined the Communist Party, politically flourishing immediately after the war (*Pale View* 59). But the novel itself is written from the perspective of the early 1980s, a period witnessing the rapid decline of communism. This means that both Ogata-San and Shigeo are in the same boat, so to speak. That is why Ogata-San is allowed to appeal to Matsuda thus:

You have no idea, Shigeo, how hard we worked, men like myself, men like Dr Endo, whom you also insulted in your article. We cared deeply for the country and worked hard to ensure the correct values were preserved and handed on. (*Pale View* 147)

You obviously have no idea of the effort and devotion men like Dr Endo gave to their work. You were just a small boy then, how could you know how things were? How can you know what we gave and what we achieved? (*Pale View* 148; italics added)

It would simply not be right to read these words as a defensive remark on Ogata-San’s part.

On the contrary, they show the common fate that both the old man and the young man ultimately cannot avoid in their lives: they have no idea what's going on and what will happen next. Just as Ogata-San had no idea about the consequence of 'the effort and devotion' he gave to the work of teaching, Shigeo has no idea not simply as to Ogata-San's past but also as to how his own present political view will be deemed in the future. Both Ogata-San and Shigeo are not allowed to get out of their narrow visions that bind them in their youth. Ogata-San says to Etsuko, seeing off Shigeo walking briskly away, that when young he himself was as confident and 'very sure' of his opinions as Shigeo is now (*Pale View* 148). Ogata-San's remark is quite close in implication to Ono's when the latter faces the criticism from Kuroda's pupil, Enchi (remember that Kuroda himself is Ono's former pupil): 'You're too young, Mr Enchi', says Ono to the pupil of his former pupil, 'to know about this world and its complications' (*Artist* 114).

Seen from this angle, Ogata-San's following remark in the conversation with his son, Jiro, on the importance of inviting a teacher to a school reunion can be read as the author's nostalgia for the old days when such moral virtues as allegiance or obligation were cherished in Japan, perhaps recalling nostalgically his old bond with his own grandparents to whom Ishiguro felt bound by a sense of filial duty that he failed to fulfil. Ogata-San, referring to the coming school reunion his son Jiro is going to attend, says: 'Pupils all go separate ways, and then they find it so difficult to keep in touch. That's why these reunions are so important. One shouldn't be so quick to forget old allegiances. And it's good to take a glance back now and then, it helps *keep things in perspective*' (*Pale View* 29-30; italics added). This remark is described not as an old man's obsession with traditional values but as a more balanced way of looking at things: keeping things in perspective. Ogata-San's attitude towards life is represented in his repetition of the particular word, 'proper', in his conversation with Jiro:

It's a shame teachers aren't asked more often to these occasions. I was asked along

from time to time. And when I was younger, we always made a point of inviting our teachers. I think it's only *proper*. It's an opportunity for a teacher to see the fruits of his work, and for the pupils to express their gratitude to him. I think it's only *proper* that teachers are present. (*Pale View* 30; italics added)

But Ogata-San's generation is ideologically severed from the younger generation who no longer feel the need to show allegiance to their older counterpart—especially after the war. The young teacher Shigeo prioritises the *political* ideology he has espoused since the end of the war over his *private* sense of duty and obligation to Ogata-San, despite the fact that he was 'introduced' to the headmaster of the school he works for now by Ogata-San before the war.

Perspective: family members

Thus while Ishiguro's early interest in perspective derives from his concern over the relationship between individuals and society, the issue of perspective has gradually turned to relationships among family members after *The Unconsoled*. Indeed, Sophie's lack of perspective in *The Unconsoled* should be understood in terms of human relationships, particularly in terms of her relationship with his father Gustav as well as her apparent husband, Ryder. Gustav is worried about the pensive mood of his daughter (who has been struggling with her wound from her childhood, as seen in Chapter 14) and attributing its cause to her lack of 'perspective'. Gustav asks Ryder to just listen to what she has to say: 'If only Sophie could *see clearly what was happening*, I know she'd get a grip on things'; 'Just someone to sit down with her for a few minutes and make her *look at things clearly*'; 'once she gets into this state, she does need a little help to *recover her sense of perspective*'; 'That's all she needs, sir, a good talk, something to *give her back her perspective*'; 'Just a short talk, just to find out what's troubling her and to *give her back a sense of proportion*' (*Unconsoled* 28; italics

added). Gustav's stress on the necessity of a perspective for his daughter suggests that Sophie's constant loss of a perspective makes her an easy prey to the vicious cycle of gloomy contemplation and despair. Later on Ryder recalls his argument with Sophie on the phone in which he repeatedly says to Sophie: 'You live in such a small world!' (*Unconsoled* 35, 37). But what Gustav calls Sophie's lack of perspective can be attributed to her relationship with her father, more specifically the complete lack of communication between them spanning more than three decades. So when Ryder tries to evade Gustav's favour by saying, 'Sophie's worries, whatever they are, may well relate to family issues', he is right—although at this stage he knows nothing about the fact that he is also involved with those family issues himself. Ryder himself constantly loses a perspective, finding himself, for instance, being lost in direction in the city and facing the wall that prevents him from reaching the hall where he is supposed to make a big speech and give his performance. Ryder's constant loss of perspective about the circumstances around him derives from his sheer obsession with his wound, which demands an impossible mission to reconcile his parents to each other—for they have been dead for years, according to Ishiguro.

Seeing a perspective in perspective

In his latest work, *Nocturnes* (2009), a collection of five short stories, and particularly in 'Come Rain or Come Shine' in it, Ishiguro treats of a tragic-comical aspect of the lack of perspective. 'Come Rain or Come Shine' is all about the difficulty of keeping oneself in perspective. Ray, Emily, Charlie—the three characters of the story—see one another's situations from their own perspectives, but pathetically fail to see their own. Naturally they also fail to see how they are seen by others. The reader is allowed to guess at the real situation of theirs only from what others say about them. Ray has been working for many years overseas at English schools and now returns to England for a short regular visit to his friends

from college who are husband and wife, Charlie and Emily. Although Ray makes some brief, vague reference to ‘a few months that hadn’t exactly been the best in my life’ (*Nocturnes* 41) as well as to the fact that time flies much quicker than he expected—‘before you know it, you’re forty-seven years old’—readers cannot find any obvious fault with Ray’s life as long as they see it from Ray’s perspective. But Ray’s conversations with Charlie and Emily offer different perspectives. Charlie regards his old friend as just making a mess of his life: ‘Your situation’s hopeless’(44); ‘you’ll be moaning about exactly the same things’ (45); ‘After a certain point, you’ve got to take charge of your life’ (45). In the same way Emily is ‘distinctly impatient’ with Ray (47), apparently persuading him to recognise his own hopeless situation:

Only forty-seven. This ‘only’, this is what’s destroying your life, Raymond. Only, only, only, Only doing my best. Only forty-seven. Soon you’ll be only sixty-seven and only going round in bloody circles trying to find a bloody roof to keep over your head! (49; italics in original)

When you think of all your potential, aren’t you ashamed? Look at how you lead your life! It’s . . . it’s simply infuriating! One gets so exasperated! (49)

‘I didn’t realise’, she went on, apparently not hearing me, ‘how different you are now. How close to the edge you must be’ (53)

I suppose the passing years have just left you high and dry. You’re like a man on the precipice. One more tiny push and you’ll crack. (53)

You’re only a husk of the Raymond from those days. (53)

The gap between Ray’s perception of himself and his old friends’ views of his present

condition is thus salient. But actually the same gap holds true for the three of them—what one sees in oneself and what the rest see in him or her. Charlie complains to Ray about too many expectations being piled upon him by his wife, Emily:

‘She thinks I’ve let myself down’, he was saying. ‘But I haven’t. I’m doing perfectly okay. Endless horizons are all very well when you’re young. But get to our age, you’ve got to . . . you’ve got to get some *perspective*. That’s what kept going round in my head whenever she got unbearable about it. *Perspective*, she needs *perspective*. And I kept saying to myself, look, I’m doing okay. Look at loads of other people, people we know. Look at Ray. Look what a pig’s arse he’s making of his life. She needs *perspective*. (51; italics added)

But Charlie himself has lost such a perspective about himself when he admits on the phone to Ray that he is irresistibly attracted by a dentist who has ‘untarnished idealism’. This time Ray admonishes Charlie thus: ‘But you should pull yourself together. Get things in *perspective*’ (74; italics added). At the same time Ray realises why he has been invited by Charlie to their dismal home. Charlie expects Ray to be ‘Mr Perspective’ (51) for his wife—to make her see Charlie as quite normal and ‘OK’, compared to utterly helpless and hopeless Ray. The three of them feel something is wrong with themselves but cannot get down to it, being too much distracted by the others’ lack of perspective. The best they can say about themselves is what Ray says about himself: ‘Look, really Emily, I’m not so bad . . .’ (53). But that view in itself is also provided from the prison of Ray’s distorted perspective.

Symbols for perspective

Ishiguro’s fiction as a whole contains a variety of symbols for perspective, especially its limitation, instability, distortion, and even absence. This section shows the rhetorical ways Ishiguro represents what he himself considers several aspects of perspective.

‘Come Rain or Come Shine’ in *Nocturnes* contains Ishiguro’s comical representation of absence of perspective. The absence appears, though this may sound oxymoronic, when Ray abandons his own perspective and instead adopts the perspective of Hendrix, or the dog of Emily and Charlie’s neighbour. Ray stealthily looked into Emily’s notebook left behind on the table in the kitchen and found on one page her scribbles like ‘arrival of Prince of Whiners’ (*Nocturnes* 56) obviously referring to Ray. He then loses control of his emotion and before knowing it he finds he ‘screwed up the offending page’ in his hand, and gets panicked (57). Getting advice on the phone from Charlie who visited Frankfurt for his business trip, Ray decides to make up a story for the mess of the page on her diary: that is, their neighbour’s dog, Hendrix, did it. To make it all look like Hendrix’s work, Ray sets out to make a mess of the whole house until he notices something crucial missing in his operation—Hendrix’s perspective:

The big mistake, it struck me, lay in my complete failure to consider the task from the *perspective* of a creature like Hendrix. The key, I now realised, was to immerse myself within Hendrix’s spirit and *vision*. [. . .] I went into the room in a crouched posture, so as to see it from something like Hendrix’s *eyeline*. (75-76; italics added)

Ray manages to take Hendrix’s ‘eyeline’ by crouching on the floor ‘on all fours’ and sinking his teeth ‘into the pages’. Witnessing all this Emily concludes that he has finally lost what few senses he had (76). Ray’s adoption of the strategy of seeing things in Hendrix’s perspective, initially aimed to cover up his emotional act of messing Emily’s notebook, ends up reinforcing Emily’s perception of his emotionally unstable condition. A series of foolish acts displayed by Ray’s taking Hendrix’s perspective illustrate the complete absence of his own perspective as well as the impossibility of attaining a perspective that looks convincing to others when they themselves are lacking in perspective.

An Artist of the Floating World, on the other hand, shows the impossibility of attaining one constant, stable perspective. Towards the ending of *An Artist of the Floating World*, the narrator Ono recalls a scenery he enjoyed more than a decade ago well before the war. It was when he looked down from a hill towards where his former master Moriyama's villa stood. That was the moment, according to Ono, when he felt 'a profound sense of happiness deriving from the conviction that one's efforts have been justified; that the hard work undertaken, the doubts overcome, have all been worthwhile; that one has achieved something of real value and distinction' (*Artist* 204). The aim of Ono's visit to Moriyama was obvious: to get his former master to shame by appearing as a more renowned artist than the master himself. Therefore, Ono had resolved he would not 'revert to old habits and address him as "Sensei"; instead, I would simply address him as though he were a colleague' (*Artist* 203). In the meantime, Ono enjoyed the view of Moriyama's villa down below from the top of the hill with his sense of elation mounting inside him:

In time I found myself at that spot on the high mountain path that gave a fine view of the villa standing amongst trees in the hollow *below*. [. . .] And it was as I sat there, *looking down at the villa*, enjoying the taste of those fresh oranges, that that deep sense of *triumph* and *satisfaction* began to rise within me. (*Artist* 203; italics added).

The apparently innocent description of the perspective available to Ono, who is looking *down* at his former master's villa *below* from *up* on the hill, shows the extent of a triumphant feeling of elation Ono is feeling from the vantage point. But the problem with this description is that the emotion he is recalling at this narrative moment comes back from the period when he was involved in a series of activities the political merit of which people challenge now. Ono is simply recalling this episode in order to console himself deprived of any grounds for satisfaction. That is why when he says to himself—'it is always a consolation to know that

one's life has *contained a moment or two of real satisfaction* such as I experienced that day up on that high mountain path' (*Artist* 204; italics added; italics added)—it sounds hollow and at the same time poignant. It sounds hollow because it is the emotion that he can only recall, not feel, at this moment. And it sounds poignant because no matter how 'real' the sense of satisfaction was to him then, it cannot be justified at the present for the political change of values. In other words, his vantage point up on the hill for looking down at Moriyama's villa is visualised as something ephemeral and delusional. The inevitable instability of perspective is fully rendered in the brief nostalgic description of the scenery.

Similarly, Stevens in *The Remains of the Day* is standing on the top of a hill which commands a great view on the first day of his motorcar trip to Cornwall. But while he drives on the roads, however, his vision is continually obstructed by foliage and trees on either side of the roads (*Remains* 24, 123). In Dorset, for instance, on the way to 'Mortimer's Pond', Stevens finds the Bentley, the car he borrows from his present master, Mr Farraday, breathing 'a heated smell' from its engine but then the narrow lane he is passing along is 'hemmed in on either side by foliage so that [he] could gain little idea of what was around' (*Remains* 123). And 'the high hedges on either side of [him] also persisted, obscuring [his] vision' (*Remains* 124). After having the engine checked by a butler in 'a tall Victorian house' and denying his connection with Lord Darlington in his conversation with the butler, Stevens arrives at 'Mortimer's Pond' and finally 'can command a view of its entirety' (*Remains* 127). The constant interruption of his vision in his drive being followed by clear visions of the surrounding scenery, together with his constant reflection and reminiscence of some episodes from the past, may work as a metaphor for Stevens's struggling to gain a wider perspective of his own life. Ishiguro says about the small world Stevens inhabits as follows:

When I wanted to write about Stevens it is very much the same story on the career-political side: someone who has *such a limited world* that he *cannot really see the*

full implications of what he's doing. So Stevens assumes that his 'you' is another servant. He *cannot really picture* a world where somebody might come from outside that world. I found this very useful to my purposes because that's what it is all about. As I said about *The Remains of the Day*, these books I wanted to be read metaphorically, I want people to *get a perspective on the smallness of Stevens's vision and his world* and then to say: 'Well perhaps my world too is very small, if someone *looks at it from some angle*' and so it was very important to me to create this atmosphere of *smallness* and of '*parochialness*', just *the limits of his vision*' (Interview, 1999, Gallix 151; italics added)

Perhaps, what Ishiguro says about Stevens and the limited, parochial vision available to him applies to all the other characters and their relation with their (lack of) perspectives analysed above. The artist Ono could not see the political implications of his artistic endeavours; and now he is convinced that the feeling of satisfaction he was then having was 'real'. Even what one considers to be a valid perspective is not taken to be so by others, as 'Come Rain or Come Shine' shows. Ray's attempt to picture Hendrix's world by imitating the latter's possible eye level helps deepen Emily's conviction that he has gone mad.

In *When We Were Orphans*, too, the protagonist experiences a similar kind of visual obstruction. On his arrival in Shanghai the first thing that attracts his attention and that he finds extremely annoying is 'the way people here seem determined at every opportunity to *block one's view*'. Indeed, '[n]o sooner has one entered a room or stepped out from a car than someone or other will have smilingly placed himself right *within one's line of vision*, preventing the most basic perusal of one's surroundings' (*Orphans* 153; italics added). Banks connects this perennial interruption of his vision to a sense of '*disorientation* which threatened to overwhelm me for a time upon first arriving here' (*Orphans* 153; italics added). In fact, readers also gradually get disoriented in the narrative Banks goes on to relate. It is

well known that this is precisely where the narrative starts to change its general tone from straight realism to strange dream-like fabulism, the narrator being overwhelmed by his emotional logic. Masahiro Takatsu interprets these instances of visual obstruction to be ‘signifiers of Christopher’s blindness to what is actually happening’ around himself (‘Through the Magnifying Glass’ 10)—perhaps referring to Christopher Banks’s blindness to the implication of the war going on in the midst of his adventure into Shanghai and his memory of his childhood Shanghai beyond.

Indeed, *When We Were Orphans*, unlike the other novels discussed so far, has drawn the most intense of discussions from reviewers and critics regarding the symbolical representation of what Tova Reich calls ‘skewed perspective’ (42) through the protagonist Banks’s use of his own Sherlockian magnifying glass. Reich and Andrew Barrow, both being reviewers of the novel in question, construe the meaning of the magnifying glass as representation of Ishiguro’s vision of ‘truth’ (Reich 43) and ‘mystery’ (Barrow 44) in life. In the same magnifying glass, Takahiro Mimura identifies the symbolical implication of the distortion of perspective, and argues that it signifies Ryder’s blindness, or the impossibility of seeing things as they are (*Kazuo Ishiguro* 136). Diana Postlethwaite provides a view, however, that the magnifying glass, symbolising Ryder’s ‘ocular difficulties’ (160), enables readers to see that he cannot see (160), implying that the novel offers readers a perspective of the lack of perspective. Perhaps we can add to these analyses of perspective what we know about the relation between the glass and a wound—the fact that the same magnifying glass enables Christopher Banks to examine the Japanese soldier’s wound (*Orphans* 254). In this respect, this favourite tool for his detective work helps magnify the wound of Christopher’s own from childhood.

‘Optical instruments’ do abound, as H el ene Machinal notes (62), in *When We Were Orphans*: the magnifying glass, the opera glasses, and a pair of binoculars, all of which

Machinal argues ‘could be envisaged as symbols of the subjectivity of vision, of vision as a means of limitation to one perspective’ (62). In the same vein Takatsu argues that the opera glasses distorts Banks’s vision so that he ‘doesn’t see the war but the boat gliding under a bridge not far from the area where the fighting is taking place’ (9). In this scene people have just stopped dancing in the ballroom to see from the balcony of a hotel a lot of shells falling down onto the city of Shanghai just beyond the International Settlements. At one point Banks is given the pair of opera glasses:

I stepped out on to a small balcony. I could feel a warm breeze and the sky was a deep pink. I was looking down from a considerable height, and the canal was visible past the new row of buildings. Beyond the water was a mass of shacks and rubble out of which a column of grey smoke was rising into the evening sky.

I put the glasses to my eyes, but *the focus was entirely wrong for me and I could see nothing*. When I fiddled with the wheel, I found myself gazing on to the canal, where I was faintly surprised to see various boats still going about their normal business right next to the fighting. I picked out one particular boat—a barge-like vessel with a lone oarsman—that was so piled up with crates and bundles it seemed impossible for it to pass under the low canal bridge just beneath me. As I watched, the vessel approached the bridge rapidly, and I was sure I would see at least a crate or two fall from the top of the pile into the water. For the next few seconds, I went on staring through the glasses at the boat, *having quite forgotten the fighting*. I noted with interest the boatman, who like me was utterly *absorbed by the fate of his cargo and oblivious of the war just sixty yards to his right*. Then the boat had vanished under the bridge, and when I saw it glide gracefully out the other side, the precarious bundles still intact, I lowered the glasses with a sigh. (*Orphans* 160-61; italics added)

Initially the focus is wrong, but once things are in focus, Ryder's attention is drawn towards a boat peacefully gliding along the canal. Banks's and the boatman's considerable aloofness to the warfare nearby and their entire absorption in the fate of the tiny vessel with crates and bundles approaching the low bridge are rendered possible due to the restriction of their perspective: the boatman is physically close to the bridge and Banks's vision is magnified by the opera glasses. Although their perspectives are parallel with each other, yet their concerns apparently come from different sources: whereas the boatman's concern is for the safety of the products he is carrying in his vessel, Banks's concern is for the safety of his own childhood world he symbolically associates with the fate of those bundles and crates on the vessel. He only hopes for them to be safely carried through under the bridge so much so that when he sees the vessel 'glide gracefully out the other side' of the bridge, with 'the precarious bundles still intact', he gives a 'sigh' of relief. Also, the huge gap between the abnormality of fighting unfolding and the common everyday scene of a vessel sailing under a bridge not only suggests the narrow perspective of Banks's but also implies the gap between the reality of today's Shanghai and his fantasy world consisting of his nostalgic memories of his childhood in Shanghai. Perhaps the scene unfolding through the opera glasses is superimposed on one of the scenes Christopher and Akira, when both were little in Shanghai, witnessed often: they sat on a riverbank 'staring at a boat going by in the river' (*Orphans* 99) in their childhood days. Thus, it takes some time to adjust his focus from the real Shanghai to his own imagined and vanished world—Banks still believes that his childhood world is intact like the tiny bundles on the vessel Banks sees through the opera glasses.

That Banks's perspective is tightly linked to his nostalgia for his childhood is confirmed by another scene. Searching through the rubbles of houses beyond the International Settlements for a house where he believes his parents are in custody, Banks encounters a Chinese lieutenant who offers to help him find the house. Then at one point when reaching a

warren the lieutenant hands Banks ‘a pair of binoculars’: ‘I raised them to my eyes and spent some time adjusting them until I could see clearly, only to find I was gazing at a chimney stack a few yards in front of me. Eventually, though, I managed to focus on the column of smoke in the distance’. (*Orphans* 234). Then strangely enough the lieutenant says to Banks as if both of them have found exactly what they had been searching for: ‘It must feel strange. To think you might be looking at the very house containing your parents’ (*Orphans* 237). At this moment these words of the lieutenant allow Banks to go far back to his childhood imagination of rescuing his parents: he used to play with Akira the rescue drama whose finale is marked by ‘a magnificent ceremony held in Jessfield Park, a ceremony that would see us, one after the other, step out on to a specially erected stage—my mother, my father, Akira, Inspector Kung and I—to greet the vast cheering crowds’ (*Orphans* 111-12). Here Banks recalls this drama and tells the lieutenant thus:

Lieutenant, you’ve been most kind. I can’t tell you how grateful I am to you.

In fact, if it won’t embarrass you, you will perhaps permit me to mention you by name during the ceremony that will take place at Jessfield Park to commemorate the freeing of my parents. (*Orphans* 238)

The pair of opera glasses and the pair of binoculars enable Banks to see what he cannot see without them. In an instant the lenses cover the distance of space allowing the protagonist a perspective with which to look very closely at something that is happening at the moment. But they also cover the time distance as well, allowing Banks to go back to his childhood fantasy of rescuing his parents.

A pair of binoculars appears in *A Pale View of Hills*, too, but with a different connotation. When Etsuko takes a trip to Inasa with Sachiko and Mariko, the protagonist buys Mariko a pair of binoculars. Etsuko tries its effect and gets surprised by the clarity of its focus. Etsuko sees through the lenses towards Sachiko, her psychological double, far in the distance:

Sachiko had dressed for the day in a light-coloured kimono tied with an elegant sash—a costume, I suspected, reserved only for special occasions—and she cut a graceful figure amidst the crowd. She was still talking to the two women, one of whom looked like a foreigner. (*Pale* 104-105)

The binoculars has some implication in terms of perspective, as Mark Wormald suggests in abstractive terms.⁴³ But let me offer a more specific interpretation about their function at this scene. As seen in Chapter 14 ‘Staging Wounds’, Etsuko will not say anything concrete about the circumstances as to how she divorced Jiro and left Japan for England. Instead, she tells about herself, actually, her past self, through relating her memory of Sachiko and Mariko. The scene above is where Etsuko sees for the first time Sachiko talking to a foreigner in English. The figure of Sachiko here can thus be envisioned as the future of Etsuko’s own, as an omen of her move to England to live with Mr Sheringham, a British journalist. After all, Etsuko, the narrator of this story, is narrating this very story *in* English. The lenses of the binoculars may have enabled Etsuko to superimpose the future figure of her own onto Sachiko. Both Banks and Etsuko use a pair of binoculars to see someone far off. But what they see through the binoculars is different to each other: Banks sees his past and Etsuko her future.

Ishiguro’s fiction is replete with symbols for perspective but at the same time many of his main characters struggles to gain a perspective about themselves and their lives, thus throwing a temporal light onto the past or the future, with optical instruments that enable them

⁴³ Wormald argues that ‘In this scene on the hill, with the binoculars, we glimpse through the quietly distorting medium of Etsuko’s prose childhood and adult passions looming and losing themselves in each other with primitive passion. Ishiguro is, of course, using those binoculars too, to contrive a brilliant, eerie moment, in a novel that proved merely the first layer in a palimpsest composed of similarly sliding perceptions and perspectives’ (232)

to. But perspective, itself being distorted, limited, and even absent, never allows us to see things as they really are—a sense that seems to be strengthened increasingly the older we get because a lot of things start to get out of our control. This is the way Ishiguro feels about life in general and his own in particular, as we will see in the coming chapter, 17.

17 Out of control

This chapter looks into Ishiguro's interviews to see how control-freak Ishiguro comes to see that he is losing control over his own life, and how his sense of loss of control is represented in his later works and *Never Let Me Go* in particular.

Control-freak

Ishiguro is a control-freak in writing. He owns up to it. He has been well known for the meticulous care with which he creates the world of his fiction. In several interviews he states that, when he wrote *The Remains of the Day*, he didn't actually start to write until he had finished all the plans for the novel—theme, storyline, character, narrator, and setting—in his head. Forming the whole plan for *The Remains of the Day* took him no less than two years but he completed its writing merely within a year. It is hardly surprising at all to hear the author talking about the novel in question thus: 'The book I ended up with was almost exactly the book I'd planned' (Interview, 1995, Jaggi 112). Apparently, however, the more interviews he went through after the publication of *The Remains of the Day* and the more questions he was put about any possible connections there might be between the butler and the writer himself—the character's emotional restraint and the author's restrained style, in particular—Ishiguro's thought was ricocheted towards the possibility of their parallelism. In a 1995 interview Ishiguro confessed he found himself being unnerved by the very possibility:

[. . .] then I go home and think, Jesus, maybe this is just the way *I* am, maybe it's not Stevens the butler that talks like this, it's me! . . . And yes, as you say, there was a fear that the very things I was talking about, the poverty of a life that is too controlled, did start to apply to myself and my writing. That certainly occurred to me. (Interview, 1995, Wachtel 30; italics in original; underline added)

This fear of his parallelism with Stevens is not unfounded. Indeed, in *The Remains of the Day*

Miss Kenton refers to Stevens's obsession with perfect control over his professional work: 'It occurs to me you must be a well-contented man, Mr Stevens. Here you are, after all, at the top of your profession, every aspect of your domain *well under control*' (182).

Four years later Ishiguro remarked on this parallelism between him and Stevens again: 'although *The Remains of the Day* is not autobiographical in any sense, there is some small part of me that I exaggerate and create a kind of monster out of. Yes, I looked at these things; coldness, a fear of the world of emotions, and this urge to *control* everything through *professionalism*, through technical ability' (Interview, Gallix 137; italics added). Stevens's professionalism is indeed parallel not only with Ishiguro's idealism, as we have seen in Part I, but with Ishiguro's obsession with controlling the whole process of writing.

This control obsession might have prompted Ishiguro to be susceptible of the way people around him began to lose control over their lives in their mid-thirties. In the mid-point of his career, at the age of thirty-five—immediately after the publication of *The Remains of the Day*—his obsession with control was replaced by an utterly helpless feeling of messiness. Indeed, in the same year when he went out on promotion tours for *The Remains of the Day* Ishiguro referred to this messiness of life on a number of occasions, especially in the context of explaining the project for his next novel, *The Unconsoled*:

I'd maybe like to write a *messy, jagged, loud* kind of book. (Interview, 1989, Chira; italics added)

But I think sometimes I would like to write something very *messy and jagged and brilliantly imperfect*, in the way Dostoevsky has done. That's a side of my writing I'd like to explore further in the future. (Interview, 1989, Kelman 50; italics added)

Yes, there is something in *that messiness itself that has great value. Life is messy. I*

sometimes wonder, should books be so neat, well-formed? Is it praise to say that book is beautifully structured? Is it a criticism to say that bits of the book don't hang together? [. . .] I feel like a change. There's another side of my writing self that I need to explore: the *messy, chaotic, undisciplined* side. The undignified side. (Interview, 1989, Swift 41; italics added)

The alteration of scope for fiction Ishiguro was undergoing, as well as his reference to Dostoevsky as a model for his novel (instead of Chekhov on whose laconic style Ishiguro said he modelled in his early novels), is primarily due to his fear of getting 'repetitive or even stylistically be[ing] imprisoned by what people have said' he does well (Interview, 1989, Chira); in other words, he was being alarmed by the possibility of being imprisoned by the shadow of *The Remains of the Day*. This is the kind of fear almost every writer develops especially after he has achieved a certain level of success. Leaving his own achievement behind is the first step Ishiguro had to take.

But at the same time, some more fundamental conviction can be identified in the way Ishiguro asserts that 'life is messy'. It sounds as though it was based on his own experience and his observation of people he knew. In an interview conducted following the publication of *The Unconsoled*—when he was forty—Ishiguro stated thus: 'when I was 32 I had a certain view of how the world worked and now I am beginning to realise *how little in control I am*' (Interview, 1995, Smith 17). It is obvious that some kind of dramatic change of his world view occurred sometime between *The Remains of the Day* and *The Unconsoled*. Ishiguro is aware of this as the following comment shows:

I try to make my writing somehow address who I am as a person. When I published *The Unconsoled*, I was often asked why apparently I had changed things so much. The only answer I could come up with is that *I had changed quite a lot over time*. A book like *The Remains of the Day* was written from the same

assumptions that got me started writing; it's a rewrite of a rewrite of *A Pale View of Hills*. And so those first three books came out of a sensibility of somebody in his mid-twenties. And then I discovered that I was quite a different person with a quite different view of how life worked by the time I was forty. (Interview, 2001, Wong 188; italics added)

The new view of life Ishiguro acquired in his late thirties evidently has much to do with his sense of messiness, or his solid sense of uncontrollability in life.

Control-freak losing control

Now let us look at the formation of his view of uncontrollability in life. Actually, *The Remains of the Day* addresses the issue of uncontrollability and even fatalism. At the end of the narrative Stevens recalls his brief conversation with a former butler and then after that he ruminates on 'the hard reality' butlers like them have to accept at certain points in their lives:

The hard reality is, surely, that for the likes of you and me, there is *little choice other than to leave our fate*, ultimately, in the hands of those great gentlemen at the hub of this world who employ our services. What is the point in worrying oneself too much about what one *could or could not have done to control the course one's life took?*' (*Remains* 257; emphases added)

Ishiguro gives his own commentary to this statement of Stevens's in an interview: 'Because at the end of his career he lives in a Britain, and indeed in a world, that has decided that the course of action his employer was taking was mistaken and even despicable, he realises *how little control he has had over his life*' (Interview, 1989, Clee 1327). But Ishiguro's confrontation with the sense of uncontrollability in life in his mid-thirties is completely different in dimension from Stevens's perception of uncontrollability. Ishiguro compares these two senses of uncontrollability:

Although those earlier books are about life being hard to control, there's something about the tone that suggests life is something that is controllable and rather orderly, that you *can* look back and say, ah! that's where I took a wrong turning and that's the path I've come. Whereas by the time I got to my mid-thirties, paradoxically, things were looking more and more complicated to me and more and more chaotic, and issues much more complex than they did to me when I was in my twenties.

(Interview, 1995, Wachtel 29-30; italics in original)

The former part of this statement is about the assumption of Stevens' view of his own life. We know that Stevens's life is totally out of his control, but from Stevens' point of view he believes he can refer to some turning points in his life where something went wrong. In contrast to Stevens's taking 'a position of relative control' (Interview, 1995, Wachtel 32), Ryder, the protagonist of *The Unconsoled*, is given no vantage point of reflection on his own past; some bits of his childhood flash back to him in patches, which he fails to connect to one another only to be overwhelmed by some emotion involved in each fragmentary episode, while things continue happening around him over which he has no control whatsoever.

Mid-thirties in age are a crucial period to Ishiguro, as seen in Chapter 11. The view of life held in his twenties is essentially different to that held in his mid-thirties. His comment that life is hard to control has recurred again and again in his interviews, especially since around the middle of the 1990s. According to Ishiguro, he had no control even over how he wrote *The Unconsoled*: 'But sometimes you don't have a choice when you are trying to do something—you end up doing something odd and rather complicated and it might not be to everybody's taste' (Interview, 2000, Chapel).⁴⁴ What kind of view is it that dominates

⁴⁴ Martin Amis says along the same line: 'even fiction is uncontrollable. You may think you control it. You may feel you control it. You don't' (*Experience* 36).

Ishiguro's world view in his mid-thirties and then shapes *The Unconsoled*:

In *The Unconsoled* I wanted to express my feeling that it *wasn't that controlled*, that there was *no path*. *Fate, circumstances, deterministic forces* pick you up and just put you down somewhere and then you say: 'Oh yes, I'm rather glad I chose to do this job, I'm glad I married this person', and then you make pronouncements about what you're going to be doing in the future and then *this wind picks you up again and puts you somewhere else* and you're doing something completely different where the values that you've espoused before have completely changed.
(Interview, 1999, Gallix 155; italics added)

In another interview, too, Ishiguro expresses this fatalistic view of life. As he approaches 'the middle of [his] life', he comes to face 'the mess of our lives', for he finds that our lives are not defined by 'choices', 'political affiliations', or 'moral stances' (Interview, 2003, Gallix, Guignery, and Veyret 5). In his early novels, the main characters like Ogata-San, Ono, and Stevens, are all now influenced by and large by the choices they made or the moral stances they took before and during the war. That is why Ishiguro allows Stevens to look back on what the butler considers some of the crucial turning points in his life. These characters remember their past on the assumption that, if they had made different choices or taken different moral stances, they may have found themselves in different situations. And this is the assumption on which Ishiguro wrote these early novels. But after *The Unconsoled* Ishiguro gives up on that kind of view of life—the view that a broad perspective gives us a certain level of control over our lives, because our lives are not 'that controlled' (Interview, 1999, Gallix 155).

Instead, he begins to feel more convinced that life is defined entirely by external forces like 'circumstances', 'deterministic forces' (Interview, 1999, Gallix 155), 'other people's agendas', 'accidents' (Interview, 1998, Krider 133), 'fate', 'chance', or 'obligations of friends

and family and your work' (Interview, 2003, Gallix, Guignery, and Veyret 5). Ishiguro's new view of life is that life is essentially full of randomness. That is why 'it's an illusion to think that we carefully plan our lives' (Interview, 1998, Krider 133). The writer's understanding of life in general is best visualised in his use of the wind metaphor: 'this wind picks you up again and puts you somewhere else' (Interview, 1999, Gallix 155). Even in the case where he does not use the word 'wind', phrasal verbs associated with the wind appear instead: 'Most people are just *tossed around* by circumstances' (Interview, 1995, Smith 17; italics added); 'We are just kind of *blown around* by chance' (Interview, 2000, Chapel; italics added). For Ishiguro the wind represents our lives themselves; thus he describes our condition this way, too: '*Life* might pick you up and drop you somewhere else' (Interview, 2005, Inverne 67; italics added). We have no control over *when* the wind picks us up nor *where* the same wind puts us down. We are just at the mercy of the whim of the fate. Indeed, looking back on his own life, Ishiguro describes it thus: 'I had the sense when I looked back over my life I would actually see *a mess of decisions*, a few of which I had thought about, some of which I had sort of *stumbled on* and many that I had *no control over whatsoever*' (Interview, 2005, Adams; italics added). All we can do is justifying our situations and finding something meaningful in what we are doing there—the creation of fatalistic idealism.

Wound strikes back

This new view Ishiguro offers in his interviews is, perhaps, not that unique and strange. Many of us who turn into middle age will share this sense of loss of control to some extent. But there seems something unique about Ishiguro's view on the uncontrollability of life. It is the co-occurrence of the sense of uncontrollability and the sudden urge to caress one's childhood wound. Let us turn to another statement by Ishiguro in another interview:

I think somewhere along the way, after I'd finished *The Remains of the Day*, that

pattern of how one views one's life didn't really ring true for me anymore. I thought things were perhaps not as controlled as that. Laterally (sic), I've become much more interested in the fact that a lot of what we do is beyond one's control. We're often *motivated by completely irrational things*, and we often choose our vocation, who we associate with, who we live our lives with, who we marry *according to some crazy irrational scenario, of wanting to fix something that can never be fixed*. (Interview, 2003, Welch)

The latter part of this passage shows the association being made in Ishiguro's mind between what we have understood as the external forces defining our lives and the 'irrational scenario' of fixing 'something that can never be fixed'. The urge to fix something broken from the past, that is, one's childhood wound, is irrational simply because it is untenable.

The irrationality of fixing something unfixable from one's childhood is a major theme of *The Unconsoled* and *When We Were Orphans*, as we have discussed it in Part II. We have only to look into *When We Were Orphans* to see how the two things—the return of childhood wound and the sense of uncontrollability—link to each other. Christopher Banks is so obsessed with his imaginative story of rescuing his father he made up with Akira in their childhood to the extent that when he meets a Japanese soldier in the battlefield in Shanghai he believes that the soldier *is* the grown-up version of Akira. So Banks talks to the soldier thus:

After all, when we were children, when things went wrong, these wasn't much we could do to help *put it right*. But now we're *adults*, now we can. That's the thing, you see? Look at us, Akira. After all this time, we can finally *put things right*. Remember, old chap, how we used to play those games? Over and over? How we used to pretend we were detectives searching for my father? Now we're *grown*, we can at last *put things right*. (*Orphans* 263; italics added).

Of course, although he tries to put something right that happened far back in the past, he is not allowed to do so, simply because the past is beyond his control. No one can regain his or her lost childhood. It is not something one holds control over. This message is encapsulated in the belated conversation between Christopher Banks and Uncle Philip, the latter calling the protagonist by his puerile nickname in the old avuncular manner:

‘So my mother was, you might say, sacrificed for a greater cause’

‘Look, Puffin, *it wasn't anything any of us had a choice about*. You must understand that’ (*Orphans* 291; italics added)

This conversation suggests that Christopher remains in the world of his childhood: a world of safety and security controlled by adults. But as Christopher knows at his heart, the world has already been shattered when his mother was taken away from him when he was small. That is why he got very angry with Mei Li, a house maid, when he found she could do nothing to prevent his mother from being taken away from home:

And a cold fury rose within me towards Mei Li, who for all the fear and respect she had commanded from me over the years, I now realised was an imposter: someone *not in the least capable of controlling this bewildering world that was unfolding all around me*; a pathetic little woman who had built herself up in my eyes entirely on false pretences, who counted for nothing when the great forces clashed and battled. I stood in the doorway and stared at her with the utmost contempt. (*Orphans* 123; italics added)

Little Christopher got angry with Mei Lei because she allowed him to be let loose into the world of uncontrollability. And this is when Christopher got a first glimpse into the world of adults which was quite different from his childhood world protected by the same adults. In other words, Christopher moved from the world securely controlled by adults into the real, harsher world without any control. The shock was so huge that it took Christopher as the

narrator of this story ‘a good hour’ to move on to the sentence: ‘It is now late—a good hour has passed since I set down that last sentence—and yet here I am, still at my desk’ (123-24). But at the same time, Christopher never relinquishes the idea that by going back to Shanghai he can return to his childhood world inhabited by him and Akira. Christopher is not only nostalgic about his childhood; in fact, he has still been in his childhood at least in his imagination. The irrationality of his expectation about returning to Shanghai for the first time in thirty years is such that Christopher believes that the trip back to Shanghai will enable him to bring back the past as it was:

I have also been looking ahead, to the day when I eventually return to Shanghai; to all the things Akira and I will do there together. Of course, the city will have undergone many changes. But then I know Akira would like nothing more than to take me around, showing off all his great knowledge of the city’s more intimate reaches. He will know just the right places to eat, to drink, to take a walk; the best establishments where we might go after a hard day, to sit and talk late into the night, swapping stories about all that has happened to us since our last meeting.

(*Orphans* 124)

We have to recall that Christopher returns to Shanghai for the first time in 1937, presumably, at the age of thirty-five—the calculation of his age is based on Christopher’s reference in the opening sentence of his narration to the fact that he graduated ‘from Cambridge’ in ‘the summer of 1923’ (*Orphans* 3). Till then what really happened to his parents has been carefully kept out of his reach by Uncle Philip.

Ishiguro’s concept of uncontrollability of life is formed based on the assumption that in addition to such external forces as ‘fate’, ‘circumstances’, and ‘accidents’, some internal force is also at work in preventing our full rein of control over our own lives, that is to say, our obsession with our own childhood wound. Life is uncontrollable in a double sense. It is

uncontrollable partly because adult life is tightly tethered to our early experience of being wounded and partly because the early experience itself is totally beyond our control. Children are allowed to inhabit their fantasies as long as they are in their bubble world, but inevitably sometimes gradually or sometimes suddenly the film of their bubble is pierced and then they are thrown out into the world of reality—when a mental wound is inflicted on them. This process is beyond their control, and children are completely vulnerable to the force from outside. That is why one cannot help being nostalgic about that lost world, however irrational and untenable it is to fix one's wound and then go back into that world. And thus nostalgia involves the realisation of the impossibility of curing one's wound, and this feeling of nostalgia creates adult idealism to compensate the loss with a contribution to society or even humanity. Idealism, at the same time, forebodes another uncontrollability. Our examination of the artist Ono and the butler Stevens amply shows the difficulty of espousing one's idealism throughout one's life. Just as children's bubble world is vulnerable to outside forces, adults' idealism is vulnerable to the vicissitudes of social values and ethics—the changes that are beyond our control.

Ishiguro's sense of uncontrollability formed in his middle age recalls our first experience of loss of control in our childhood. Indeed, our loss of control—parents' constant rows for Ryder and parents' disappearances for Banks—forms the creation of our childhood wound. Considering this, our childhood experience of loss of control—Ishiguro calls this the formation of wound—strikes back at us when we feel again the same loss of control in the middle age. Ishiguro's nostalgia contains an acute sense of fatalism in itself—the inevitable return of wound from childhood.

Metaphors of uncontrollability in *Never Let Me Go*

The lives of the clones in *Never Let Me Go* are carefully controlled by their guardians

while they are allowed to stay in Hailsham, as seen in Chapter 13. But when they grow up and get sent out into the world outside Hailsham, they start to confront their shaky existence, or their lightness of being. The ‘bubble’ metaphor as we have seen mentioned by Ishiguro in Chapter 9 represents the way the clones are protected from the world beyond, as well as how brittle the sphere of their lives is, but it also metaphorically expresses the fragility of human life. And this bubble metaphor is the prototype of several metaphors that articulate the feather-like lightness of life.

Kathy the carer receives the news from a Hailsham graduate that the school closes, and the very same night she turns her mind to the episode of a few days ago when she found herself walking along a street close behind a clown who carried helium balloons.

. . . I could see [the clown’s] fist, where all the balloon strings converged, and I could see he had them securely twisted together and in a tight grip. Even so, I kept worrying that one of the strings would come unravelled and a single balloon would sail off up into that cloudy sky. . . . I thought about Hailsham closing, and how it was like someone coming along with a pair of shears and snipping the balloon strings just where they entwined above the man’s fist. Once that happened, there’d be no real sense in which those balloons belonged with each other any more.

(Never 209)

Inside as well as outside Hailsham, Kathy feels, she and others are anchored by their guardians’ grip onto the metaphorical strings knotted around them. Yet the closing of their school means that the very strings will be cut off from the guardians’ grip,⁴⁵ forcing the students and graduates slowly but separately to float up, from the close-knit Hailsham

⁴⁵ Toker and Chertoff maintain that Hailsham is ‘a kind of maternal environment’ with the guardians and the students tied into a tight knot by an ‘umbilical cord’ (166).

community to which many of them are emotionally tied up, into the grey, sunless sky where they never will feel their sense of security and solidarity. Now each has to begin a one-way isolated journey to death.

This sense of eventual separation from each other is described by Tommy, too: ‘I keep thinking about this river somewhere, with the water moving really fast. And these two people in the water, trying to hold onto each other, holding on as hard as they can, but in the end it’s just too much. The current’s too strong. They’ve got to let go, drift apart. That’s how I think it is with us . . . we can’t stay together forever’ (*Never* 277).⁴⁶ Their firm grip onto each other is to slip in the end in the furious current, their being swept separately out into the fog-bound sea where they never can touch each other. This river metaphor is analogous to the balloon one above in symbolising their lightness as helpless beings, and very reminiscent of an earlier scene charged with narrative anticipation, where Kathy and others, upon graduation from Hailsham, cluster together as though protecting themselves against their fate, just like a flock of birds against the wind, in front of the farmhouse at the Cottage: ‘[We are] . . . fearful of the world around us, and—no matter how much we despised ourselves for it—unable quite to let each other go’ (*Never* 118).

⁴⁶ The river metaphor appears in an interview where Ishiguro compares the situations of Masuji Ono and Stevens with that of the main characters in *Never Let Me Go*: [Ono is] just being swept along with the tide. To some extent there is a similar situation in *Never Let Me Go*. The characters do belong to a rather odd community, but they are nonetheless very much part of that community, and they cannot stand outside it. This is why they’re so passive about what they’re being told to do: they cannot stand outside their situation as individuals. Many of my characters tend to go with the flow, and even an outsider like Stevens in *The Remains of the Day* to some extent isn’t an outsider’ (Interview, 2009, Matthews 115).

This passage also reminds us of Kathy's favourite song 'Never Let Me Go' and the novel's title of the same name. Kathy's interpretation of a part of the lyrics—'Baby, baby, never let me go' (*Never* 70)—is that it is about a woman who had never been pregnant for some reason, but who finally had a baby by miracle, and now 'holds this baby very close to her and walks around singing' this phrase partly 'because she's so happy, but also because she's so afraid something will happen, that the baby will get ill or be taken away from her' (70). Kathy knows her interpretation is not consistent with the rest of the lyrics, but then still keeps holding tightly in her mind this image of the mother holding tightly her baby. This might well signify her futile resistance to separation from her secure childhood, or from other students (Jerng 386), or from 'even humanity' (Herbert 55);⁴⁷ or simply signify her helplessness about her predestined future. *Never Let Me Go* is, in brief, a poignant echo of a faint, anguished cry for a life.

The clones' feather-light lives are most pathetically represented by use of the wind metaphor (recall Ishiguro's use of the same metaphor in his interviews: 'pick you up and just puts you down') in the novel's last scene in which bunches of trash fluttering along the fences surrounding a vast Norfolk field will at any moment be blown away by the wind:

All along the fence, especially along the lower line of wire, all sorts of rubbish had caught and tangled. It was like the debris you get on a sea-shore: the wind must have carried some of it for miles and miles before finally coming up against these trees and these two lines of wire. Up in the branches of the trees, too, I could see, flapping about, torn plastic sheeting and bits of old carrier bags. That was the only time, as I stood there, looking at that strange rubbish, feeling the wind coming

⁴⁷ Eluned Summers-Bremner asserts that the novel's theme is 'the human tenacity in warding off thoughts of death' (154). For the 'tenacity' in Ishiguro's view of life, see also Nagara.

across those empty fields, that I started to imagine just a little fantasy thing [. . .].

(*Never* 281-82):

The flapping trash, wasted and then carried by the wind all the way from places miles away, does refer to the ultimate conditions of Kathy's and others' lives.⁴⁸ Tommy's and Ruth's organs have been removed from their bodies and then implanted into human bodies unknown to the donors; their whole beings remain only in Kathy's memories, but even those memories will eventually disappear when in the very near future she undergoes the same transplant operations as did her friends, with her organs being scattered and her whole being lost in the world.⁴⁹ Their metaphorically represented lives are weightless and uncontrollable and frangible, and they are utterly helpless about it. And their fragile lives represent ours, too. In a sense, we are all being toyed by our whimsical fate, just as the trash is being toyed by the wind. Then it can be deduced from this that while depicting the lightness of the lives of the clones like Kathy, Tommy, and Ruth, who were created and raised and used as suppliers of body organs for human beings, Ishiguro is articulating the unbearable lightness of our own beings *per se*.

The issue of life being out of control in Ishiguro's fiction has more recently been addressed by some of his academic readers like Sean Matthews and Sebastian Groes. In their co-authored article, "Your Words Open Windows For Me": The Art of Kazuo Ishiguro', they

⁴⁸ Wong says that the images of trash scattered in the novel are not used metaphorically enough, to which Ishiguro replies they are not metaphors at all (Interview, 2006, Wong and Crummett 216-17). I disagree with them both.

⁴⁹ For the clones' fragmentariness, see Herbert 39. Tomoko Nakagawa speculates that their knowledge that their own bodies will someday disappear from the earth might cause the clones to invent this fantasy—that something lost can be found in Norfolk (94).

point to a certain ‘key tension’ in Ishiguro’s fiction that they describe thus: ‘[it is] the idea that we as individuals are not proper, rounded subjects but merely ghostly actors and performers inhabiting roles that are allocated to us *randomly* by the context in which we find ourselves’ (8; italics added). And referring to Miss Kenton’s asking Stevens about the reason for his pretension in *The Remains of the Day* as well as to Miss Emily’s remark in *Never Let Me Go* that clones are ‘simply pawns in a game’, Matthews and Groes neatly summarise our own typical situations in relation to those of Ishiguro’s characters:

We are doomed to enact narratives over which we, if we think of the pianist Ryder and the detective Christopher Banks, have *little control*, or, as in the case of the butler Stevens or carer Kathy H., *do not even want any control*. At our more *fragile* and less rational moments, we understand this. It frightens us and imbues everything in the world with a sense of loss that we can only recuperate through forging, nursing, and celebrating *brittle* human relationships. It is a high-quality and above all human writer such as Ishiguro who shows us how to do this, and in the act returns to us a degree of agency, hope, and comfort. (Matthews and Groes 8; italics added)

Perhaps the idealism Matthews and Groes identifies in Ishiguro’s attempt to bring back to us ‘a degree of agency, hope, and comfort’ demonstrates what little control Ishiguro can possibly gain over the imaginary world in his fiction. Resigned to the utter sense of uncontrollability in real life, nonetheless, Ishiguro seems as if trying to recover the old sense of security and safety from our lost childhood when he says thus: ‘What you’re trying to do is create an imaginary world that you have some *control over*, that you can *reorder*’ (Interview, 1996, Wachtel 33; italics added). But at the same time, Ishiguro never fails to lose interest in portraying the actuality of human conditions. He is not a type of writer who is impatient to preach his world view through his fiction. Rather, all he does with his fiction is just to

describe what he recognises as the existential essence of the real lives of ordinary people.

Ishiguro presents not what the world should be but what and how it really is. Our ultimate condition is conceived by Ishiguro as being defined by fate.

18 Fate

Ishiguro prefers writing about those whose lives are controlled by their fate rather than about those who (think they can) control their fate. Etsuko in *A Pale View of Hills* defies her fate of loneliness by leaving her Japanese husband for the English journalist, Mr Sheringham, together with her daughter, Keiko, but ends up losing both her English husband and daughter to death in England and is now left to live alone in the countryside. In both *An Artist of the Floating World* and *The Remains of the Day* alike, the protagonists place themselves in the more dire situations of facing the political consequences of what they were only marginally involved with in the past. They are both overwhelmed by the dilemma of whether to accept the fact that what they did in the past was morally wrong from the perspective of the present or, more simply, to accept their own mediocrity. Ryder in *The Unconsoled* and Banks in *When We Were Orphans* fight for losing battles of retrieving their lost childhood from the past and end up either losing their relationship with their loved ones or accepting the impossibility of their attempts. On the other hand, the situation into which the cloned protagonists in *Never Let Me Go* are fixed is the most extreme in that from the very beginning they are denied every right to live up to maturity in age, or to qualify a little, they are destined to live their lives that have been predetermined by others. Ishiguro has thus portrayed the way people come to see what their fate is and then come to terms with it.

Thus, there is no surprise that the term *fate* pops up over and over again in Ishiguro's interviews, as we have already seen. In the following interview *fate* appears in the context where Ishiguro explicates our destiny of not being able to attain a special perspective on our own world:

Most of us are not equipped with any vast insight into the world around us. We have a tendency to go with the herd and not be able to see beyond our little patch, and so it is often *our fate* that we're at the mercy of larger forces that we can't

understand. (Interview, n.d., Shaikh; italics added)

The difficulty of gaining such a vast insight into the world suggests that we have no choice but to leave the implication of what we do to those with broader perspectives:

And we do our little jobs as best we can and we take our pride and dignity from doing them well. And we offer this up, usually to somebody up there . . . that is our little contribution. We offer it to our employer, perhaps, or to the institution in which we work, perhaps we offer it to a cause . . . but often that is what we are *fated* to do. (Interview, 1999, Gallix 142; italics added)

Of course, this statement of Ishiguro's echoes what we have seen Stevens say about the profession of butlers: 'The hard reality is, surely, that for the likes of you and I, there is little choice other than to *leave our fate, ultimately, in the hands of those great gentlemen at the hub of this world who employ our services*' (*Remains* 244). If things are out of control, then it is only a step from this assumption to a tentative conclusion that what we do is actually what we are *allowed* to do. Of course, the agent is fate, not us. Ishiguro explains this in terms of idealism:

You can have a lot of principles and values and things that you declare you will and won't do at the outset, but once you are actually out there, how you end up living seems to me much more about what *fate allows* you to do, what other people's obligations *allow* you to do. (Interview, 2000, Chapel; italics added)

Of course, this view is reflected into, or more likely a reflection of, how Ishiguro views his own life. Ishiguro's frequent description of his own writing career demonstrates the extent of his conviction about the general uncontrollability of life:

It was only after I had been a failure at something else that I was *allowed* to be successful. (Interview, 1995, Smith 17)

So after years of total failure as a musician, as soon as I had a go at writing, all my stories sold. So although I never really wanted to be a writer, that's where I felt I got *permission* to do these things. (Interview, 1998, Krider 126)

I wanted to be a singer-songwriter. I did the whole thing of sending songs and demo tapes around, and after years of being rejected, I moved from writing songs to writing short stories. When I started to write stories, they started to get published almost immediately. So it was like a lot of things—you do what life *allows* you to do. (Interview, 2000, Mudge)

Like many things in life—you bang on a door and it doesn't open, and another one happens to open, so you go through it. That's what happened to me with writing. I suddenly discovered writing fiction at around age 24. And I started to do it. I was *allowed* to do it, so I very rapidly started to get published—after years of getting nowhere as a singer-songwriter. (Interview, 2000, Feeney)

These statements are all based on the actual and solid sense that he has been given no control to exercise over the course of his professional life. This use of 'allow' is very close in meaning to another term that frequently appears when Ishiguro refers to his success as a writer: 'I was very, very *lucky*' (Interview, 2006, Jones); 'I've been fantastically *lucky*' (Interview, 2011, Sullivan); 'I've been very *lucky*, but like any life, there'll be ups and downs' (Interview, 2011, Kehoe). Perhaps Kathy H. echoes this feeling of Ishiguro's when she says that, confronted with a donor whose 'face beneath the blotches went into a completely new kind of grimace' when she asks him where he grew up, she has found 'how lucky' she and Hailsham students were (*Never* 6). All these examples of how Ishiguro views his own life help surmise how he sees life in general. Ishiguro obviously finds in us what he finds in

himself: acceptance. Indeed, Ishiguro is very articulate in the following two interviews (both being quite recent ones) about his irresistible fascination with how we face our fate:

I'm not at all interested in the brave who fight against the odds and win. I am *interested* in those who *accept their lot*, as that is what many people in the world are doing. They do their best in ghastly conditions. (Interview, 2011, Sullivan)

I've always been *interested* in the extent to which people *accept fate*. [...] It is astonishing the extent to which people *accept their lot*. And not only do they *accept* it, they try and dignify it. Try and make it meaningful. (Interview, 2011, Hammond)

The emphasis is on the acceptance of fate. We may follow our fate possibly because it is inevitable, but Ishiguro's interest lies in the relative passivity of ours. This view is identical to one of the definitions of 'fatalism' offered by *The Oxford English Dictionary*: '2. *Acquiescence* in the decree of fate; *submission* to everything that happens as inevitable' (italics added). What makes us acquiescent and submissive towards our fate is the uncontrollability of the fate. Fate is out of control, in part because we have no big perspective of the world, and in part because fate in itself is full of random. Thus, Julia Llewellyn Smith is more than acute when she comments thus, 'success was as random as any other event' in Ishiguro's life (17). Indeed, Ishiguro regards the true condition of adulthood as consisting in randomness. Hence, when he stresses the importance of protection of a bubble in childhood, that is, making children believe in their security and safety, he says 'You let them learn the randomness later' when they enter the world where 'what you expect to happen next generally doesn't happen next' (Interview, 1996, Mackenzie 12). In Ishiguro's view, the reason why we cannot control our own lives is not because something or someone else has any control over our lives but rather because our lives are full of contingency and randomness.

The similarity between Ishiguro's view and the general meaning of fatalism cannot be emphasised too much, as revealed by the more concrete definition of fatalism given by *The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*: 'the belief that events are decided by *fate* and that you *cannot control* them; the fact of *accepting* that you cannot prevent sth from happening'. In short, we cannot control our own lives because they are defined by fate; thus we have no choice but to accept the uncontrollability of life. It is not so difficult to do this, because it is inevitable. As long as you cannot control it, you have to accept it. And things uncontrollable are many but the most obvious is mortality. Ishiguro's fatalistic view that one totally accepts the inevitable is best projected into the way cloned characters come to terms with their destiny of their early mortality in *Never Let Me Go*, for they are rendered totally helpless about their fixed fate (Haldane 112; Nagara 'Ishiguro no sakuhin' 400).

Acceptance of mortality

Quite a few reviewers of *Never Let Me Go*, including Philip Hensher, Michiko Kakutani, and Jay Jennings, cast doubt on the plausibility of the end of the novel—namely, that the clones end up passively and unconditionally accepting their fate of offering their vital organs to those from whose embryos they were apparently created. All of them put an obvious question: 'Why do they turn out to be so passive and helpless?' impatiently demanding the cloned students should be more rebellious than they are. An anonymous reviewer of the novel in question sounds more than frustrated: 'The most frustrating aspect of the novel, however, is the paradox of Hailsham's students being so expensively educated and taught to think for themselves, yet so fully accepting of their fate. Why do they not run away?' ('Organ Failure' 80). During the promotion tour of the film version of this novel, Ishiguro recalls this kind of early response from readers this way:

When this novel was published in 2005, a lot of readers put one question to me:

why don't the characters run away from the situation they are put in? Why don't they rebel and create a new world? Many readers seemed to be impatient with the characters' too passive attitude towards their fate. Indeed, 99% of the movies and novels coming on to the market are stories of the characters changing their fate and carving out a new world. However, *it is not the case*. (Interview, 2010, Shiraki 16; my translation; italics added)

But not all readers found the clones' passivity unnerving. Mark Jerng observes that reviewers' puzzlement at total passivity on the clones' part is ascribable to reviewers' expectation that demands of clones that they should rebel if they are close to human beings, because 'humans are people who rebel'. In Jerng's opinion, the very expectation is exactly what the novel tries to undermine (382). Yukimi Fujita, too, points to this human aspect of the clones' conditions:

Surely, the fate that awaits Kathy and others is cruel. But aside from the distinct case of their organ donations, it could be said that the clones' lives have the same reality as that of 'a life of a normal human being'. A man's whole life is predestined at the moment of his birth, and he cannot escape from his own destiny. The idea is a mere illusion that unlimited possibilities are open to him. He has no choice but to accept the fate allotted to him. (121; my translation).

The whole emotional structure of the novel is predicated on the assumption that the clones' passivity and helplessness are those of human beings, who are generally as passive and helpless as the clones in the way of having very few options to exercise in what they can do with their lives; and virtually no choice but to accept their mortality. And the assumption constitutes the central theme of the novel. Ishiguro tries to bring this point home to puzzled reviewers when he states:

I suppose the big thing about *Never Let Me Go* is that they never rebel, they don't do the thing you want them to do. They *passively accept* the programme in which

they are butchered for their organs. I wanted a very strong image like that for the way most of us are, in many ways we are inclined to be *passive*. We *accept our fate*. Perhaps we wouldn't accept this to *that* extent, but we are much more *passive* than we'd like to think. We *accept the fate* that seems to be given to us. I suppose, ultimately, I wanted to write a book about how people *accept* that we are mortal and we can't get away from this, and that after a certain point we are all going to die, we won't live forever. There are various ways to rage against that, but in the end we *have to accept* it and there are different reactions to it. So I wanted the characters in *Never Let Me Go* to react to this horrible programme they seem to be subjected to in much the way in which *we accept the human condition, accept ageing, and falling to bits, and dying*' (Interview, 2009, Matthews 124; italics added).

It is obvious that what motivated Ishiguro to write *Never Let Me Go* is his urge to portray as precisely as possible the condition under which we live and the way we come to accept the very condition. We are then drawn into the issue of how Ishiguro represents the way we confront and accept our fate in *Never Let Me Go*.

Leona Toker's and Daniel Chertoff's observation that 'the binding fascination that characterizes the first time reading of *Never Let Me Go* is, to a large extent, parallel to the experience of the novel's characters' (163) succinctly describes the parallel relationship between the reader and the clones with regard to their confrontation with their shared fate. The clones' condition of being in the seclusion of Hailsham obliges them to have only limited perspectives about their own actual conditions; Ishiguro organises the narrative structure in a well-calculated way that allows the gradual process by which the cloned students make out and then come to terms with their fate to be followed along a trajectory by his readers—a process the author dubbed a 'parallel journey' (Interview, 2005, Wroe). Thus, readers, whose

field of narrative vision is foggily blocked, are required to take as much time as the clones to penetrate into the consequence of the latter's fate. Peter Kemp perceives the strange obscurity of the narrative in Kathy's somewhat dim perception of the circumstances, while Marilyn Herbert and Andrew Riemer describe the opaqueness with negations and questions, respectively: 'The students do not know, and the guardians do not fully explain, how and when the school began. The children are not initially told who they are and what makes them unique' (48); 'What is Hailsham? Who are the "donors" Kathy looks after? . . . And what will become of her when she ceases to be a carer?' (See also Hensher; Kakutani). Both the readers and the clones are, in short, parallelly stumbling in a blind manner towards the narrative destination.

Sarah Howard highly praises this puzzling obscurity as owing much to an artistic dexterity on Ishiguro's part of 'building suspense' (24). Interestingly, on the other hand, other reviewers, as if dealing with a detective novel, guiltily reveal what they think is a crucial fact in the novel, brandishing self-justifying banners of 'spoiler alert': 'read no further than the end of this paragraph . . . Now seriously, no kidding, stop here' (Grossman 62); 'Stop reading now if you don't want to know . . .' (Jennings 44); 'Warning . . . don't read on' (Onstad); 'I've gotten letters [from one of his readers] . . . criticizing me for revealing too much about books. So I give you, as a kind of public service, all the endings . . . Let's add one more to the list: They're clones' (Watman 61). These obviously exaggerated precautions are not perhaps much more than well-meant (though banal enough) signs typical of notices.

Earl G. Ingersoll, however, seems vexed by them; indeed, he contends that the narrative is manipulated from the outset to 'forestall surprise'. Ingersoll argues that readers are somewhat prepared for coming 'revelations yet [they are] not so certain of [their truth] as to find its disclosure boring and obvious' (48). Thus Ingersoll flatly spurns those spoiler alerts above, asserting that 'these infantilizing efforts to *protect the reader* and not to "give away

the ending” can only continue the misreading of a narrative aimed at exploring the metaphor of a setting, or situation’ (43; italics added). Ingersoll is definitely right. The reviewers’ ‘efforts’ also seem to be laced with mischievous humour, as their expressions bespeak it.

But this verdict by Ingersoll sounds too obvious nonetheless; in fact, it is equally possible to see the reviewers’ uniform precautions as making almost the same impact on the reader as the precaution made by Miss Lucy (the only rebellious spirit among the guardians) does on her students. As she attempts to protect them by warning them of their future, so the reviewers just did their utmost to ‘protect the reader’ (to quote Ingersoll’s term)—be they aware or not—by perhaps warning thus: what they’re going to do is show us something we should *not* know if we haven’t yet read the book, but then that is ultimately what we *should* know. As a matter of fact, this is precisely what Miss Lucy does to her cloned students. The guardian’s surprise at finding that what they really should know has not been taught enough—for example, the fact that they have been afforded from the start no vocational option to choose from—compels her to allude to it before them, unwittingly betraying her anger against her fellow guardians and the authorities above them (*Never* 28-29; 80). In the same vein, the reviewer’s surprise at the students’ very identity must have forced them to hesitantly disclose it to the reader—quite a natural reaction.

Ishiguro himself says that when to expose the truth is a trivial matter to him because the novel is not a ‘mystery’ (Interview, 2006, Ōno 133; Interview, 2005, Wroe). But it is not the case: the very timing is crucial here. The point at issue is when to reveal the fact that the clones’ fate nearly approximates to the readers’; for what is at stake here is the readers’ confrontation with the uncontrollability of their lives as well as their mortality. What Ishiguro has done is organise the narrative in such a way as to lead both his clones and readers synchronically and gradually to confront their dreadful common fate. Ishiguro’s intention is by no means to evoke any suspense, but, as Wong points to the simultaneous ‘transformation’

of Ishiguro's characters and readers (*Kazuo Ishiguro* 102), to urge the reader to follow exactly the same steps by which the naïve, ignorant clones pick their way through the narrative towards their final realisation that their secure childhood is nearing its end, and that their inevitably early death is now imminent. In other words, Ishiguro's readers are encouraged to be baffled and irritated at the obscurity and fogginess of the clones' world, at least in the early stage of their reading, as the clones themselves are, but somewhere in the middle to be surprised not at the fact that the students are clones unlike them,⁵⁰ so much as by an unexpected similarity between themselves and the clones in terms of their slow comprehension of their ultimate fate.⁵¹ Here the reviewers above have indiscreetly overstepped the line drawn in the narrative, as Miss Lucy does, since it has been drawn to be overstepped by his readers themselves in the process of their reading, just as by the clones when they cross boundary-lines from ignorance to knowledge. In this respect, James Wood puts it aptly: 'We begin the novel horrified by their difference from us and end it thoughtful about their similarity to us' ('The Human Difference' 39; see also Takahashi 205). Their 'difference' is, of course, that they are clones unlike us, but their 'similarity' points, however hard it is to accept this, to our common fate: as soon as we are born, we irresistibly head rapidly or slowly through several uncontrollable stages of our lives towards our eventual

⁵⁰ Rebecca L. Walkowitz contends that the reader is rather 'urged to see humans as clones', not the other way round, because 'even humans produced through biological reproduction are in some ways copies' (226).

⁵¹ There are also studies of surprise on readers' part at 'sympathy' roused in themselves for the clones by the narrator's intimate voice. See Berstain 139; Kerr 16; MacDonald 79-80; Takahashi 205; and Toker and Chertoff 167-68. For criticism of Kathy's voice, see Hensher; Jennings 44; and Kermode 21. Ishiguro's commentary of the narrator's voice is offered in BookBrowse.

deaths.

But we should not forget the clones' initial unwillingness to face their fate. Their psychological struggle to ward off this crisis is duly observed by Sarah Kerr, but more eloquently elucidated by Ingersoll: 'That unwillingness to acknowledge their origins helps in part to explain how long this narrative must go on before the truth can finally be "outed," primarily because it operates in that psychological closet of truths we all would prefer not to open' (49). Ingersoll writes not just 'their' but 'we', for he perfectly knows that the story is quite tragic not so much because the clones' fate is crueller than ours, as precisely because ours is as cruel; and that our stringent fate stipulates for our near helplessness about our existential uncontrollability and mortality. Thus Ingersoll explicates our suffering correctly when he writes: 'Anticipating a point whose exploration has to be deferred, it might be said that Ishiguro masterfully develops the very *human* difficulty of not so much figuring out the truth as learning how to live with it' (48; italics added). John M. Harrison asserts that *Never Let Me Go* is a story about 'repressing what you know, which is that in this life people fail one another, grow old and fall to pieces' (26). Cynthia F. Wong finds the irrevocability of fatalism both in *Never Let Me Go* and *When We Were Orphans* when she observes that 'the epiphanies encountered by Christopher and Kathy shock their recipients into quiet yet painful and wrenching acceptance of their irrevocable fate' (*Kazuo Ishiguro* 83). Wong regards 'the inevitability of life' as constituting the world view offered by Ishiguro's recent novels (*Kazuo Ishiguro* 84). These remarks cover the precise range of Ishiguro's fatalism, which is described through the reverberation of Kathy's narrative voice we hear at the end of *Never Let Me Go*. Kathy closes her narrative with these words: 'I just waited a bit, then turned back to the car, to drive off to *wherever it was I was supposed to be*' (*Never* 282)—she describes the destination as 'wherever' simply because she has been, and will be, very much at the mercy of her own fate.

Fatalistic nostalgia

While *Never Let Me Go* is the latest and most extreme version of Ishiguro's fatalism, fatalism can be traced back chronologically into his novels that precede it. *When We Were Orphans*, the one immediately before *Never Let Me Go*, addresses fatalism in the sense that the main characters feel compelled to pursue their journey into their childhood. William Sutcliff writes that although '*When We Were Orphans* comes closer to the narrative of adventure than anything he [Ishiguro] has written before, an underlying *fatalism* remains firmly in place. [...] Ishiguro, quietly and profoundly, shows that we can't shape events; events shape us' (49; italics added). Brian W. Shaffer, too, identifies Christopher's obsession with his lost childhood in Shanghai with the distinctive agenda from which the protagonist cannot escape when he writes that Christopher, Sarah Hemmings, and Jennifer 'all share the same *life-defining fate*: that of having to "face the world as orphans"' (Rev. of *Orphans* 596; italics added). Diana Postlethwaite observes the extent to which Christopher's 'present life [has been] *determined and controlled* by long-past events' (165). These characters' obsession with their childhood is determined by their fate as having been left as orphans by their parents. The acutest comment provided, however, can be found in the remark by Masahiro Takatsu on *When We Were Orphans*: 'this novel makes clear how *the traumatic experiences in childhood* bring about *their ambition to get along in the world, and to contribute to it*' ('Through the Magnifying Glass' 8; italics added). It is obvious that Takatsu refers to the cause-and-effect relationship between nostalgia and idealism. What has been pushing the idealism of Christopher Banks and Sarah Hemmings forward throughout their youth is their obsession with their wound inflicted on themselves by their loss of parents, or to put it more simply, their irresistible nostalgia for their long-lost childhood.

Christopher and Sarah are bound into each other by their common fate of being drawn

back to their common childhood wound, or the loss of their parents. Sarah, being described by one of her old friends as trusting ‘so much to fate’ (*Orphans* 311), accepts what has happened to her in her last letter to Banks: ‘I have long ceased to be cross with you. How could I remain cross when *Fate* in the end chose to smile so kindly on me?’ (*Orphans* 312; italics added).

Christopher ruminates on their shared fate as orphans thus:

My feeling is that she [Sarah] is thinking of herself as much as of me when she talks of a sense of mission, and the futility of attempting to evade it. Perhaps there are those who are able to go about their lives unfettered by such concerns. But for those like us, *our fate* is to face the world as orphans, chasing through long years the shadows of vanished parents. There is nothing for it but to try and see through our missions to the end, as best we can, for until we do so, we will be permitted no calm. (*Orphans* 313; italics added).

Christopher’s fatalism, however, has to be read in the context of his caressing of his own wound as we have examined in Part II. His and Sarah’s fate as orphans never releases them from their obsession with, or their mission of, regaining their childhood days before they got wounded by becoming orphans. But it is impossible to bring those days back as long as they are bound in time. This means that they have to be fated to pursue unattainable things forever. At the same time, fatalism pursued by the author Ishiguro takes on nostalgia, which means that these characters’ orientation towards nursing their feeling of nostalgia is fated. In short, nostalgia works fatalistically in Ishiguro’s world. His characters feel compelled to embrace their nostalgia for childhood because they are destined to be so. If nostalgia is fatalistic in Ishiguro’s world view, then it is natural to think of his idealism as fatalistic too.

Fatalistic idealism

Ishiguro’s idealism involves his concomitant fear about the future as well as his fear

about the contingency of human condition. The latter fear brought him towards the rumination: what might have happened to him had he been born a generation earlier—a rumination we have witnessed in Chapter 3, ‘Fear of the Future’. Hirai, pointing to the emotional division between father and son being deepened by generational conflicts and overshadowed by the wall of America as the conquering country in ‘A Family Supper’, remarks that beneath the internal conflicts between father and son runs not only Ishiguro’s imaginative sympathy towards his parents’ generation but also ‘the novelist’s *fatalistic* perception of the human fragility: that we are inevitably bound by the constant change and instability of our geopolitical positions in the violent current of the times’ (*Kazuo Ishiguro*, 58; my translation; italics added). But it should be noted that the fatalism implied by Ishiguro’s early fiction concerns idealism, instead of nostalgia he develops later on. Ono, the protagonist in *An Artist of the Floating World*, gives priority to his own contribution to the society and the nation even at the expense of his personal relationship with his superiors (masters Takeda and Moriyama) or his subordinates (pupils like Kuroda and Shintaro). Stevens, unlike Ono, apparently never betrays his masters, because his whole identity as a great butler is dependent entirely on their existence. But actually, precisely because of the perception of his former master, Lord Darlington, as being lacking in morality, a perception shared by the whole population in post-war England, Stevens denies the fact that he served Lord Darlington. These examples amply show the extent to which their professional idealism is each destined to be shattered in the end of their narratives. In this respect, Ishiguro’s idealism can be seen as founded on nothing but a fatalistic view of life. And this is where nostalgia and idealism join each other—in fatalism.

Fragility of a life-view

In an interview Ishiguro talks about *Never Let Me Go*, which proves to him to be ‘a way

of exploring certain aspects—psychologically for instance—of what happens as you leave childhood, face up to adulthood, and then face up to your mortality’ in the end (Interview, 2006, Wong & Crummett 214). In other words, the same novel covers the psychological trajectory of entrance into and departure from distinct periods of childhood, adulthood, and old age (the clones’ lives are artificially shortened). The bubble in which children’s security and safety are guaranteed by adults’ protection inevitably leads to its burst. And the transition is actually coterminous with their entrance into adulthood. When childhood fantasies turn through the infliction of wound on them into adulthood fantasies, people enter the zone of idealism. Or it can be said that childhood fantasies are being replaced by adulthood fantasies. Julian Barnes employs the metaphor of a ‘holding pen’ in *The Sense of an Ending* to refer to this psychological protection provided for children by adults. When the characters move from childhood into adulthood, they notice that they enter a new enclosure surrounded by something intangible but definitely being out there. Barnes has the narrator describe the mechanism of the transition thus:

In those days [in their high school days], we imagined ourselves as being kept in *some kind of holding pen*, waiting to be released into our lives. And when that moment came, our lives—and time itself—would speed up. How were we to know that our lives had in any case begun, that some advantage had already been gained, some damage already inflicted? Also, that our release would only be into *a larger holding pen*, whose boundaries would be at first indiscernible. (Barnes, *The Sense of an Ending* 9; italics added)

In Ishiguro’s world, the transition involves a movement from one bubble to another—from childhood fantasies to fantasies of idealism. And yet even the world of idealism leads to the loss of our grip on idealism itself either through some external forces like ‘fate’ or through such an internal force as the returning of one’s psychological wound from childhood. The

cycle of the entrance into a new world and the resultant loss of it is again repeated when adults climb into maturity when they finally face the universal fate of their mortality. Thus, the sense of childhood security and the sense of its loss are coterminous with the sense of a grip on adulthood and the sense of its resultant loss, but even the border between childhood and adulthood fades away with the imminent and inevitable loss of life itself.

From this it takes only a few steps to paraphrasing Ishiguro's fatalism as pessimism. Barbara Ohno points to Ishiguro's tendency 'to see the negative or frustrating aspects of life': 'The most obvious gap in Ishiguro's thinking is that he does not allow for a greater outlook that makes sense of all the anguish. He is haunted by the emptiness and the apparent useless agony that people bear in life. He is not terribly optimistic about people's ability to change their circumstances' (142). Hirai, too, states that the feeling of exhaustion and emptiness that overwhelms the pianist in *The Unconsoled* endlessly going back and forth in an unknown city to fulfil his unfulfillable mission is a manifestation of Ishiguro's pessimism (*Kazuo Ishiguro* 112). Hirai also argues that despite the message *When We Were Orphans* proclaims that 'love heals everything' the novel is covered with pessimism too (*Kazuo Ishiguro* 171).

But as the Part I and II demonstrate, this pessimistic view of Ishiguro's fatalism is ultimately misleading. Ishiguro is a fatalist in a strict sense but it does not follow that he is pessimistic about it. In fact, Ishiguro considers himself to be anything but pessimistic. As to *Never Let Me Go*, for instance, Ishiguro says 'this story was trying to be positive on life and human nature [. . .] like friendship and love' (Interview, n.d. Carnevale). Moreover, when asked about any influence from Japanese writers, Ishiguro avers that he has had no influence from Japanese writers; after all, he doesn't like their 'negative vision of life' (Interview, 2009, Matthews 116-17). Indeed, as Chapter 7 shows, Ishiguro's novels end with a general note of optimism, utterly pathetic as it is.

What does all this imply for Ishiguro's readers? The implication is that we have to be

attuned to visions which are paramount to Ishiguro. For Ishiguro, fatalism is simply an inevitable fact of life and nothing more than that. It is totally beyond us. Fatalism can be interchangeable with randomness or chance, as we have seen above. The point he is making through his fiction as well as in his interviews is that all this is out of our control. Emphasis, instead, is placed on the two other visions: idealism and nostalgia. What fascinates him more irresistibly is the condition, albeit definitely a fatalistic one, in which we feel compelled to be idealistic and nostalgic. We cannot help being sanguine about many possibilities in our lives, though we know we have to accept the fact that possibilities are not many. At the same time, we allow ourselves to hold fantasies about our past, especially our childhood world. We believe there used to be a period in the early part of our lives when we were happier in individual protective bubbles. The most ironical is the fact that these visions strengthen fatalism—through the explosion of childhood bubbles, that is to say, the infliction of wound on children, and then through the rupture of adulthood bubbles, that is to say, the returning of childhood wound on adults. Just as nostalgia for early childhood is a futile attempt to retrieve irretrievable days, idealism is destined to be shattered in the end. Thus, Ishiguro's philosophical scheme defines idealism and nostalgia as subsumed into and at the same time resisting fatalism. To put it more schematically, Ishiguro starts with idealism, whose emotional source he then pursues in nostalgia, and the confrontation with the psychological cord that bounds idealism and nostalgia together leads him inevitably to fatalism. A true idealist/nostalgist is a fatalist.

This is what has been construed from our examination of Ishiguro's world view focussing on the philosophical relation among idealism, nostalgia, and fatalism, and what many critics and literary scholars have neglected to take into consideration in discussing Kazuo Ishiguro. What this thesis has done is attempting to replace the general stress on fatalism with the combined understanding of these three visions.

CONCLUSION

Kazuo Ishiguro is an immensely popular writer of fiction among not only the general public but also professional readers like literary critics and academics. His popularity as a writer is demonstrated by the vast number of articles addressing him, academic as well as journalistic, together with scholarly books on him, that come out nearly every year. The ways of reading Ishiguro have been as various as literary theories, or even as various as critics and scholars themselves. The multiplicity of reading approaches represents our age of diversity in values and cultural assumptions. The condition of the pluralistic and centrifugal tendency in critical interpretations, however, involves a consequential sacrifice, too. Such interpretations increasingly cease to be relevant both to the work and the author, and ultimately do not make much sense to the general reader as well. They tend to be irrelevant because they give only scanty attention to the author who writes the work; and they do not make sense because they go against the grain of the general reader, who wants to know what the author *is* doing with his work. Thus an attempt to read a work with full attention to the author's intention, no matter how impossible a full understanding of the intention is in theory, is far from naïve. It is refreshing, in fact, as a step towards rethinking about how to read fiction.

Ishiguro is a writer whose primary aim in his creativity is to express his view of life through his fiction. Attempts to read Ishiguro's literary works intrinsically contain two agenda of *how*: how he views life in general and how that view informs his fiction. It is Ishiguro's work, or rather Ishiguro himself, that demands that way of reading. What this thesis has done is highlighting this long-neglected way of reading.

Critics and academics are not entirely indifferent to Ishiguro's world view, as the recent studies that I have introduced in Introduction show. But most of them focus almost entirely on Ishiguro's fatalism represented in his oeuvre and his latest novel, *Never Let Me Go*, in particular. The uniqueness of the present thesis lies in the systematic description of the

structure of Ishiguro's view of life by showing not only the relevance of the other visions of Ishiguro's, idealism and nostalgia, to his conception of fatalism but also the necessity of focusing on these three visions as a whole in order to see his view of life in its entirety. The previous chapters show how each vision is relevant to the rest and how they cumulatively combine to make Ishiguro's view of life.

Part I has focused on idealism that obsessively preoccupies the narrators-protagonists of Ishiguro's early novels, Masuji Ono and Stevens, both of whom espouse professionalism as their idealism. Both the central characters take tremendous pride in and devote themselves entirely to their professions. What motivates their devotion to their professions is an instinct and irresistible urge to make a contribution, however small it turns out to be, to the society they inhabit and even the humanity as a whole. Even though their idealism is very vulnerable they maintain their optimistic view of it to the end of their narratives. The vulnerability of their idealism manifests itself in its near collapse at the end of the novels when both the protagonists have to face the fact that their ideals have got stretched to the point of implosion by their lack of a broad perspective from which to predict the direction that the moral or ethical standards endorsed by their society takes. After all, they find it impossible to control the concomitant transformations of values and there is virtually no option left for them but to submit themselves to the current of the times. But at the same time they never do away with their idealism completely as shown by the optimistic endings of these novels.

Ishiguro's nostalgia as seen in Part II is a chronologically backward desire towards the period of early childhood where children tend to be emotionally protected in fantasies they or adults around them create. But the protection is an illusory condition, which is as vulnerable as a bubble. With a careless poke at it, the bubble bursts and children in it are forced out of it and into the harsher outer world of adulthood. When Ishiguro calls this desire for this early fragile period *nostalgia*, he has *idealism* in mind, too. In Ishiguro's scheme, both childhood

fantasies (nostalgia longs for) and adulthood fantasies (idealism expands) are vulnerable. Thus, what my thesis has shown by comparison of these two notions, nostalgia and idealism, is that the professionalism, or the conceptual crystallization of Ishiguro's idealism, is another form of fantasy whose fate quite resembles that of the fantasy created by small children.

Part II also shows that Ishiguro pushes the function of fantasy in idealism and nostalgia towards the implication that it brings about unique mental struggles—particularly in people turning mid-thirties in age. Ishiguro newly addresses a so-called mid-life crisis in terms of psychological childhood wounds in *The Unconsoled* and *When We Were Orphans*. In Ishiguro's view, the age of mid-thirties is typically a period when one realises the limitation of one's potentials and possibilities in life. The narratives of Ryder and Christopher Banks concern themselves with their realisation in their middle ages that their adulthood fantasies, or their idealism, are so hard to stick to, but nonetheless that they cannot help being idealistic. What Ishiguro has done with these novels is tracing the universal urge for idealism to our obsession with nostalgia: a desire to bring back our early period, a period followed by the shattering of childhood fantasies as well as the infliction of mental wounds on us.

Herein lies the crucial link between idealism and nostalgia. Nostalgia with the residue of mental wounds to fix hatches idealism in us. That is why Ishiguro shows that his highly idealistic characters like Ryder and Banks constantly look back on their past and more particularly on their childhood days. They can neither control their idealistic tendency nor can they help forming idealistic fantasies about their future. Ishiguro's fatalism must be considered in the light of this conceptual conjugation between idealism and nostalgia. The fate of their idealism is supposed to be reminiscent of the fatalistic cycle of the formation and explosion of childhood fantasies. In other words, Ishiguro's idealism and nostalgia are destined to their sublimation into fatalism. The point I have made in Part III is that Ishiguro's fatalism, referred to as his decisive world view by many critics and academics, therefore,

should have been understood as an idea developed from the conceptual combination of idealism and nostalgia. That is why the argument that Ishiguro is merely a fatalist is more than misleading. For Ishiguro, fatalism is simply a law of life; it is just something we are all somehow required to accept. But his moral or ethical emphasis is placed not on fatalism itself but rather on idealism and nostalgia that drive our motivation to contribute to the world. At the same time, Ishiguro's emotional and intellectual interest is also directed towards the *fatalistic* condition, in its double meaning, of idealism and nostalgia. The fact that we have the universal tendency of being drawn towards idealism and nostalgia as well as the fact that both our idealism and nostalgia are doomed is ultimately the human condition that Ishiguro has been representing in his fiction.

Ishiguro is a living writer, which means that he may continue writing and modifying his visions hereafter. There is no providing any final say about his view of life at this stage. Just as it is difficult for us to lead our lives as planned beforehand, it is hard to predict if these visions of life which I contend Ishiguro offers through his depiction of his characters' lives in his fiction are only temporary or decisive ones. Indeed, it is possible that the novelist may propose a completely different vision of life in his forthcoming novel, *The Buried Giant* (2015)⁵²—though I for one believe it is unlikely. Yet even the possibility of the revision of his visions may fit in with Ishiguro's philosophical scheme provided above, for priority changing from time to time is what Ishiguro's view of life is all about.

⁵² Professor Noriyuki Harada informed me of the upcoming publication of *The Buried Giant* in March 2015.

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