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The Story of Identity: Narrative Self-Fashioning in Kazuo Ishiguro's A Pale View of Hills and When We Were Orphans

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The Story of Identity: Narrative Self-Fashioning in Kazuo Ishiguro's *A Pale View of Hills* and *When We Were Orphans*

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Introduction

"Man is nothing else but what he makes of himself" – Jean-Paul Sartre

The moments we remember from our lives are the foundation of the stories we tell about ourselves. I have spent many a night trying to fall asleep by running through my memories like the montage scene of a movie—clips of a funny moment with a friend, the smile of a loved one, a stupid thing I said to someone I was supposed to impress. These moments I remember portray, at the deepest level, who I want to be, who I am scared to be, and who I most understand myself to be. Intentional remembrance, as opposed to actual experience, tends to exaggerate the best and worst parts of the self. Late at night, without the distractions of day-to-day life, I can focus on myself—where I succeeded, where I failed, how I embarrassed myself, what moments I wish I could experience again—and, as I fall asleep, I can reframe and perfect these versions of myself. Ultimately, I am attempting to pinpoint which of my lived experiences line up with the identity I believe I have and which are misaligned. In other words, I can tell myself – and eventually (and perhaps more importantly) others – the story of me, a story that takes my memories and crafts them into a coherent narrative that represents the version of me I want to be.

The constructing of the self I describe above is something we all do. The question of what defines "identity" has been asked and answered and philosophized about for hundreds of years. The contemporary general understanding of identity is that it is unfixed and unstable; however, that understanding is a fairly new phenomenon. Stuart Hall, in *Modernity and Its Futures,* briefly summarizes how we have come to that view. Hall provides what he calls an oversimplified outline of the three primary conceptions of identity. In the Enlightenment period, Hall notes, identity was understood as a fixed, constant essence throughout an individual's life. However, as the world became increasingly complex, the notion of identity shifted to something less fixed

and more relational. According to Hall, by the 19th century, identity was understood to be affected by "significant others" that conveyed the "values, meanings and symbols" of the world, and an individual's identity was only stabilized by way of identification with these significant others (275-76). Hall then moves to the postmodern concept of identity—the unfixed identity that is constantly being shaped by "the ways we are represented…in the cultural systems that surround us" (277). In his book *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, Stephen Greenblatt, a contemporary of Hall's, coins the phrase "self-fashioning"—a concept that echoes Hall's definition of postmodern identity. Greenblatt's concept of self-fashioning aims to show how identity is something that is shaped and crafted by our representations of ourselves. Interestingly, though, he applies this postmodern understanding of identity to Renaissance figures such as Thomas More, William Tyndale, and William Shakespeare, and his work demonstrates how these men unintentionally, and sometimes intentionally, pushed against the Enlightenment conception of identity as a fixed entity. Jan R. Veenstra, in her article, "The New Historicism of Stephen Greenblatt: On Poetics of Culture and the Interpretation of Shakespeare," sums up Greenblatt's argument rather nicely: "the power to fashion the self is an aspect of the power to control identity, a power exercised in the sixteenth century by the State, the Church, and the Family. The age commonly praised for its recognition of man's autonomy is, in fact, marked by a profound awareness of the malleability of the self" (182). Self-fashioning, then, is the narrative creation of the self, a creation controlled by the self.

Of course, postmodern notions of identity as unfixed and fluid align with Greenblatt's concept of self-fashioning. Nowhere has this been made more obvious, perhaps, than in postmodern novels. For example, the novels of Kazuo Ishiguro could easily be read through the lens of self-fashioning because of his frequent use of first-person narrators who are reflecting on

key moments in their past that seem crucial for who they believe themselves to be. The novels themselves are made-up of the stories the narrators tell about themselves, constructed by their reliance on memories of past events in an attempt to reconcile an identity that is in question. Analysis of Ishiguro's novels often focuses on these narrators and their so-called unreliability—readers and scholars tend to question the memories that the narrators choose to share and the ones they omit, in part because the narrators themselves so often call attention to the fallibility of their memory. Nevertheless, what the narrator perceives as his or her identity is *created* by both the stories they tell about their past and the narrative they are telling now, which is the novel itself. Whether or not the memories are accurate or other people (including the readers) believe them, their identities are formed and defined by these stories. By viewing the work of Ishiguro through a narratological lens and appropriating Greenblatt's concept of self-fashioning, I argue in this thesis that identity is only ever just a narrative, told through the intentional shaping of our memories.

In *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, Greenblatt develops his theory of self-fashioning and grounds it in an application to notable men from Renaissance England, including William Shakespeare and Sir Thomas More. He chooses to focus his work on the Renaissance period because, in the sixteenth century, there appeared to be "an increased self-consciousness about the fashioning of human identity as a manipulable, artful process" (Greenblatt 3). Greenblatt's theory of self-fashioning raises important questions—*how* do we create our identity, how much agency do we have in this creation, and to what extent do others impact us in this creation? Greenblatt references the anthropologist Clifford Geertz in order to forward his claims about the individual's ability to form their identity within society:

> "There is no such thing as a human nature independent of culture," Geertz writes, meaning by culture not primarily "complexes of concrete behavior patterns—customs, usages, traditions, habit clusters"—but rather "a set of control mechanisms—plans, recipes, rules, instructions…—for the governing of behavior." Self-fashioning is in effect the Renaissance version of these control mechanisms, the cultural system of meanings that creates specific individuals by governing the passage from abstract potential to concrete historical embodiment. (3-4)

In other words, identity, according to Geertz and—by extension—Greenblatt, is primarily formed in relation to these control mechanisms of culture; he argues there is no "human nature" without culture, outside of the individual's connection with other humans and societal structures. Yet, Geertz's phrasing of "control mechanisms" to describe culture connotes an oppressiveness, a limiting force on an individual's agency. Nonetheless, Greenblatt employs Geertz's concept in developing his theory of self-fashioning to show that while culture contains control mechanisms, people are able to work within those control mechanisms to craft identity.

Though Greenblatt spends his book examining real-life figures, in his introduction, he discusses the role literature plays in the process of self-fashioning. Literature "functions within this system [of control mechanisms] in three interlocking ways: as a manifestation of the concrete behavior of its particular author, as itself the expression of the codes by which behavior is shaped, and as a reflection upon those codes" (4). In other words, literature communicates the author's behaviors and ideas to his readers, displays the societal codes that shape that behavior, and serves as a reflection on (and perhaps critique of) on those codes and, consequently, society. The audience, though, also plays an essential role in turning narrative and storytelling into a space for self-fashioning. While authors are fashioning themselves in and by way of their

literature, the audience is responsible for manifesting (or not manifesting) those ideas and that identity in the actual world. Indeed, readers use narrative and storytelling themselves as ways to make sense of the world and express themselves within it. Greenblatt states that "compulsive readers of literature tend to see the world through literary models…in part because our own lives…are saturated with experience artfully shaped" (6). The phrase "experience artfully shaped" is a beautiful way to describe storytelling. In our own lives, we shape our experiences into a narrative in order to both understand and communicate those experiences to our self and those around us. Greenblatt explains that we view cultural figures, such as authors, as models for successful self-fashioning. He states that we are drawn to those individuals because we "respond to a quality, even a willed or partially willed quality, in the figures themselves, who are, we assume by analogy to ourselves, engaged in their own acts of selection and shaping and who seem to drive themselves toward the most sensitive regions of their culture, to express or even, by design, to embody its dominant satisfactions and anxieties" (6-7). We see these well-known figures successfully shape their identities, and we are confirmed in our own practices of narrative self-fashioning because we want to believe others, even the most illustrious, are like us.

Greenblatt's observation that literature functions as the expression of self-fashioning begs for an analysis and application of his theory to fiction, especially given that he limits his exploration to real people. Self-fashioning is, of course, evident in much of literature given that literature is made up of stories and storytellers, but perhaps no literary element is as fruitful as the first-person narrator. Kazuo Ishiguro's novels provide a good starting place, as he frequently uses first-person narrators, and these narrators engage in self-fashioning on multiple levels. Ishiguro is a contemporary Japanese-British novelist and winner of the 2017 Nobel Prize in Literature, which he was rewarded for his "novels of great emotional force [that have] uncovered

the abyss beneath our illusory sense of connection with the world" ("The Nobel Prize"). One of the driving forces of Ishiguro's writing is our "illusory," or fabricated, connections with the world, and he has a particular fascination with the illusions that the mind creates. In his Nobel Prize lecture, Ishiguro says "as I was growing up, long before I'd ever thought to create fictional worlds in prose, I was busily constructing in my mind a richly detailed place called 'Japan'—a place to which I in some way belonged, and from which I drew a certain sense of my identity and my confidence" (Ishiguro, *My Twentieth* 14-15). The phrase "constructing in my mind" echoes Greenblatt's concept of self-fashioning; Ishiguro creates a version of Japan in his mind in order to better understand where he came from rather than relying on actual facts or information about Japan. As a Japanese immigrant, Japan is an important aspect of his identity, yet he is physically removed from the actual place; so, he constructs a version of Japan based on his memories and the stories of others to understand that part of who he is, and it is his fabricated story of Japan that is his identity rather than his having been born in Japan.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, then, reliance on memory is a prevalent theme in Ishiguro's fiction as well. In an interview with Brian W. Shaffer, Ishiguro explicitly discusses the role of memory in his novel, *When We Were Orphans*, saying that it explores "the ways in which we creatively misremember childhood [and] the ways in which we try to repair something from the past when it's actually far too late" (Shaffer 3). "[C]reatively misremember[ing]" connotes two very important things: first of all, to "misremember" something is a failing of memory—it is not of lack of remembering or forgetting but remembering something incorrectly, whether intentionally or not; however, second, the adverb "creatively" suggests there is an intentional shaping to these memories. We take these memories from our past, whether they are remembered correctly or not, and we tether them to each other in order to form some sort of narrative about

our lives; we do this with creativity, imagination, and care. The act of "creative misremembering" calls to mind Greenblatt's idea that "our own lives… are saturated with experience artfully shaped" (5). Both Ishiguro and Greenblatt, then, shine light on the ways that our identity is simply and only a narrative of our memories.

Because Ishiguro often uses first-person narrators who rely heavily on memory in order to tell their stories, they are frequently viewed by scholars as unreliable; however, applying Greenblatt's concept of self-fashioning might lead to a more nuanced understanding of these storytellers. Generally speaking, a narrator is unreliable when they are "misreporting, misinterpreting, and misevaluating, as well as by underreporting, underreacting, or underevaluating" (Phelan, qtd. in Alber 51). The reader, then, feels as if they need to supplement the information that the narrator has given because it is either incorrect or incomplete. Monika Fludernik, in *An Introduction to Narratology*, provides further characteristics of the unreliable narrator:

> A first-person (homodiegetic) narrator who shows him/herself to be untrustworthy in his/her narration is referred to as unreliable. The reason for the narrator's untrustworthiness is not usually to be found in deliberate falsification on his/her part (the first-person narrator lies) but rather in a distorted view of things. It may be the case that the narrator is too naïve to be able to describe what happens in a satisfactory way; s/he may also have a world view or moral attitudes which the reader cannot condone. (162)

Fludernik's definition highlights that unreliability often is the result of narrative effect; readers' responses are what elicit the feeling that a narrator is not to be trusted. Scholars sometimes describe Ishiguro's narrators as "unreliable" because of how the narrators speak to their audience. For example, in her article, "Ishiguro's Floating Worlds," Rebecca L. Walkowitz states

that "'unreliable narrator' would seem to characterize the first person protagonists in every one of Ishiguro's [novels]" (1067). The narrators frequently tell their audience that they may be misremembering events, or they will embellish their memories of the past with their current emotions or thoughts. They also may "propose that their own stories are always someone else's" (1067). In his analysis of one of Ishiguro's novels, A. Harris Fairbanks states that readers tend to feel a sense of "superiority" to unreliable narrators through their "detection of their factual inconsistencies or errors" and the sense that the narrator has failed "to interpret events with [the reader's] own intelligence and sensitivity" (612). While these theories of unreliability provide insight into why readers may feel hesitant to fully trust the story that Ishiguro's narrators are telling, calling them unreliable is an oversimplification that does not take into account *why* the narrators are telling their narrative the way they are telling it or showcase a thorough analysis of *how* they are telling it.

Other scholars hold more complex views of Ishiguro's narrators and see unreliability in a more comprehensive light. For instance, Wai-Chew Sim, author of *Globalization and Dislocation in the Novels of Kazuo Ishiguro*, says that Ishiguro frequently employs a "narrative pattern whereby a character comes gradually to realise the ramifications of his proclivity to engage in self-deception" in order to examine "the human capacity for self-serving fictions and evasions" (28, 31). Sim's use of the phrases "self-deception" and "self-serving fictions and evasions" suggest that the narrator's unreliability is not an attempt to deceive the reader, nor a failing on the part of the narrator, but rather it is more an attempt to deceive themselves. This language suggests that the narrators may be unhappy or unsatisfied with parts of their past experiences and feel compelled to create their stories toward their own ends or focus on memories that do not challenge their sense of self *and* that they do this more for themselves than

for whatever audience they may be envisioning. Likewise, Cynthia F. Wong holds a similar view of Ishiguro's narrators, stating that their purpose for telling their story is to "seek order" and "revise the personal past" (128). Wong's notion of structuring and revising calls to mind Greenblatt's idea of self-fashioning, as the narrators craft their memories into a narrative that helps them to make order of their past and, indeed, create a narrative that *is* their identity. Finally, in *The Novels of Kazuo Ishiguro*, Matthew Beedham discusses Ishiguro's concern with "how his characters respond to the lives they have lived" and "the struggle that memories impose on the individual" (24, 133). For Beedham, the narrators "struggle" with their memories and their past, and their stories are a response to this struggle, an attempt to overcome that struggle and better understand where it left them. For these scholars, and many others, Ishiguro's so-called unreliable narrators are human—flawed, relying on memory to understand their present and themselves, and creating a narrative that helps make sense of who they were, are, and could be.

Through appropriating Greenblatt's term "self-fashioning" to describe fictional characters who are telling their stories, stories which then make up the novel that is being crafted by an author, narratological theory can help unpack the various ways self-fashioning happens in literature. Namely, self-fashioning takes place on two levels: story and discourse. According to Gerald Prince's *Dictionary of Narratology*, story is defined as "the content plane of narrative as opposed to its expression plane or discourse; the 'what' of a narrative as opposed to its 'how'; the narrated as opposed to the narrating; the fiction as opposed to the narration" (91). Discourse, on the other hand, is its opposite: "the expression plan of narrative as opposed to its content plane or story; the 'how' of a narrative as opposed to its 'what'; the narrating as opposed to the narrated; the narration as opposed to the fiction" (21). In stories employing a first-person narrator, the "narrated" and the "narrating" are controlled by the same person; however, in acknowledging

them as separate pieces of the same narrative and analyzing them accordingly, we can better understand how the identity of that person *is* the narrative. For example, the Christopher Banks that is writing down his story in Ishiguro's novel *When We Were Orphans* is removed at least one level from the Christopher Banks who experienced and is experiencing the events the story relays. Ishiguro's choice to frequently construct his novels as narratives that foreground the differences between an experiencing self and reflecting self calls attention to the ways in which identities are crafted by way of narrative self-fashioning. Through the selection of particular moments from their past and the structuring of those moments into a narrative form, the narrators are trying to communicate (and perhaps understand for themselves) their identity; but also, how they tell their audience about this selection and structuring process crafts an identity in and of itself. In other words, Ishiguro's novels remind us, both in *what* they're saying and *how* they're saying it, that the narrative is the identity.

In my thesis, I will examine two of Ishiguro's novels—*A Pale View of Hills* and *When We Were Orphans*—by considering Greenblatt's concept of self-fashioning and analyzing the narratives on both the story and discourse levels. Briefly, *A Pale View of Hills* is Ishiguro's first novel, published in 1982, and the narrator, Etsuko, is telling what seems to be a simple story made up of memories from her past, though it becomes clear over the course of the narrative that she is trying to understand her role as a mother after her daughter's suicide. *When We Were Orphans*, published in 2000, is a play on the detective novel, and the narrator, Christopher Banks, works to solve the mystery of his parent's disappearance by returning to his childhood home, though—like with Etsuko's story—the narrative is more about Banks than it is about his parents. Both Etsuko and Christopher Banks self-fashion to reconcile, and define, their identity in the aftermath of deep trauma. Both novels raise important questions about identity, which this

thesis will explore: is the formation of identity a way to find stability in the midst of a seemingly unstable, changing self? If yes, then is that stability found through the act of forming the identity or in the final product—the narrative that is told? In other words, which is more important—the telling of the story or the story itself—and important to whom, and to what? Ishiguro's novels suggest that a stabilized identity, the narrative we tell of our self, is the only way to find comfort as it is the only thing that can *be* stable. We might believe that our identity is being relayed in the stories we tell about ourselves, but those stories are acts and products of self-fashioning. We craft ourselves into being, and our identity is stabilized only in a creation that sits outside the self: the narrative.

Becoming the Good Mother in *A Pale View of Hills*

Introduction

A Pale View of Hills, Ishiguro's first novel, is narrated to an unknown audience by Etsuko, a Japanese woman living in England, as she deals with the grief from the suicide of her eldest daughter, Keiko, and recalls a summer in Nagasaki when she was pregnant with Keiko. During this summer, she befriends another mother, Sachiko, and Sachiko's ten-year-old daughter, Mariko. Sachiko seems to be a rather neglectful mother, more focused on her American boyfriend and leaving Nagasaki than Mariko, who is frequently left alone or in the care of Etsuko. The novel juxtaposes these mothers and daughters—Etsuko and unborn Keiko, Sachiko and Mariko, as well as present-day Etsuko and her younger daughter, Niki—evoking questions such as, what does it mean to be a good mother, and how much responsibility does a mother have for her child's happiness?

Ishiguro's novel does not answer these questions. Rather, Ishiguro crafts a narrative made up of Etsuko's reflections on her past, which implicitly examine her role as a woman and mother in post-war Japan, almost against her will, as she is overwhelmed with memories of a seemingly very important summer from her past. In her article, "Made in Translation: Language, 'Japaneseness,' 'Englishness,' and 'Global Culture' in Ishiguro," Rebecca Karni states that Etsuko's narrative consists of her tracking "back in time through an unsettling mist of memories that vaguely suggests feelings of guilt and remorse related to certain choices made in…her past life" (319). Indeed, Etsuko is unable to voice her regrets from the past, unable to even acknowledge that she was the victim of a truly traumatic historical event—the bombing of Nagasaki—or that she was a mother who made choices detrimental to her daughter's well-being. Rather than directly addressing the truth of her experience as a young woman in Nagasaki or her

relationship with her daughter, Etsuko reflects on memories of her interactions with Sachiko and Mariko. Her reflections reveal the hurt she is unable to name, the pain of the loss of her own daughter and guilt over the decisions she made that may have led to that death. Etsuko is unable to explicitly state her guilt about her potential failings as a mother, and she struggles to know if she is a good mother. In other words, her narrative makes clear that there is a difference between the mother she wants to be and the mother she may have truly been. The identity she wants to claim is entirely interwoven by and in the narrative she tells, as she distances herself from her shortcomings and creates a version of herself that did not face the same traumas. In other words, what Ishiguro's novel makes clear is how the narrative itself—of a woman surviving trauma and grief—*is* her identity. Etsuko's self-fashioning is evident on both the story and discourse levels of the narrative, and this chapter will spend time examining each of these areas.

Story

Like many of Ishiguro's novels, *A Pale View of Hills* features a first-person narrator; Etsuko tells her own story, which invites an analysis of what she chooses to tell, as well as what she does not tell. In many of Ishiguro's works, the first-person narrator functions as a way to see how "characters respond to the lives they have lived" (Beedham 24). At the story level, the reader is given a glimpse into what Etsuko presumably views as the most important parts of her past. The events that she retells and focuses on make clear that Etsuko is dealing with very heavy traumas, particularly the devastation of the war and the suicide of her daughter; however, she never quite acknowledges her trauma to the extent that the audience might expect. While her memories and her conversations with others detail these traumatic events, Etsuko's story—which she is telling—evades any inward examination of how she is truly feeling.

At the story level, Etsuko's narrative reveals two aspects of her identity more than any others: her role as a woman in post-war Nagasaki and her role as a mother. As the focus of many conversations that Etsuko has with others, in both the past and present timelines, womanhood and motherhood are important to the story that Etsuko is telling, and her own sense of her identity is grounded in how she views herself as a woman and mother. The conversations she recalls and the details she includes about war recovery and Japanese ideals reveal how others view the post-war society and how they think she should act, particularly as a woman—both of which sometime differ from Etsuko's view. Similarly, the details Etsuko shares about mothers and motherhood also reveal a tension between how others view her role as a mother and how that is distinct from how she views herself as a mother. Through a closer examination of what memories she shares surrounding these aspects of self, Etsuko's self-fashioning is clear; she tells the story of a good mother and proper Japanese woman who navigated the trauma of post-war Nagasaki, evading any explicit acknowledgement of her struggles during that time—struggles the reader only sees through her self-fashioning of *what* she chooses to tell and not tell.

The flashback timeline of *A Pale View of Hills* is set in the immediate aftermath of post-war Nagasaki, as the city recovers from the atomic bomb and the effect it had on Japanese society. Though Etsuko does not intentionally focus on the trauma of the atomic bomb and post-war rebuilding, it is an unavoidable aspect of her story and the stories of those around her; the reader cannot help but think of the devastation of the atomic bomb. At times, as she shares her memories, Etsuko provides brief insights into the aftermath of the bomb in the region, but there are rarely moments when she directly addresses the event. Etsuko was most likely a teenager when the bomb fell; oddly, however, she does not have strong personal memories attached to the event. For example, early in the novel, Etsuko says that she "was once told that before the war a

small village had grown up on the riverbank. But then the bomb had fallen and afterwards all that remained were charred ruins" (Ishiguro, *A Pale* 11). Though it is likely she knew of the village when she lived in Nagasaki, given its proximity to her home, she describes the scene by sharing what someone else told her, distancing herself from any personal experience with the before and after of the bombing. She knows enough, though, to express emotional reactions to the sights around the city, as she shares that "returning to the Nakagawa district still provoked in [her] mixed emotions of sadness and pleasure…[and] never failed to fill [her] with a deep sense of loss" (23). In other words, while she does not share or acknowledge her own memories of the bombing, her emotional reactions suggest that she does have some memory and even personal experience of that time. Thus, her evasion of her own connection to the sites on the story level clues the reader in to her tendency to bury painful memories.

While Etsuko may not make the aftermath of the atomic bomb a plot point in her story, her conversations surrounding the topic provide insight into how Etsuko handles traumatic situations. For example, in a conversation with her father-in-law, Ogata-San, Etsuko asks him to tell her how she acted in the days following the bomb, saying "'What was I like in those days, Father? Was I like a mad person?'," and he tells her that she was "'very shocked, which was only to be expected. [They] were all shocked, those…who were left,'" but then he tells her to "'forget these things'" (58). The ending statement, to forget the trauma of the past, reveals how Etsuko may approach any painful memories. Whenever she tries to recall her reactions to the bomb, her father-in-law, a man of great influence in her life, urges her to leave those memories behind. He does not want her to dwell on the pain of the past, and this gives context for how Etsuko approaches other difficult moments from her past, such as the death of her daughter. The tendency to self-fashion and rewrite a better narrative for herself is already evident in these early

conversations. While she does not reflect directly on the painful moments from her past, the presence of these conversations in her narrative suggest that the trauma of the war does affect her sense of self but she does not or cannot understand how.

After World War II, Japan was forced to rebuild, as the landscape and people's homeland were irrevocably damaged from the atomic bomb. In an interview with Kazuo Ishiguro, Graham Swift comments that Ishiguro's early novels, including *A Pale View of Hills*, deal "heavily with the ruins of empire, Japanese empire" (22). In response, Ishiguro states that he "tend[s] to be attracted to pre-war and post-war settings because [he is] interested in this business of values and ideals being tested, and people having to face up to the notion that their ideals weren't quite what they thought they were before the test came" (22). If people have to face the failure of an empire that told them what ideals to uphold, this prompts a question that may help to understand Etsuko's reactions to trauma better: what does the ruin of empire do to an individual's sense of self within that empire? Etsuko's narrative makes clear that one of the main ideals being questioned and revised in the aftermath of WWII were the ideals surrounding the proper Japanese woman. For example, according to the traditional role of women in Japan during Etsuko's time in Nagasaki, the ideal woman was expected to be submissive to her husband and raise their children. Etsuko makes observations about these women around her, how they reacted and recovered after the war, stating, "I do not doubt that amongst those women I lived with then, there were those who had suffered, those with sad and terrible memories. But to watch them each day, busily involved with their husbands and their children, I found this hard to believe –that their lives had ever held the tragedies and nightmares of wartime" (Ishiguro, *A Pale* 13). Etsuko's comment that, even in the face of tragedy and trauma, the women around her seem to reenter into their expected roles without any issues, draws attention to the bizarreness of this behavior, at

least to Etsuko, that they are able to live their lives as if they did not face those challenges. She never states that she disagrees with their behavior or the ideals of womanhood in Japan, but she implicitly reveals some of her feelings through her observations of others. In other words, as she shares these observations from the present, which are comprised of both what she remembers and her reflections on those events, her narrative begins to reveal who *she* is through the story she tells.

The ideals of womanhood in post-war Japan take two distinct paths in Etsuko's narrative: one that maintains traditional Japanese ideals and one influenced by Western culture. Two key figures in Etsuko's past timeline represent each path respectively—Ogata-San upholds the old, while Sachiko represents the new. Ogata-San is an influential voice in Etsuko's life in Japan, and he maintains the ideals of pre-WWII Japanese culture, even as Western culture encroaches on Japanese territory. In the summer that is the focus of Etsuko's memories, Ogata-San is staying with her and her husband, and many of her flashbacks include her interactions with Ogata-San. One evening, Etsuko's first husband, Jiro, has a group of men over, and they are all conversing with Ogata-San. One of the men tells a story about his wife, joking that his "wife votes for Yoshida just because he looks like her uncle. That's typical of women. They don't understand politics. They think they can choose the country's leaders the same way they choose dresses" (Ishiguro, *A Pale* 63). Ogata-San's response reveals his thoughts towards the intrusion of Western culture in Japan:

> "The Americans, they never understood the way things were in Japan. Not for one moment have they understood. Their ways may be fine for Americans, but in Japan things are different, very different," Ogata-San sighed again. "Discipline, loyalty, such things held Japan together once. That may sound fanciful, but it's true. People were bound by a

> sense of duty. Toward one's family, towards superiors, towards the country. But now instead there's all this talk of democracy. You hear it whenever people want to be selfish, whenever they want to forget obligations." (65)

Etsuko's narrative makes it clear that she respects Ogata-San very much, and he has been in her life "since long before [she] had ever met Jiro" (28). Yet he has such a negative view of women and Western culture, and the reader knows Etsuko is drawn to Western culture, as she is narrating her tale from her present-day life in London. Ogata-San believes people should still be bound by duty to their family, their elders, and their country. In the past timeline, Etsuko tries to be the dutiful young wife to Jiro. Immediately preceding Ogata-San's speech about women being influenced by Western culture, Jiro orders Etsuko to get tea for the gentlemen, and she comments that "[her] husband had said this despite the fact that [she] was already on [her] way to the kitchen" (61). Etsuko pushes back, albeit internally and perhaps from the present, against the old ideal of Japanese womanhood, for she is not happy to be told what to do by her husband, yet externally she does what she is told and does not voice any resistance. The inclusion of this interaction further illustrates Etsuko's tendency to hide her true feelings in that she never explicitly admits to her unhappiness. Furthermore, she does not outwardly show that she desires to stray from the men's expectations of how she should act because her father-in-law vocally disagrees with that kind of woman. The fact that Ogata-San plays such a prominent role in her narrative at the story level shows how much his presence and beliefs have influenced her.

Opposite of Ogata-San, though, Etsuko's friend Sachiko represents the draw of Western culture, and she plays just as prominent a role as Ogata-San in Etsuko's flashback timeline. Although Etsuko introduces Sachiko by saying that she "never knew Sachiko well. In fact our friendship was no more than a matter of some several weeks one summer many years ago,"

Etsuko's memories of Sachiko are a primary focus of her narrative (11). During the summer that Etsuko recounts, Sachiko was contemplating leaving Nagasaki to run away to America with her American boyfriend. At one point, she tells Etsuko that the American wants to "take [her] to America and lead a steady respectable life there," suggesting that the American and/or Sachiko do not believe a steady, respectable life is possible in Nagasaki (69). This view, of course, is in contrast to Ogata-San's opinions throughout the book, as he seems to think that women are drawn to Western culture in order to leave responsibilities behind. Etsuko distinctly remembers conversations that show the influence of Ogata-San and Sachiko and the tension she seems to have experienced as a result of these conflicting viewpoints. Matthew Beedham, in his book *The Novels of Kazuo Ishiguro: A Reader's Guide to Essential Criticism*, quotes Ishiguro saying that the "'meanings that Etsuko imputes to the life of Sachiko are obviously the meanings that are relevant to her (Etsuko's) own life. Whatever the facts were about what happened to Sachiko and her daughter, they are of interest to Etsuko now because she can use them to talk about herself'" (16). At the story level, Etsuko's focus on Sachiko hints at another path that was available to Etsuko, one that could provide her more agency than she had in her marriage to Jiro. In a conversation between the two after Etsuko observes other women gossiping about Sachiko, Sachiko tells Etsuko that "'it's never been any concern to [her] what people like that thought'" (Ishiguro, *A Pale* 38). Etsuko recalls Sachiko as a confident woman, one who is not fazed by the thoughts of those around her but simply follows her own desires. Sachiko's version of womanhood stands in direct contrast with the type of woman that Ogata-San believes is proper, and Etsuko's inclusion of contrasting views of womanhood show her conflicting understanding of that part of her identity.

This conflicting understanding is only heightened as, in the summer she reflects on, Etsuko is pregnant with her first child, and many of the conversations she has with others reveal that motherhood may not be as joyous of an occasion as Etsuko would like to believe. In various conversations with Mrs. Fujiwara, the elderly woman who runs a noodle shop by Etsuko's house, Etsuko reveals her complicated feelings about motherhood. In one instance, Mrs. Fujiwara tells Etsuko that she looks miserable. Etsuko objects, saying, "'Miserable? I certainly don't feel it. I'm just a little tired, but otherwise I've never been happier'" (24). Mrs. Fujiwara urges her to "'keep [her] mind on happy things now," such as the child and the future (24). Later in the novel, a very similar conversation takes place, in which Mrs. Fujiwara says, "'You've everything to look forward to now, Etsuko. What are you so unhappy about?'" (77). Etsuko once again rebuffs the accusation, but her inclusion of these conversations shows that others could sense an unhappiness that she herself was not willing to admit to then and still does not seem to admit to now as she recalls these memories. These conversations also show Etsuko's desire to want to control how others perceive her and her emotions, both in her lived experiences and in the story she tells about herself. Her recollection of these conversations is representative of her self-fashioning, as she retells the conversations about herself without commenting or reflecting on their accuracy. She never says if Mrs. Fujiwara was correct or not, and the omission of any reflection suggests that she, at the very least, had conflicting feelings about motherhood that she avoids addressing outright.

Etsuko's memories hint at past complicated feelings about her relationship with her daughter that have carried into the present, especially in the grief over Keiko's suicide. In his article, "A Civil Tongue: The Voice of Kazuo Ishiguro," Ben Howard argues that through "her recollections of Sachiko, Etsuko attempts to appease the feeling that by choosing to leave Japan,

she uprooted Keiko, destroyed her family, and precipitated her suicide" (403). These feelings of guilt permeate Etsuko's story, both past and present. Her past timeline takes place when she is pregnant with Keiko, and the memories she bases the story on show how she tried very hard to be a good mother, a good wife. These memories, though, are juxtaposed with the present timeline, in which Keiko's suicide is an overwhelming reality that Etsuko cannot forget. She says that she finds herself "continually bringing to mind that picture—of [her] daughter hanging in her room for days on end. The horror of that image has never diminished" (Ishiguro, *A Pale* 54). It is a terrible image to continue to recall, and the persistence of this conjured image points towards an underlying feeling of guilt that Etsuko has. In an interview with Gregory Mason, Ishiguro comments on this:

> She feels a great guilt, that out of her own emotional longings for a different sort of life, she sacrificed her first daughter's happiness. There is that side to her that feels resistant to her younger daughter Niki, who tells her, "You've got nothing to worry about," and that she did exactly the right thing. She feels that this isn't quite a true account. But on the other hand, she does need to arrange her memories in a way that allows her to salvage some dignity. (338)

Etsuko is dealing with a guilt that she has carried for most of Keiko's life, the guilt that her decision to leave Japan led to a poor life and eventual suicide for Keiko. Outside perspectives, such as that of her younger daughter, reassure her that this is not the case, but Etsuko is still incapable of shaking her guilt. Ishiguro uses the phrase "arrange her memories," language that mimics the concept of self-fashioning. When we analyze the novel on the story level, we see by way of what she does (and does not) include that she is attempting to understand herself as someone who can still hold some dignity even in the face of immense guilt. In this way, the

narrative she tells is more representative of her identity than the events and experiences the story relates.

Discourse

In an interview that took place in 1989, only six years after *A Pale View of Hills* is published, Graham Swift asked Ishiguro about "the language of self-deception [that is] developed with all [his] main narrator figures" that "revolves around the fallibility of memory" and how "characters seem to forget and remember at their own convenience, or they remember things in the wrong context or they remember one event elided with another" (23). Ishiguro answers that "[at] some level [the narrators] have to know what they have to avoid and that determines the routes they take through memory, and through the past…But of course memory is this terribly treacherous terrain, the very ambiguities of memory go to feed self-deception" (23). Etsuko acknowledges this very idea in her narrative, telling her audience that memory "can be an unreliable thing; often it is heavily coloured by the circumstances in which one remembers, and no doubt this applies to certain of the recollections I have gathered" (Ishiguro, *A Pale* 156). This statement, given by the narrator herself, points out the possible unreliability of her story because it is grounded so heavily in her memories. In the same way that an examination of *A Pale View of Hills* at the story level reveals that Etsuko's narrative crafts her identity, analyzing the novel at the discourse level furthers this argument. Ishiguro's technical and aesthetic choices highlight the unreliability of Etsuko's story, and, in doing so, his novel shows that her *narrative* is truth.

The most noteworthy technique that Ishiguro uses on the discourse level is Etsuko's inclusion of metanarrative comments, which call attention to the fallibility of her memory. In particular, these comments suggest that Etsuko may be misremembering certain events or that

she is attempting to make herself or the situation look better than they actually were. Monika Fludernik's discussion of mediation and metanarration is especially useful for an analysis of Etsuko:

> The level of mediation is in itself so realistic that the reader feels s/he is in direct communion with the narrator. This results in a buildup of trust between reader and narrator, a feeling of closeness and reliability, which—in contrast to the stereotypical view of an intrusive narrator—helps to put across a convincing picture of the fictional world. Metanarrative comments enhance the credibility of the narrator: her/his difficulties in teasing out the truth of what happened or the search for the rights words to use are taken by the reader as proof of authenticity. The narrator is not omniscient but makes an honest attempt to furnish a satisfactory account of what happened. (61)

In short, while metanarrative comments are an admission of unreliability, they also serve to heighten a feeling of trust between the narrator and audience, as the audience appreciates the narrator's honesty. In the case of Etsuko in *A Pale View of Hills,* metanarrative comments like these abound. While they do showcase Etsuko's questionable memory, they also build a case for her trustworthiness. Furthermore, in thinking about Etsuko's narrative as an act of self-fashioning, these comments reveal the narrator's hand in the structuring of her narrative, as she mediates what she shows her audience with her own interpretations and attempts to control others' perceptions of her, including the reader's.

The first type of metanarrative comments Etsuko makes are attempts to explain events from the past timeline and justify her thoughts in the present timeline, and these comments all come from present-day Etsuko. In the present timeline, Etsuko stops and starts the recording of past events when she reflects on those events, including her present-day thoughts and feelings

about the events she is describing, sometimes for the benefit of Niki, whom she seems to be addressing at times, and sometimes – it seems – for the benefit of herself. For example, in one conversation, she and Niki are discussing Etsuko's move from Japan to England, and she pauses to include her current understanding of this past event:

> For, in truth, despite all the impressive articles he wrote about Japan, my [second] husband never understood the ways of our culture, even less a man like Jiro [Etsuko's first husband]. I do not claim to recall Jiro with affections, but then he was never the oafish man my husband considered him to be. 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…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. (90-91)

Many of her metanarrative comments echo the one above in that she is continuously adamant about not wanting to give more details and not wanting to think about these events anymore, frequently employing phrases such as "I have no wish to ponder them yet again" or "nothing to be gained in going over such matters again" (91). And yet, of course, thinking on these things is exactly what she is doing. Her metanarrative comments suggest that she does not want to intentionally reflect on the pains from her past, but her memories keep pushing her to do so. Additionally, by stating very clearly that she knows she "always kept Keiko's interests very much at heart," she reveals the version of events that she wants to believe, a version in which she did her very best and has no reason to feel guilty. The difference between the metanarrative comments and the actual events she recounts in her past timeline create a gap between who

Etsuko claims she is and who the events portray her to be. Through this gap, we see that her identity lies not within what actually happened nor in what she chooses to share but in the grappling she displays in the act of telling her story.

Etsuko's metanarrative comments not only give insight to her identity; they also reveal her desire to control or correct others' perceptions of the past. In her article, "Ishiguro's Floating Worlds," Rebecca L. Walkowitz argues that "Ishiguro's narrators, all of whom are desperate to explain away the present sense of a prior mistake, try to fix a positive history in the continuity of values that are, literally, timeless" (1052). In the quote above, Etsuko corrects her second husband's opinions of her first husband, stating that while she does "not claim to recall Jiro with affection," she tries to paint him in a positive light in her present metanarrative comments. This control of the interpretations continues as she addresses Keiko's suicide. Even as feelings of guilt pervade her mind, she is adamant that she kept her daughter's interests at heart. Walkowitz argues that the "word 'misunderstanding' repeats throughout Ishiguro's texts in the voice of characters and narrators whose response to conflicting interpretations is not acknowledgement but correction" (1055). When someone else, such as her daughter, has a different interpretation of the past than she does, Etsuko's metanarrative comments correct those interpretations and push forward her own. These metanarrative comments make plain Etsuko's self-fashioning because she elects to tell her audience how to interpret an event or conversation rather than let them come to a conclusion on their own. Her identity rests not in the experiences she recounts or the way others view her but in the story she is telling, as it bridges the distance between what actually happened and what Etsuko wants to believe and feel.

The second type of metanarrative comments Etsuko makes are those that are attached to memories or conversations featuring Sachiko and her daughter, Mariko. When first introducing

Sachiko in the story, Etsuko relies on the gossip and rumors of other women, recalling that "there was talk that a woman and her little girl were living [on the riverbank], and [she] saw them [herself] on several occasions" and saying that she is "not sure now how it was [they] first met" (Ishiguro, *A Pale* 12, 13); at the discourse level, Etsuko's introduction of Sachiko is vague, driven in particular by the metanarrative comments of uncertainty she adds to her story from the present timeline. Likewise, when recalling one of the instances when Mariko ran away to the riverbank, Etsuko prefaces the memory by saying, "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" (41). By slipping this type of metanarrative comment in around a memory, Etsuko is able to sidestep any questions the audience may have as to its accuracy. It is hard to know whether Etsuko is avoiding questions from Niki or whether her memory really is that unclear. These metanarrative insertions keep undercutting the accuracy of her story and add a mysterious undertone to the scenes and events surrounding Sachiko.

For most of the novel, it seems that there are eerie similarities between the two women and their daughters and that Etsuko may be recalling stories of the mother and daughter to better understand her own relationship with Keiko. Many scholars discuss the relationship between Etsuko and Sachiko, as Etsuko's details of Sachiko are vague enough to question how "real" she actually is. For example, Rebecca L. Karni argues that Etsuko's "account of her mysterious attraction to another mother-daughter couple, Sachiko and her disturbed and neglected daughter Mariko, marks, for the reader, this relationship between Etsuko, pregnant that summer with Keiko, and the other mother-daughter couple as somehow key to what is being withheld from him or her" (328); Matthew Beedham states that "readers are compelled to ask if Sachiko and Mariko are real people or manifestations of Etsuko's guilt" (15); and Wai-Chew Sim is

convinced that these memories "about Etsuko's 'friend' [are] actually hers as well, for a strategy of seeing the self in others appears to form part of a necessary accommodation to Keiko's death" (*Globalization* 45). For these three scholars, and many more, the truth of Sachiko's identity is a question without a clear answer. The quotations above provide two primary interpretations of Sachiko and her relationship with Etsuko. On one hand, the reader takes Etsuko at her word, and Sachiko is simply another mother that she connects with for a summer before Sachiko leaves Nagasaki. On the other hand, Sachiko may be an individual that Etsuko knew, but Etsuko has transposed her own life onto Sachiko's, and she serves as a doppelganger to Etsuko. Sim explores this view of Sachiko extensively, as he refers to Sachiko as "Etsuko's alter-ego" and "doppelganger," and he argues that it "becomes clear that this story about Etsuko's 'friend' is actually hers as well" (44, 45, 49). By further examining specific events involving Sachiko at the discourse level, we can see how Etsuko uses Sachiko to work through her grief over Keiko's death

In *A Pale View of Hills,* there are two scenes in which Etsuko follows Mariko, Sachiko's daughter, onto the riverbank, and the conversations that happens between the two characters are eerily similar. In the first part of the novel, Etsuko is watching Mariko, and she runs away to the riverbank. When Etsuko finds her, Mariko asks a question:

> "What's that?" she asked.
>
> "Nothing. It just tangled on my foot when I was walking."
>
> "What is it though?"
>
> "Nothing, just a piece of old rope" (Ishiguro, *A Pale* 83).

In this earlier scene, this conversation is recounted by Etsuko using direct quotations, suggesting that she has a strong memory of the event. The focus seems to be on the child, and the questions

about the rope feel odd yet unimportant, just a child asking random questions that the adult brushes off. However, near the end of the novel, a very similar conversation occurs:

> 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.” (173)

This reiteration, again recounted by Etsuko using direct discourse, happens after Etsuko finds Mariko on the riverbank again, where she tries to convince her to return home. While the earlier mention of the rope is easy to brush off, a second mention that closely resembles the original raises some questions. Did the conversation actually happen twice, or is Etsuko combining events in her memories? What is the importance of the rope? These conversations are not happening in real time but are being retold by present-day Etsuko, a mother who lost her daughter to suicide by hanging. With this knowledge in mind, the imagery of the rope becomes ominous. In the first conversation, the rope is merely caught on Etsuko’s foot; however, the second time, Etsuko holds the rope in her hands and reassures Mariko that she is not going to hurt her. The guilt that Etsuko has been avoiding throughout the novel seeps into her narrative in subtle ways, and the rope suggests that she feels responsible for Keiko’s death. When analyzing details on the discourse level, we are better able to notice that Etsuko’s narrative reveals her unconscious grappling with this guilt; Etsuko’s narrative is something her mind does in order to protect her.

The two scenes on the riverbank between Etsuko and Mariko also blur the lines between the identities of the characters. Earlier in the novel, Etsuko recalls a day when Sachiko left her

daughter home alone for an extended period of time, and when Etsuko went to check on her, Mariko got scared and fled the house. Etsuko finds her by the riverbank and tries to calm her down. A very similar situation happens at the end of the novel, when Mariko runs away after Sachiko tells her they are leaving for America, and Etsuko once again finds Mariko by the riverbank. Yet, in the scene at the end of the novel, there is a difference in Etsuko's recollection on the discourse level. Etsuko recalls arguing with Mariko:

> "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 musn'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." (173)

In the scene earlier in the novel, Mariko directly refers to Sachiko as her mother, and Etsuko takes the girl back to her mother, who waits for them at home. However, in this later scene, Sachiko is not mentioned, and Etsuko instead speaks to Mariko as if *she* is her mother, scolding her, then reassuring her than if she does not like it in America, "we" can come back (173). She uses the word "we" five times in two lines of dialogue, begging the questions: Who is we? Has Mariko been Keiko this whole time? Is Sachiko merely a manifestation of Etsuko? Or is Sachiko someone who existed but Etsuko appropriated her story in order to deal with her own trauma? The lines between Etsuko's story and Sachiko's story are blurred, and Etsuko's use of the first-

person plural pronoun in this scene suggests that Sachiko and Mariko mirror Etsuko and Keiko more than Etsuko ever let on, or perhaps even realizes herself. Ishiguro states that at this "most intense point" of the novel, he "'wanted to suggest that Etsuko had dropped this cover. It just slips out: she's now talking about herself. She's no longer bothering to put it in the third person'" (qtd. in Beedham 16). What seems to be a simple shift in pronouns on the discourse level reveals that this conversation happened between Etsuko and Keiko rather than Etsuko and Mariko. The revelation that Etsuko's move out of Japan caused so much strife between her and Keiko provides a reason for the guilt that Etsuko feels over her daughter's suicide. If she had promised Keiko that they could return to Japan if she was not happy, the present timeline shows that Etsuko went back on this promise, and Keiko remained unhappy. The narrative as a whole, both the memories Etsuko recalls on the story level and her present recollection and interpretations of those memories on the discourse level, is necessary in order to understand Etsuko, the choices she made, and her continued grappling with them. Her identity is inextricable from the narrative itself—the narrative she tells *is* her identity.

Conclusion

In the final chapter of the novel, which occurs right after the scene of the pronoun slip, Etsuko returns to the present timeline and does not mention Sachiko or Mariko again. The novel ends in this present timeline, and Etsuko intentionally reflects on her relationship with Keiko. She mentions a picture of the harbor in Nagasaki to Niki, telling her that she was remembering an outing she took with Keiko, that "Keiko was happy that day" and they "rode on the cable-cars" (Ishiguro, *A Pale* 182). Earlier in the book, Etsuko tells a very similar story, where she and Sachiko took *Mariko* to ride on the cable cars. This conversation, combined with the pronoun

slip from the previous chapter, once again suggest that Sachiko and Mariko may just be doppelgangers for Etsuko and Keiko—vehicles for Etsuko to deal with her grief and trauma and displace the blame she feels so heavily for Keiko's suicide. Wai-Chew Sim argues that "Keiko…surfaces in place of Mariko, and what lends the narrative its compelling poignancy, therefore, is this sense that Etsuko has all along been dwelling on Keiko, that her narrative combines guilt, regret, and self-flagellation over parental neglect" (*Globalization* 45). Etsuko is devastated by the loss of Keiko, and she is overwhelmed by memories of the crucial summer from Etsuko's childhood when she made the decision to take her out of Japan—a decision that she perhaps feels Keiko never recovered from. Her conversation with Mariko-turned-Keiko reveals that Etsuko promised her daughter they would return if they did not like it in America. Yet Etsuko's narrative, both on the story and discourse levels, suggests that she went back on that promise and blames that decision for Keiko's unhappiness and suicide. In her narrative, it was not Etsuko who made those poor decisions—it was Sachiko, another woman entirely. Matthew Beedham states that, "[c]onfronted by the troubling aspects of her past, Etsuko can only tell her story by telling the story of another" (17). Sachiko was the bad mother, and Sachiko did not treat her daughter right. Etsuko portrays her past self as the reasonable one in the dynamic—the woman who cared enough to chase after an upset Mariko and judged Sachiko for her selfish decisions. Sachiko held all of Etsuko's regretful actions and tendencies, so Etsuko could assuage her guilt. This is self-fashioning in its ultimate form. Etsuko's attempts to fashion a new version of herself in the narrative she tells in order to deal with her grief, and yet it is also her narrative that shows that we can only fashion new selves in the stories we tell about ourselves; we cannot go back and actually change events and experiences. Ultimately, Etsuko's identity is revealed most poignantly in her narrative—that is where her true self is most authentic.

The Creation of the Great Detective Banks in *When We Were Orphans*

Introduction

When We Were Orphans differs from *A Pale View of Hills* and many of Ishiguro's other novels as it resembles an already well-known form, that of the detective novel. Scholarship on the novel often addresses Ishiguro's use of the genre: Wai-Chew Sim says that "[o]n first encounter, *When We Were Orphans* gives the impression of being a conventional detective thriller" (*Kazuo* 67); Earl G. Ingersoll states that the novel is "in several senses a 'detective novel'…[while] also turning detective fiction inside out" (39); and Helene Machinal notes that Ishiguro "directly invokes the narratological traditions and expectations of classic detective fiction" (80). However, for as much as Christopher Banks, the narrator of *When We Were Orphans*, identifies himself as a detective, the novel strays far from a reader's expectations of the stories of Sherlock Holmes or Philip Marlowe. Matthew Beedham quotes Tova Reich to argue that "Ishiguro more prominently foregrounds the novel's irony by portraying a detective who does not realise that 'the real case is himself, and its resolution involves self-knowledge'" (130). In two novels published twenty years apart with two seemingly very different narrators written with very different techniques, Ishiguro is still examining humanity's desire to understand and create the self.

When We Were Orphans is written as the journal of Christopher Banks, a British detective who returns to his childhood home in Shanghai to solve the mystery of his parents' disappearance. Because his father worked for a business involved in the opium trade, Banks was raised in the International Settlement in Shanghai and was influenced by his multi-cultural neighbors. When his father disappears on his way to work one day, and his mother disappears a few days later, Banks returns to England to live with a distant aunt. The rest of his childhood and

young adulthood are shaped by his desire to learn the truth of what happened to his parents, and this desire leads him to pursue a career as a private detective and properly investigate his parents' case. The novel is framed as a journal written over a twenty-eight year span, as Banks writes of the early days of his detective career in 1930, his success in that career, his return to Shanghai to find his parents, and ends with his reunion with his mother in 1958. Like with Etsuko, Banks' sees himself as stable and healthy in his present-day life, but the events and conversations he shares in his story display the trauma he experienced in losing his parents and how that loss affects his understanding of himself. In her article "Ishiguro's Floating Worlds," Rebecca L. Walkowitz argues that Kazuo Ishiguro's "narratives estrange and challenge not just the content of identity but the way it is imagined" (1071). In other words, as we have already seen in the previous chapter, Ishiguro's novels show that identity is something molded by the mind rather than a fixed understanding, and *When We Were Orphans* makes this crafting even more obvious than *A Pale View of Hills* by way of both the story and discourse levels. The use of the journal frame displays an intentionality behind Banks's self-fashioning, as journal entries are the narrator's thoughts *in reflection* often for an audience that is the self, rather than spontaneous internal or verbal narration to an unspecified audience. As we will see, Ishiguro's choice to craft the novel as a journal makes even clearer than we saw in the previous chapter that one's *narrative* is their identity.

Story

At the story level, *When We Were Orphans* is Christopher Banks's narrative retelling of his investigation into his parents' disappearance. The narrative spans many years, as he remembers the circumstances surrounding the loss of his parents in his childhood and narrates

his eventual return to Shanghai, bringing the story to his present day. He narrates the story from the position of a successful detective in present-day London, using journal entries to reflect on his current success as well as the one case that has haunted him all his life—the separate disappearances of each of his parents. Through these reflections, Banks explores two aspects of his identity in particular—his Englishness and his role as a detective—seemingly trying to confirm to himself that he *is* these things. While he closes the narrative feeling like he is these things, the memories he shares both prove and disprove these aspects of his identity. Thus, what the novel ultimately shows through *what* Banks tells is that his identity is grounded in the narrative of his identity, the narrative that he creates of himself for himself.

As a child, Christopher Banks struggles to understand his English identity because he is removed from England, and what he knows as "English" is either a fabricated recreation or bound up in the relayed stereotypes and beliefs of those around him, such as his friend, Akira, and his Uncle Phillip. Banks spent his childhood in the International Settlement in Shanghai because his father worked for an import company. Banks can vividly remember his childhood home in Shanghai: "the carefully tended 'English' lawn…and the house itself, a huge white edifice with numerous wings and trellised balconies" (Ishiguro, *When* 53). His family, originally from England, lived in the middle of Shanghai, surrounded by families from all over the world, and yet their house was decidedly English, serving as a constant reminder for Christopher about who he really was. Christopher's closest childhood friend, Akira, also lived in the settlement, but was from Japan. Banks' reflections on his past often recall moments with Akira; Akira's influence and ideas seem to have lingered well into Banks' adulthood. Though they were quite young at the time, the two boys had rather deep conversations about their positions in the

International Settlement. For example, in one scene, as the boys are discussing their parents' fights, Akira suggests that Christopher is not English enough, explaining in his broken English:

> "It same for me," he said. "Mother and Father, they stop talk. Because I not enough Japanese."
>
> As I may had said already, I tended to regard Akira as a worldly authority on many aspects of life, and so I listened to him that day with great care. My parents stopped talking to one another, he told me, whenever they became deeply unhappy with my behaviour—and in my case, this was on account of my not behaving sufficiently like an Englishman. (76)

Akira and Christopher are aware of their positions as essentially foreigners in Shanghai; but because they are children, they also do not have strong memories of their homeland, and so their understanding of their home culture and identity comes from what they are told or glean from their parents, as well as how they view each other and what conclusions they draw together in their child-like understandings. When Christopher attempts to tell Akira about his father's disappearance, he stifles the tears, remembering their "long-standing feud about whether the English or Japanese cried easiest" (112). He wanted to prove to Akira, and maybe to himself, that he was a true Englishman, and he believed that Englishmen should not cry easily. So, he pushed down his tears, and with it his true feelings, in order to prove himself to Akira. The stories he relays about his time with Akira, someone who is decidedly *not* English, are evidence of Banks's early fashioning of Englishness. To be English in his and Akira's childhood experiences meant certain (often false) ideals, and Banks's endeavored to fit the mold.

The notion of a proper and true English identity is not just relegated to Christopher's relationship with Akira. Banks also recalls that, as a child, he asked his Uncle Philip, one of the

prominent adult influences in his Shanghai life, how he might "'become more English'" (79). Philip acknowledges that Christopher's upbringing would cause him to be "'a bit of a mongrel,'" and he tells him that "'[p]eople need to feel that they belong. To a nation, to a race. Otherwise, who knows what might happen? This civilization of ours, perhaps it'll just collapse'" (79-80). Instead of giving him sensible advice about how to act more English, Philip heightens Christopher's worries about not being English enough. Philip's comments suggest that he believes in clear boundaries between the nations as the way to maintain human civilization, thus implying that Christopher has been negatively influenced by the diversity of the nations that reside in the International Settlement. Similar to his interactions with Akira, Christopher's response shows a childlike desire to belong; Christopher asks Uncle Philip if he can "'copy [him] sometimes'" in order to practice how to do things the "'English way'" because he believes he must be as English as possible in order to please his parents (80). Even as a child, Christopher wants to fashion himself into what he thinks others expect of him, being English, and his journal recounts his early anxieties about this part of his identity.

This fascination with proper Englishness follows Christopher Banks into his adulthood, as he works to mold himself into a member of English society while never quite feeling like he fits in. Having moved back to London, he is well-known among the upper-class because of his successful career as a detective. But he is not entirely sure he feels at home in these social circles. He journals about a feeling he would often get when interacting with others:

> a feeling that someone or other disapproved of me and was only just managing to conceal it. Curiously, these moments tended to occur in the company of the very people whom I might have expected to be most appreciative of my achievements. When talking to some statesman at a dinner, say, or to a police officer, or even a client, I would be suddenly

> surprised by the coldness of a handshake, a curt remark inserted amidst pleasantries, a polite aloofness just where I might have expected gushing gratitude. (142)

Because he spent so much of his childhood in the International Settlement, he learned his societal manners from a range of different cultures, not just English culture. Thus, he often feels that those who are deeply entrenched in English society—particularly those he wants to impress, such as statesmen or clients—disapprove of him. Throughout the novel, Banks frequently discusses this idea of "connectedness" that he believes other members of English society have. For example, when he runs into his old classmate, Osbourne, he recalls his fascination with the young man's connections and believed he "would learn from Osbourne something crucial, something of the way such things worked" (7). While Osbourne interprets Banks's pestering as a desire to know how to move up in society, Banks wants to know how to be connected in order to feel that he belongs to a group. Matthew Beedham notes that this fixation on connectedness "does not seem motivated by the thought of a 'leg-up' so much as it does by his need to connect, no longer to be an orphan" (129). As an orphan displaced from his childhood home, Banks struggles to connect with others, even those he theoretically has an automatic connection with, such as his fellow Englishmen. And, as an orphan, "Englishness…will remain for him a form of learned behaviour," as Philip Hensher notes in his review of *When We Were Orphans* (11). His childhood need to be connected to his cultural identity and his belief that Englishness, or other aspects of human behavior, are learned is a mindset he carries with him into his adulthood and his journaling of this part of his past. His recollections of his Englishness make clear that his identity is not fixed or automatic; rather, it is something he crafts into being.

The other identity Christopher Banks' fashions for himself is a successful detective, which began as a childhood game and turns into a renowned career. After Christopher's father

disappears, Christopher and Akira create a game in which they solve the mystery of his father's disappearance, pretending to be the detectives on the case. Banks recalls that this game felt "like an entire era—though in truth it could only have been a period of two months or less—when day after day we invented and played out endless variations on the theme of my father's rescue" (Ishiguro, *When* 113). Christopher and Akira "would become the detectives—though sometimes [they] played [them]selves—until in the end, after the chases, fist-fights, and gun-battles around the warren-like alleys of the Chinese districts, whatever our variations and elaborations, [their] narratives would always conclude with a magnificent ceremony" (118). In the game, Banks could take control of the situation and solve the mystery in the way they imagined the detectives who were actually on the case would do. The boys took on the role of the saviors, solving the mystery that the adults seemed unable to resolve. Early in his life, then, Banks was staring to craft a narrative in which he is a successful detective, solving not just other cases but also the disappearance of his father.

This self-fashioning into a detective continues as Banks relocates to England after his mother's disappearance. His classmates from boarding school pick up on his "secret" ambition to become a detective, and they gift him a magnifying glass as a joke, laughing at his excitement over the gift. In his journal reflection about the memory, Banks says that "if [his] companions' intention was indeed to tease [him], well then, the joke is now very much on them" (10). In another instance, he walks into a classroom where a group of boys are talking, and he hears one of them say, "'But surely he's rather too short to be a Sherlock,'" and, while it never gets brought up again, Banks has a "niggling concern that [his] secret had got out and become a topic for discussion behind [his] back" (10). While Akira would encourage his fantasies and become a detective right alongside his friend, Christopher's classmates find his ambition a bit odd. To

others, his identity as a detective was a joke, but already in his own eyes, he takes this role very seriously. For the boys in England, Christopher's desire to become a detective is far-fetched, and they do not have the context to understand why this is something Christopher views as a truly possible trajectory for his life. In his article "The Lure of the Detective Story: Kazuo Ishiguro's *When We Were Orphans,*" Earl G. Ingersoll argues that Christopher's professional possibility "seems to have chosen him when both his parents disappeared," and the only probable course of action is to follow through (39). He fully believes that his parents are still out there, and the only way they will be found is if he goes out and finds them himself. Seeing himself as a real detective is a necessary step in finding his parents and, thus, a necessary self-fashioning.

Because Christopher is an adult in the present day of the novel, the audience only sees Banks's success in its aftermath. He is already an achieved detective, having solved real cases such as the "Mannering case" and the "Trevor Richardson affair," both of which he references in the opening pages of the novel (Ishiguro, *When* 9). Interestingly, he does not include direct recollections of his actual detective work in his journal, instead mentioning the cases in passing reference as something his audience should already be aware of. In "*When We Were Orphans*: Narration and Detection in the Case of Christopher Banks," Helene Machinal notes that Banks is "apparently a renowned and successful detective, even allowing for any elements of exaggeration in his self-presentation," presented with the "aura and esteem of Sherlock Holmes," which "establishes [Banks's] credentials as, by profession and temperament, trustworthy and humane" (81). In other words, as Ishiguro might have hoped for, Banks's identity is established for the reader via the already existing connotations (both within and from outside of *When We Were Orphans*) of a successful British detective. Machinal views Banks role as a detective as a performance of the ideal of the detective, "the adoption of an identity derived from a fictional

source" (85). Because Banks never shares memories of actual detective work, the reader never has any direct evidence of who he is as a detective. The reader never sees "Banks exhibiting ratiocinative brilliance or engaging in intricate spadework" (Sim, *Kazuo* 77). However, by including in his journal mentions of successfully solved cases and the societal esteem he receives in return, Banks crafts himself into a well-renowned detective, the kind who would return to his home and solve the greatest case of all: the mystery of the missing parents—which is, of course, the main plot thread of the novel. It is not enough for Banks to become a detective; he must become a *famed* detective, one that could solve the great mystery of his parents' disappearance. Ingersoll argues that Banks sees "his mission as a comic-book hero 'combat[ing] evil'" (40). Banks wants to believe that the work of a detective is similar to the games he would play as a child with Akira, when they would to solve his father's disappearance, so he shapes his story in order to fit that dream.

When Banks returns to Shanghai, both aspects of his self-fashioned identity—his Englishness and his successful detective career—are called into question, as he is confronted by the fact that the ideals he built his identity on are inherently flawed. For example, when Banks attends a party at the English consulate, the wealthy Englishmen and women watch a battle taking place across the harbor from the luxury of their balcony. When a dance show starts in the ballroom, Banks notes that "the room seemed to lose all interest in the battle across the water, though the noises were still clearly audible behind the cheery music. It was as though for these people, one entertainment had finished and another had begun" (Ishiguro, *When* 172-173). Banks feels "a wave of revulsion" towards the "so-called elite of Shanghai" who ignore the suffering of the Chinese citizens across the water from their party (173). For the first time in the novel, Banks pushes against the ideal of the English elite and aligns himself, albeit only internally, with the

Chinese. He held a strong desire throughout most of the novel to fit in with these people, to feel as if he truly belonged, but when he returns home, to Shanghai, he realizes that to be English is not to be ideal. Likewise, his notion of the detective as the height of success is also undermined when Uncle Philip tells Banks what actually happened to his parents: his father ran off with his mistress, and Philip sold Banks's mother off to a Chinese warlord. When Banks asks how the other detectives could have failed to discover the truth, Philip scoffs, saying, "'Those underpaid, overworked flat-feet? They wouldn't have found an elephant gone missing on Nanking Road'" (307). So, not only was the great mystery of his childhood simply a lie to protect a child's innocence, the detectives that Christopher admired were not the great ideal that Banks believed, and Banks' fantasies of solving the great case of his life do not come to fruition. And yet, though the ideals themselves are called into question, his own identity as a proper Englishman and as a renowned private detective is not called into question; he was never inherently these things. He crafts himself to be these things by way of the narrative he tells; the narrative is his identity.

Discourse

Shortly after the publication of *When We Were Orphans*, Ishiguro commented on Christopher Banks, stating that he "didn't want to write a realistic book with a crazy narrator. [He] wanted to actually have the world of the book distorted, adopting the logic of the narrator" (qtd. in Machinal, 80). Ishiguro's goal was best achieved in his decision to craft the novel as a journal, as a journal can be the ramblings of a writer's mind, sharing tangents and memories without question. Ingersoll posits that the journal format allows for the reader to logically follow the "illusion" that "events 'happen' and [Banks] simply records them" (43). In other words, readers allow for some discrepancies between what actually happened and how Banks narrates

those events because they understand the bias of the mind, especially in a journal. In *The Novels of Kazuo Ishiguro,* Matthew Beedham says that "the structuring of Banks's account in notebook format, established in part by the detailed dates and places provided at the beginning of every chapter, is continuously overrun by the narrator's memories" (133). Each section begins with intention, providing a date and location—the earliest entry is written in London in 1930 and the last entry is written again in London in 1958, while a majority of the entries are from Shanghai in 1937. While Banks writes the journal to reflect on the case of his parents' disappearance, his lack of control over the narrative shows, as I noted earlier, that "'the real case is himself, and its resolution involves self-knowledge'" (130). Therefore, even though the journal structure of the novel suggests that Banks is in full control of the narrative, the novel itself reveals truths about Banks that Banks himself cannot see; this is particularly evident on the discourse level of the novel, where Ishiguro once again uses metanarrative commentary and the technique of ambiguity in the concluding scenes to show how Christopher Banks's narrative is his identity.

Similar to Etsuko in *A Pale View of Hills,* Christopher Banks's narrative is littered with metanarrative comments that mediate between the event or memory that is being shared and Banks's reflection on it. Banks' metanarrative comments fall into two patterns: those in which his internal thoughts conflict with others' recall or interpretation of an event, and those in which Banks is navigating his own struggle with memory. Both remind us that Banks' self-fashioning occurs not only by way of the actual events that he narrates (*what* he says), but also in his narration of the events (*how* he says it).

The first kind of metanarrative comment Banks makes is when he feels he has to explain how he interpreted or reacted to a situation in the past, particularly when this reaction conflicts with the others' interpretations of the event. Banks often takes exception to how adults

interpreted his childhood reactions to the disappearances of his parents. For example, Banks disagrees with how Colonel Chamberlain, the man who transported him from Shanghai to England after the loss of his parents, remembers him during that journey:

> [A]s he continued with these reminiscences, I found myself becoming somewhat irritated. For gradually, from behind his cheerful anecdotes, there was emerging a picture of myself on that voyage to which I took exception. His repeated insinuation was that I had gone about the ship withdrawn and moody, liable to burst into tears at the slightest thing. No doubt the colonel had an investment in giving himself the role of an heroic guardian, and after all this time, I saw it was as pointless as it was unkind to contradict him. But as I say, I began to grow steadily more irritated. For according to my own, quite clear memory, I adapted very ably to the changed realities of my circumstances. (Ishiguro, *When* 28)

To the colonel, Banks was a moody child who was dealing with the grief of the loss of his parents, being transported by a stranger back to a home he does not know. Even though years have passed and Banks no longer even knows the colonel, he cannot help but express his irritation about this image of himself, as he believes that he was adaptable and mature in the face of loss and change. Machinal notes that when "Banks recalls his departure as a child from Shanghai, he scrupulously tries to reassess his memories, taking into account the vision of the child he was at the time…profoundly conscious of the way memory selects and modifies facts and situations according to the pressures of the affect, context, and intention involved in the process of recollection" (87). Machinal's argument paints Banks in a good light in that she argues he is "profoundly conscious" of how his memories may be affected by outside sources. However, in the example above, I interpret the metanarrative commentary differently. Instead of

acknowledging the influence of other's views of him, he voices his anger at what he views as the misinterpretations of others. The image of a moody child conflicts with Banks's self-image of the man who, from childhood, knew he would return to Shanghai to find his parents; therefore, as he crafts his identity in the writing of his journal, he suggests when and where others may be wrong and presents what he sees as a more accurate version of events.

Banks's metanarrative commentary about conflicting interpretations occurs in his recalling of conversations closer to the present timeline, as well. In the first chapter of the book, Banks runs into a former classmate, Osbourne, who reminds Banks of his previous intense interest in how well-connected Osbourne was. Banks disagrees with Osbourne's interpretation, commenting, "I cannot imagine I 'mercilessly interrogated' him as he had claimed. It is true the subject was something I thought about a lot when I was fourteen or fifteen, but…as far as I remember, I only once brought it up with him personally" (Ishiguro, *When* 6). Banks's metanarration both corrects Osbourne's interpretation of his behavior and offers his own recollection of his interest in well-connectedness. Walkowitz argues that Ishiguro's narrators' "response to conflicting interpretations is not acknowledgement but correction," and this rings true for Banks, as he not only corrects but expresses anger or frustration at others' supposed misunderstandings of him (1055). Banks ultimately desires to have control over his own narrative, and in his metanarrative comments he crafts the narrative to paint himself in the light he wants to be see in. The use of the journal frame for the novel complicates Banks's metanarration even further, as we have to wonder, "who is his intended audience for these corrections?" "Other potential future readers or himself?" In other words, Banks wants to be in control of his identity and how he is viewed in the world, but perhaps the only person he is

convincing is himself. Analysis of the discourse level of the novel reveals Ishiguro's hand; Banks's corrections may *not* be the truth.

The second kind of metanarrative comment Banks's makes are those that communicate his own struggles to recall certain memories or details about his childhood. For example, when Christopher provides a description of his childhood home—"the carefully tended 'English' lawn…and the house itself, a huge white edifice with numerous wings and trellised balconies"—he claims to recall the image "very vividly"; however, he finishes the detailed picture by saying, "I suspect this memory of the house is very much a child's vision, and that in reality, it was nothing so grand" (Ishiguro, *When* 53). His acknowledgement of his own inaccurate memory is a striking contradiction from the anger he feels at the possible misremembering of others who knew him as a child. Beedham notes that Ishiguro's narratives often feature "the narrator's admission of uncertainty in the veracity of his recall" (133). Banks desires to control his narrative much more than Etsuko did in *A Pale View of Hills*, yet he is also much more willing than she was to admit that many of his childhood memories do not match up with his adult interpretations. For example, he confesses to a level of uncertainty in his memories of conversations with his parents. In one situation, he says, "[p]ossibly at this point my mother closed the door on [my father] and led me away. I have no further memory of the episode. And of course, I cannot be sure of the exact sentiments, let alone the exact words, my father was uttering that day. But this is how, admittedly with some hindsight, I have come to shape that memory" (Ishiguro, *When* 91). The use of the phrase "shape that memory" hints at the intentionality behind the narrative that Banks has been crafting in his own mind and is crafting in his journal.

The metanarrative commentary about the fallibility of memory extends beyond comments on how Banks remembers certain events, as he also expresses his concern over his journal being

reliant on his memory. At one point, he openly acknowledges his difficulty in remembering the events he is writing about, stating:

> For the truth is, over this past year, I have become increasingly preoccupied with my memories, a preoccupation encouraged by the discovery that these memories—of my childhood, of my parents—have lately begun to blur. A number of times recently I have found myself struggling to recall something that only two or three years ago I believed was ingrained in my mind forever. I have been obliged to accept, in other words, that with each passing year, my life in Shanghai will grow less distinct, until one day all that will remain will be a few muddled images. Even tonight, when I sat down here and tried to gather in some sort of order these things I still remember, I have been struck anew by how hazy so much has grown. (70)

He is acutely aware of the loss of his memories from his time in Shanghai with his parents. The driving force of his story is his ability and desire to solve the mystery of his parents' disappearance, but it is also just as much about the process of trying to hold on to those memories in the face of a failing ability to do so. If he loses or cannot trust his memories from that time in his life, how will he be able to discover the truth? And his own admissions of this fallibility remind the reader that the only thing we can truly trust is the narrative itself.

The second main technique Ishiguro uses on the discourse level to call attention to the veracity of the narrative itself is, like with *A Pale View of Hills*, the use of ambiguity in the closing scenes of the novel. Since childhood, Christopher Banks believed he would be the great detective to find his parents, a belief that began with pretending to be the original detectives on the case with his childhood friend, Akira. The loss of his parents is a trauma that plagues him for most of his life, especially as the case remains unsolved while he goes on to solve other cases. In

the final chapters of the novel, Banks does indeed learn what happened to his parents, but the way he describes this event is by way of a series of unbelievable events. The three-chapter-long adventure that he describes seems to mimic the detective games of his childhood. Wai-Chew Sim claims that "in order to cope with traumatic loss," Banks builds up "the childhood games devised with Akira into a kind of alternative, palliative universe" (*Kazuo* 69). In other words, the description in the journal is a meshing of what likely happened with the games from Banks's childhood. In order to get to his childhood home (where he believes his parents are being held captive), he must go through an active, on-the-ground battle between the Chinese and Japanese forces in the slums of Shanghai. He convinces the Chinese soldiers and a Japanese soldier, whom he believes to be Akira, to escort him through the battle, yet when he gets to the location, his parents are (of course) nowhere to be found; instead, he finds only a Chinese family that has been injured in a bombing. Perhaps the most telling discourse-level evidence for Banks's delusion is his recruitment of the Japanese man. As he is making his way through the treacherous battle, Banks stumbles upon a captive Japanese soldier, tied up and bloody, whom he immediately believes to be his childhood friend, Akira, and recalls in his writing about the moment that he "recognize[s] Akira with no difficulty" (Ishiguro, *Orphans* 266). When he first tries to get the man to recognize him, the man replies, "'I not know. You pig'" (267). The man only sees Banks as a white man, but once Banks protects him from the Chinese soldiers who come into the room, the Japanese man sees the benefit in pretending to be whoever Banks wants him to be. For the rest of the "fantasy," the man pretends to be Akira. Banks includes him in the mission of finding his parents, asking:

> "You know how to get to the East Furnace? From here?"

> He nodded. “I fight here, many weeks. Here, I know just like”—he suddenly grinned—“like my home village.”
>
> I smiled too, but the remark had puzzled me. “Which home village is this?” I asked.
>
> “Home village. Where I born.”
>
> “You mean the Settlement?”
>
> Akira was quiet for a moment, then said: “Okay. Yes. Settlement. International Settlement. My home village.” (274)

Akira would view Shanghai, in particular the International Settlement, as his “home village,” as that is where he spent most of his childhood, so Banks assumes that is what the Japanese man means when he says with vague intentionality that he knows Shanghai “‘just like…his home village.’” The Japanese man allows Banks to correct him in order to fit the role of Akira because he is just going along with what Banks believes in order to find safety; he is not actually Akira. But Banks latches onto this rough semblance of his childhood-friend-turned-Japanese-solider because, in order to truly indulge his childhood fantasy of being the detective who finds his parents, Akira must be in attendance, as he was in their childhood games.

Like with *A Pale View of Hills*, there are multiple ways to interpret these events: should we take them at face value? Are these events descriptions of hallucinations that Banks fully believes but the reader knows are unbelievable? Did the events never happen, and Banks simply wrote this adventure in order to indulge his childhood fantasies before he actually discovers the truth in his conversation with Uncle Philip? Sim states that “what was merely off-kilter up to this point becomes increasingly surrealistic and implausible as the novel begins to violate the realist protocols it has so far appeared to endorse” (*Kazuo* 68). It would be difficult to write the whole experience off as mere fantasy because of how he narrates his return to the English consulate,

acknowledging that he does "not remember clearly those first hours following [his] return," but he vaguely remembers "the officials rushing out to meet" him (Ishiguro, *When* 298). Once again, his metanarrative comments that tell of his uncertainty make us want to believe him more, and there were witnesses to his return to the English consulate, so, at the very least, we can be certain that he did leave the Settlement and returned in bad shape. However, the implausibility of these scenes suggests that he spent his whole life wanting to find his parents, never maturing past the fantasies of a little boy playing detective games with his best friend. In order to move past this great trauma of his life, he has to play detective one last time. Whether he played it in real life, we cannot know; all we can know is that he plays it in the narrative he tells about himself.

When Banks finally makes it to the house where he believes his parents are being held, they are nowhere to be found, and he comes to the realization that his childhood fantasy of finding his parents would not come true. When Banks is found in the house by the captain who helped get him there, he says, "I 52ealized I had been sobbing for some time, and that this was making a poor impression on the captain. I wiped my face and continued: 'I came here to find my parents. But they're not here any more. I'm too late'" (294). He recognizes that he is too late to find his parents, decades past their disappearances, and during his return to the British consulate, he comes to term with his misguided venture into battle. He asks the man transporting him if he knew what had become of the Japanese solider that was with him, whom he believed to be Akira, and the man asks if he knew that solider, to which Banks responds, "'I thought I had. I thought he was a friend of mine from my childhood. But now, I'm not so certain. I'm beginning to see now, many things aren't as I supposed'" (296). The narration of Banks's venture into battle and eventual return to the British consulate suggests that the event did indeed happen, as he continues to write about the details of the same experience's aftermath, albeit acknowledging that

he may have misinterpreted aspects. In indulging his childhood fantasy for one last time, Banks is able to leave the past behind. And in his admission that "many things aren't as [he] supposed," Ishiguro reminds us that the only identity Banks (and the reader) can truly rely on is the one he crafts in his narrative.

Conclusion

In the final chapter of the book, which takes place twenty-one years after his return to Shanghai, Banks reunites with his mother, finally finding his surviving parent and solving the great mystery that had plagued his life. In finding her, he recognizes that much of his striving to understand his identity was a result of his orphan status. Banks reflects on his conversation with his mother in the nursing home he finds her in, saying "'she'd never ceased to love me, not through any of it. All she'd ever wanted was for me to have a good life. And all the rest of it, all my trying to find her, trying to save the world from ruin, that wouldn't have made any difference either way. Her feelings for me, they were always just *there*, they didn't depend on anything…it took me all that time to realise it'" (328). So much of Banks's identity was dependent on how he believed others perceived him—if they thought he was English enough or a good enough to detective to find his parents. Banks's realization that his mother's love was not dependent on anything other than his identity as her son helps Banks to find stability. Ultimately, Banks is longing for a stable sense of self—a stability that was lost when he became an orphan—and the conversation with his mother grounds him.

In the closing paragraph of the novel, Banks says, "I do not wish to appear smug; but drifting through my days here in London, I believe I can indeed own up to a certain contentment" (336). Brian W. Shaffer, in his review of *When We Were Orphans*, notes, "Ishiguro's novels end

in this poignantly understated way, leaving the reader to grapple with the question of whether the protagonist's life has been as successful or complete as he…would have us believe" (595). Ultimately, it is not up for the reader to interpret Banks's narrative. Through the crafting of his narrative and his self-fashioning, Banks is able to not only understand his identity but be content with who that person is, after striving for so long to make himself into what he thought others wanted from him. Banks's contentment is all that truly matters, and we *must* take his word for it.

Conclusion

I first read *A Pale View of Hills* in the last semester of my undergraduate college career. In our discussion of the novel, my classmates and I expressed confusion and outrage at the unclear, abrupt ending, and our professor mediated a conversation between students with vastly different interpretations of Etsuko that ranged from the doppelgänger reading all the way to Etsuko committing murder. *A Pale View of Hills* set me on a personal journey of reading through all of Ishiguro's novels, and I realized that confusion was very much a hallmark experience of reading Kazuo Ishiguro, although my confusion quickly turned to acceptance and even appreciation. Just one of the beautiful elements of Ishiguro's works is the way in which he explores memory's impact on identity across all kinds of stories. *A Pale View of Hills* and *When We Were Orphans* are both literary fiction with historical reference to early-mid twentieth century wars. Yet the rest of his novels span genres—the fantasy of *The Buried Giant*, the science-fiction dystopias of *Never Let Me Go* and *Klara and the Sun*, the existentialism of *The Unconsoled*, and more literary fiction with *Remains of the Day* and *An Artist of the Floating World*. While I chose to focus on *A Pale View of Hills* and *When We Were Orphans* in this thesis, any one of Ishiguro's eight novels are fruitful examples of the individual grasping to control over his or her identity, whether they are a retired butler, a performer on the eve of his biggest performance, or a clone.

It is difficult to provide an all-encompassing statement about how readers respond to Ishiguro's novels because the interpretations of the books—both at the story level and the discourse level—are numerous. In his book *Narratives of Memory and Identity: The Novels of Kazuo Ishiguro*, Mike Petry argues "Ishiguro's novel[s]…challenge the reader in that they allow for various different readings and play with the reader's own moral standards" (61) For example,

in my own readings of *A Pale View of Hills* and *When We Were Orphans*, I felt an immense amount of sympathy for Etsuko and her grappling with the loss of her daughter, and this sympathy prompted me towards an interpretation of the novel that would make sense of her questionable actions through a lens of deep trauma. Meanwhile, I felt an almost-equal amount of distaste for Christopher Banks, as I viewed his actions in Shanghai as foolish and dangerous, placing his personal mission in higher priority than the lives of many Chinese and Japanese soldiers and civilians, and this dislike led me to harsher interpretations of Banks. As Petry argues, these interpretations are more reflective of my own moral standards, rather than Ishiguro's or any other reader's.

These various reactions also reflect reader's response to Ishiguro's use of unreliable narrators. In his article, "Ontology and Narrative Technique in Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Unconsoled*," A. Harris Fairbanks discusses the assumed, common response to Ishiguro's unreliable narrators: "the aesthetic pleasure we take from unreliable narrators involves the sense of our own superiority to them—our detection of their factual inconsistencies or errors, our sense of their failure to interpret events with our own intelligence and sensitivity," and this sense of superiority results in "moral judgments towards characters" because of their presumed inability to outright "recognize and regret their failures and transgressions" (612, 615). As an outside observer to Etsuko and Christopher Banks's self-fashioning, the reader is able to see the inconsistencies, to question the certainty of memories. Mike Petry states that "autobiographical memory is always unreliable. 'How we tell it' and 'how it was' are more often than not worlds apart from each other. But we are not dealing here, when we concern ourselves with the issue of personal pasts, with questions of right or wrong" (157). Petry's distinction, that the reliability of a personal past is not concerned with questions of right or wrong, is why the audience reaction to

Etsuko's and Banks's stories cannot answer to the truth of the narratives. As I have shown in my previous chapters, for much of their stories, Etsuko and Christopher Banks are deeply concerned with how others view them—Etsuko reflects on memories of Ogata-San and Sachiko telling her who she should be, while Christopher Banks frequently expresses outrage at others' interpretations of him and is desperate to be seen as a proper detective. Yet, Ishiguro shows that this attention to others' perceptions of them is an impetus for the creation of the self, a kind of disregarding of what others think of them in favor of creating their own sense of self. Matthew Beedham argues that Ishiguro's concern in his novels is "how characters respond to the lives they have lived," *not* how they explain that response to other people (24). For Etsuko and Christopher Banks, they both respond to their lives by telling a story that helps them work through their trauma, and, in doing so, they take control of their future—a future that no longer necessarily requires an audience.

Readers may be frustrated at the endings of *A Pale View of Hills* and *When We Were Orphans* because the first-person narrators do not give space for any other perspective of the narrative and identity they have crafted. Once they have reached the end of their narratives, Etsuko and Christopher Banks no longer need their identity validated by anyone else, simply ending their stories once they reach self-satisfaction; indeed, that is where *Ishiguro* ends their stories. For these narrators, the act of creating the narrative itself—of self-fashioning through a trail of memories, trauma, and rewritings—establishes the identity, and both novels end with the narrators satisfied with their identities in ways that felt unreachable at the beginning of their stories. In the final paragraph of *A Pale View of Hills*, Etsuko watches her daughter leave the house, and, when Niki glances back, Etsuko "smile[s] and wave[s] to her," showing a calmness that evaded her for much of the novel as she delt with parental grief and trauma (Ishiguro, *A Pale*

183). In the closing paragraph of *When We Were Orphans*, Christopher Banks is content, telling us he "should not mind if [he has] to live out the rest of [his] days" in London—a statement that is in stark contrast to his demeanor for most of the novel, anxiously striving to return to Shanghai (Ishiguro, *When* 336). To use this quotation one final time, Matthew Beedham observes that *When We Were Orphans* is the story of a detective "who does not realise that 'the real case is himself, and its resolution involves self-knowledge'" (130). That term—"self-knowledge"—seems to me to be what is most important for Ishiguro's narrators. I do not take it to mean a self-knowledge that is explained to someone else, with the narrator awaiting the acceptance of the audience. In Ishiguro's novels, especially in *A Pale View of Hills* and *When We Were Orphans*, the narrator's identity is grounded only in the narrative they tell, but it is a narrative that does not need to be told to or accepted by anyone other than the narrator. The audience's satisfaction with the narrative, or the more likely lack thereof, is irrelevant—and is perhaps Ishiguro's point. In an interview with Brian W. Shaffer, Ishiguro says, "It is…emotional issues [of my characters]—and not the facts—that interest and concern me" (6). Ishiguro always ends his novels with some ambiguity because he is not interested in providing a concrete answer to the big questions of the novel; rather, the novels give the space to ask questions about human capacities—to remember, to grieve, to tell a story—and the questions remain because there is no universal answer.

I would like to return to Stephen Greenblatt for a moment, as he reflects on the reality of existing in a space where the individual has the power to self-fashion. In the epilogue of *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, Greenblatt states, "in our culture to abandon self-fashioning is to abandon the craving for freedom, and to let go of one's stubborn hold upon selfhood, even selfhood conceived as a fiction, is to die. As for myself…I want to bear witness at the close to my overwhelming need to sustain the illusion that I am the principal maker of my own identity"

(257). In other words, self-fashioning is derived from the desire for control over the self and to abandon yourself, even a created self, is death—the only way to keep living is to craft an identity that we want to hold onto. There is hope in the illusion (even knowing that it is an illusion) that we can create ourselves, particularly when the person that others have created for us feels wrong. Etsuko and Christopher Banks *are* the "principal maker[s]" of their own identities. And perhaps that is why I am drawn to them, as well as Ishiguro's other novels. Truthfully, I am interested in the idea of self-fashioning because I want to believe that I hold a similar power. The self I have created in my head—through memory recall and storytelling—*she* is real, my truest self.

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