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Silvia Mara Tellini

Kazuo Ishiguro's *An Artist of the Floating World* and *When We Were Orphans*: Floating Histories, Memories and Identities in the Pacific-Asian Theatre of the two World Wars

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Tese apresentada para defesa como parte dos requisitos para obtenção do título de Doutor em Letras, junto ao Programa de Pós-Graduação em Letras, do Instituto de Biociências, Letras e Ciências Exatas da Universidade Estadual Paulista “Júlio de Mesquita Filho”, Campus de São José do Rio Preto.

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Financiadora: CAPES

Comissão Examinadora

Prof. Dr. Peter James Harris- Orientador (UNESP-São José do Rio Preto)

Prof<sup>a</sup>. Dr<sup>a</sup>. Nilce Maria Pereira (UNESP-São José do Rio Preto)

Prof. Dr. Alvaro Luiz Hattnher (UNESP-São José do Rio Preto)

Prof. Dr. Ivan Marcos Ribeiro- UFU (Uberlândia)

Prof<sup>a</sup>. Dr<sup>a</sup>. Flávia Andrea Rodrigues Benfatti UFU (Uberlândia)

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## RESUMO

Ao posicionar os protagonistas em áreas de conflito, recontando suas memórias fragmentárias e turvas, Kazuo Ishiguro dá a possibilidade de vislumbrarmos a sociedade de uma perspectiva singular, observando a transformação de valores, bem como as consequências profundas para os personagens que já não encontram mais abrigo na segurança imaginária de um mundo racional positivista. Do mesmo modo, suas obras possuem a capacidade de oferecer um vislumbre na subjetividade e instabilidade interpretativa do leitor ao inventar uma técnica concisa de narrar caracterizada por reprimir e esconder os verdadeiros significados e por deslocar o movimento e as ações para os bastidores das cenas. Visando a uma leitura comparativa da trajetória do protagonista do segundo romance do romancista Kazuo Ishiguro, *An Artist of the Floating World* (1986), com a do narrador do seu quinto livro, *When We Were Orphans* (2000), este estudo enfoca as interrelações dos conceitos de memória e identidade, aliados ao contexto histórico, sob a luz de teorias ligadas aos estudos culturais, pós-coloniais e psicanálise. Assim que o detetive Christopher Banks de *Orphans* retorna a Shanghai em busca de seus pais desaparecidos, passa a projetar em sua narrativa um universo estranhamente fantasmagórico e onírico, expresso em uma memória que se fragmenta paralelamente à intensificação do caos provocado pela invasão japonesa durante a Segunda Guerra Sino-Japonesa. Da mesma forma, o pintor Ono de *An Artist* também apresenta ao leitor lembranças perpassadas por duras perdas familiares e sociais durante a Segunda Guerra, que se projetam em uma narrativa instável, abrindo-se a amplas possibilidades interpretativas. As personagens, buscando dar sentido a um mundo sem sentido, através da busca em vão de coerência e continuidade em suas histórias,

manifestam a capacidade humana de se auto-iludir, como apontado pelo comitê do prêmio Nobel de 2017 concedido a Ishiguro. O romancista possui a capacidade de explorar as identidades construídas nesse limiar entre memória coletiva e individual, entre esquecimento e lembrança, entre negação e desejo, usadas como mecanismos de sobrevivência e de renegociação com o passado.

Palavras-chave: Kazuo Ishiguro. *An Artist of the Floating World. When We Were Orphans*. Estudos Culturais. Memória. Identidade.

## ABSTRACT

Kazuo Ishiguro allows us to investigate societies from singular perspectives, as he sets his novels during wartime while he scrutinizes the changing values and the profound impact upon the characters, who are no longer able to cling to rationalizations. Similarly, his novels comprise the reader's unstable subjective interpretations of events, stemming from the tight narrative technique he invents, characterized by suppressing and hiding away meaning and by moving the action to the backstage of the scenes. Aiming at a comparative reading between the trajectory of painter Masuji Ono, the protagonist in Ishiguro's second book, *An Artist of the Floating World* (1986), and detective Banks's narration in his fifth novel *When We Were Orphans* (2000), this study focuses on the interrelations between memory and identity, while not disregarding the historical backdrop, in the light of theories in Cultural and Post-Colonial Studies as well as in Psychoanalysis. As soon as Banks arrives in Shanghai searching for his parents who disappeared when he was a child, his narrative projects an uncanny and dream-like world expressed through fragmented memories in parallel to the deepening of the chaos provoked by the Japanese invasion during the Second Sino-Japanese War. Similarly, Ono presents a story imbricated in painful familial and social losses during World War II, projected onto an unstable narrative, leading his readers to broad interpretations. These characters seek meaning in an ultimately senseless world as they struggle to develop a coherent story, whereas what they actually end up displaying is self-deception, as outlined by the 2017 Nobel Committee, when Ishiguro was granted the award. The novelist possesses the ability to explore these identities in the threshold between collective and individual memories, between forgetting and remembering, between denial and desire, used as mechanisms of survival and renegotiation with their pasts.

Keywords: Kazuo Ishiguro. *An Artist of the Floating World*. *When We Were Orphans*.

Cultural Studies. Memory. Identity.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Kazuo Ishiguro has been a prominent writer at a global level, which I believe is partly due to his bicultural and bilingual upbringing by Japanese parents in England. This gave him an especial ability to navigate through different cultural scenarios authentically, insofar as he creates stories that are able to connect with a multi-cultural audience. His characters possess genuine voices, even if they are like Ono, the Japanese painter who is reminiscing in English on paper, but who conveys to the readers a sense of actually telling his story in Japanese. Ishiguro achieves this sort of translationese, as he puts it, through different narrative techniques, as well as by creating historical and cultural references, convincing us of the diverse metaphors he employs.

Beyond the plot and the cross-cultural and hybrid linguistic dimensions, the key to savouring his novels lies in their lyricism, mood and atmosphere, as they penetrate universal issues such as human helplessness and blindness or tackle the absurdity of life in the face of finitude. The author is not afraid to explore hard topics surrounding melancholy and mourning over the loss of the other, or on the other hand to approach the polymorphous perverse side of the human psyche. Despite of their sadness and nostalgia, these carefully crafted novels awaken our compassion towards these characters, who inevitably end their reminiscings in unresolved conclusions.

The present thesis discusses two of his novels, set in Japan and China, *An Artist of the Floating World* and *When We Were Orphans* respectively, focusing on the interplay between the concepts of memory and identity as keys in generating the narrative techniques, aiming at interpreting the trajectories of the painter Ono and the detective

Banks, insofar as not only their emotional and psychological states and private relationships are explored, but also the historical and cultural backdrop, which are examined as constitutive of their identity constructions. In order to achieve that different theories are discussed, from some of Freud's psychoanalytic fundamental concepts to cultural theories regarding concepts like nation and identity. Thus, this thesis focuses on the historical aspects of the Second Sino-Japanese War and the aftermath of World War II in Japan to illustrate the floating values that surrounded China and Japan during those periods of extreme despair and change. There is an extreme strong discourse in Ono's narration that floats between clinging to the traditional values of fascism while embracing the new democratic values; on the other side of the front, as the Japanese invade and destroy Shanghai, Christopher is catapulted into the verge of madness, as his narrative increasingly adopts a dream-like and incoherent tone. Therefore, the chapters that analyse *An Artist* and *Orphans* departure from recent reviews aiming at developing an examination circumscribing psychoanalytic concepts in dialogue with cultural and post-colonial theories, to further understand how denial, defense, desire and reliability already explored in the earlier reviews can be developed when contrasted or compared to the historical backgrounds.

The controversies surrounding the debate whether there is an aesthetic Japanese quality to the novelist's books is approached in the introduction as well. The following chapter outlines the historical and cultural backgrounds set in the East during World War I and II, understood here as indisputably fundamental to the analysis of both linguistic and cultural aspects present in both novels. In chapters IV and V, the analyses of the novels are pursued; moreover, although each chapter is more biased towards the critical reviews of one specific novel, they are both analytically compared through the lens of cultural and psychoanalytical theories in relation to the historical aspects. The main issues raised

throughout the thesis are summarized in the conclusion as certain aspects of Kazuo Ishiguro's Nobel Prize speech are addressed .

### **1.1 An Overview of Kazuo Ishiguro's Background and Works**

Ishiguro was born in Nagasaki, in 1954, but went to England at the age of 5 when his father, an oceanographer, joined a British government research project on the North Sea. He grew up in Guildford, southern England, in a middle-class conservative environment. After leaving school, in 1974, he travelled to the United States, hitchhiking around the West Coast. Later that year he took up a course at the University of Kent, but after a year, decided to take another six-month break volunteering as a community worker on a housing estate in Scotland. Back at the University of Kent, he studied English and Philosophy and, after earning his Bachelor of Arts degree, he went back to social work helping homeless people.

His career as a writer began in 1980, after his song writing had been rejected by several record companies, including BBC Radio. His interest in writing short fiction gained him a place on the Creative Writing M.A. programme, run by the critic and novelist Malcolm Bradbury at the University of East Anglia, where he met the fabulist Angela Carter, who also became a sort of mentor for him. He graduated in 1980 with an advance from Faber & Faber for a novel in progress. In 1981, three of his short stories were published in *Introduction 7: Stories by New Writers: A Strange and Sometimes Sadness, Waiting for J. and Getting Poisoned*.

The writer has received several prizes and honours for his work, including Italy's Premio Scanno, the Cheltenham Prize, and an OBE (Order of the British Empire) for

services to literature, and he is a Fellow of Royal Society of Literature. He also received honorary doctorates from the Universities of Kent (1990) and East Anglia (1995), and in 1998 he received the French decoration Chevalier de L'Ordre des Arts et Lettres. His work has been translated into over twenty-eight foreign languages. In 2008, *The Times* named him among "The 50 Greatest British Writers Since 1945".

Among other prizes is *The Winifred Holtby Award* for his first novel *A Pale View of Hills* 1982. Soon after that, in 1983, he was included in *The Granta Best of Young British Writers* list, alongside his contemporaries Martin Amis, Ian McEwan, Salman Rushdie, Julian Barnes, Graham Swift, Rose Tremain, Jeanette Winterson and Pat Barker. His second novel, *An Artist of the Floating World*, came out in 1986 and received the Whitbread Book of the Year Prize; The Booker Prize for Fiction, in 1989, was awarded for his third novel, *The Remains of the Day*; his fourth novel, *The Unconsolated* (1995), was also awarded the Cheltenham Prize. In 2000 he published his fifth novel, *When We Were Orphans*, which was shortlisted for both the Whitbread Novel Award and the Booker Prize for Fiction. *Never Let Me Go* (2005), his sixth novel, was again shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize for Fiction and adapted for the cinema in 2010, directed by Mark Romanek and starring Carey Mulligan, Keira Knightley and Andrew Garfield. The project for the novel had started much earlier in 1990, one year after he published *The Remains of the Day* (1989), but he temporarily abandoned the project only to return to it after the publication of *The Unconsolated* (1995). Nonetheless, once again the novel was put on hold until after the publication of *When We Were Orphans* (2000). Eventually, after his third attempt inspired by a radio programme debating breakthrough in biotechnology, he managed to come up with the metaphor of clones as a literary device to depict the story he wanted to tell.

Although his primary work is influenced by western classical literature, he has written screenplays for television (*A Profile of Arthur J. Mason*, broadcast in 1984, and *The Gourmet* broadcast in 1986), as well as original screenplays for the cinema, *The Saddest Music in the World* (2003) and director James Ivory's *The White Countess* (2005). Moreover, he has written song lyrics for the American jazz singer Stacey Kent, confirming that he continues to explore the complexities of the concepts of dislocation and homelessness.

Among his latest work is a collection of short stories entitled *Nocturnes: Five Stories of Music and Nightfall*, published in 2009, and the release of his novel *The Buried Giant*, in March 2015. According to interviews and media publicity, Ishiguro asserts that his latest narrative is more concerned with social memory than individual memory and with the relevance of forgetting the past as a mechanism to maintain nations together.

## 1.2 Critical Perspectives on Ishiguro's Work

When examining Ishiguro's upbringing, Shaffer asserts that "in the early years of school Ishiguro experienced what might be called culture shock, finding himself a curiosity in the playground and adjusting to a new reality in which he was not to see 'another non-English person' for years" (*Understanding Kazuo Ishiguro* 1). He argues that one of the reasons the novelist identifies himself as an international author is due to his never feeling either very English or very Japanese, which has turned him into a homeless writer (*Understanding Kazuo Ishiguro* 2).

His first novel, *A Pale View of Hills* (1982), is concerned with the reminiscing of a Japanese woman, Etsuko, who left the devastated Nagasaki to live in the countryside

of England. She has two daughters from two different marriages, but the elder Japanese, one committed suicide. His second novel, *An Artist of the Floating World* (1986), approaches the reminiscing of Masuji Ono, a Japanese painter, who agonizes over his career as a propagandist artist for the imperialist government during World War II. Nonetheless, afraid that his work would be labelled under the Japanese novel umbrella, Ishiguro proceeded to set his following novel in England: *The Remains of the Day* (1989) centres on the remembrance of butler Stevens, who had worked at an English estate, Darlington Hall, and is on a road trip to meet his ex-co-worker, Miss Kenton in 1956. The journey gives him the opportunity to recall his years of service during the 1930s and 1940s. The butler metaphor depicts the relation of small people to power and portrays “the English class system with combined satire and relish, with perception of both its cruelty and its rigorous ethos, as a distillation of English history” (Kauffmann 43)

Despite his Japanese upbringing, the author has also been influenced largely by the western canon, including nineteenth century English and Russian writers such as Dostoyevsky, Chekhov, Charlotte Brontë and Dickens. Other more modern writers have been of great influence on his narrative techniques, such as E.M. Forster for his “plain style of writing”, Ford Madox Ford “for his vivid portrait of character and narrative repression”, Henry James “for his ability to show us people changing their self-images”, and Kafka “for his depiction of the uncanny” (*Understanding Kazuo Ishiguro* 6).

His fourth novel marked a significant shift in direction since, although self-deception, memory and desire continue to be at stake, the story of the pianist Ryder in *The Unconsoled* (1995) assumes a disturbing Kafkaesque dreamlike narrative, while the short traditional form of his novels now gain an epic and experimental form (*Understanding Kazuo Ishiguro* 5).

At the time when *The Remains of the Day* received the prestigious Booker Prize, Ishiguro had already established his solid reputation, by the age of thirty-four. Since then his work has attracted interest from both English-speaking and non-English-speaking worlds. Matthew Beedham (1) defines Ishiguro's narratives as novels on the edge of what can be portrayed, allowing him to display his masterly control of prose. Other commentators have also noted that Kazuo Ishiguro's work avoids melodramatic plots, concealing the details and providing the reader with an experience of dislocation or displacement. He anchors his stories on two different grounds: one is the act of narrating the reminiscing of the protagonists while destabilising time as the narratives are constructed and reconstructed, creating overlapping layers according to the way the character remembers a particular event; the other is the setting of the story according to historical facts, usually some event associated with a turbulent historical period when a paradigm or conflict remains unsolved. However, such historical references are not provided in detail, since the author conceals them within the blurred remembering of the protagonists, which prevents the establishment of referential time, hence historical accuracy. Linguistically, through the employment of flashbacks, digressions and flash forwards, Ishiguro blurs the limits between the subjective and the objective worlds.

Critics find that his explorations on the theme of exile allow for some comparisons with the works of Henry James in the sense that Ishiguro's work is not devoted to details such as a representation of reality, in the tradition of nineteenth-century realist fiction (Parkes11-20). They also highlight that Ishiguro indicates Chekov's controlled tone and slow pace on one side, and Dostoevsky's chaotic ordinary life represented with simplicity on the other. The influence is explicit in his first writings, like the short story 'Getting Poisoned' (1981), where a psychopathic adolescent poisons his own cat and then poisons the daughter of his mother's boyfriend just as he is about to have sex with her. In 'Waiting

for J.’ (1981), the title being an allusion to Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* (1953), the narrator is a professor who is terrified of meeting J., whom he murdered in order to fulfil an agreement, but J. may return to receive his side of the bargain. These short stories were early outlines of surrealistic aspects he would further explore in his fourth novel *The Unconsoled* (1995), his most experimental work, full of dream-like sequences and opaque constructions, and again in his fifth novel, *When We Were Orphans* (2000), where he directs the reader’s attention to the psychological manoeuvres of the detective Christopher Banks, who is trying to solve the mystery of his parents’ disappearance. Brian Shaffer compares his earlier short story, ‘Waiting for J.’ (1981), and *The Unconsoled* (1995):

(‘Waiting for J.’) resembles and anticipates far more strongly *The Unconsoled* with its pervasive dream-like atmosphere, its troubling self-destructive protagonist-narrator, its subtle use of character doubling, and its paranoia-inducing Kafkaesque and Beckett-like qualities. [...] (it) is a quirky enigmatic psychological intrigue. Yet the story explores issues common to many of Ishiguro’s works, such as narratorial self-deception and repression, and interrogation of the sources and goal of the artistic life. [...] As in all Ishiguro’s work, here too ‘outer’ narrative layers need to be stripped away in order to grasp the essence of the story at which the protagonist only reluctantly hints. (qtd. in Groes and Lewis 12)

He argues that Ishiguro’s novels are psychological and that they approach Beckett’s themes such as the incapability the characters display to see reality. Shaffer also claims that the plot of *Waiting for J.* anticipates the plotline of Ian McEwan’s *Amsterdam* (1998). Claire Messud (qtd. in Beedham 138) agrees as she observes that the emphasis on the futility of life reveals Beckett’s influence on Ishiguro: “As in Beckett, Ishiguro’s characters, in their detached world, show us a version of our own minute preoccupations

and piddling distractions, and raise life's largest questions for all of us. Is this all there is? Must it end so soon? Why strive? Why persist? What is it all for?"

It is not mere coincidence that Ishiguro sees himself as an international writer, since he approaches universal themes, conscious that he is going to be translated, which makes him think about how something that looks great in English may be translated into other languages (qtd. in Spiegel 1). Universal metaphors are keys to access the core signification of these narratives and are a constant reminder that for Ishiguro his themes:

offer an opportunity to consider the relationship between the ontology and the phenomenology of world literature because, apart from being translated, they are written for translation [...] Thinking about how and where his books will be read, Ishiguro claims, has led him to focus on "shape, structure and vision", or what he calls "architecture", rather than on 'sentences and phrases. (Walkowitz 219)

Her opinion seems to guard against the earlier reviews, which reduced and marketed his books as productions possessing an exotic oriental aura, a kind of literal reading which Ishiguro has rejected. For example, in *Never let Me Go*, despite its sci-fi clone related ambience, the novelist explains that the clone metaphor suits the oppression of time, portraying the questions we all face: "What are the things you hold on to, what are the things you want to set right? What do you regret? What are the consolations? And what is all education and culture for if you are going to check out?" (in Groes and Lewis 200). Like Ishiguro's other novels, this book is centred upon what emerges from memory as a factor which constructs identity. The novel is set in a fictionalised post-war Britain and renews the philosophical question of what it means to be human from the perspective of our contemporary historical era, raising questions about the boundaries of what human identity can encompass as well as lose, in a highly instrumentalised and technological society. The story focuses on love, friendship and what matters in life in the light of the

limited time span of the characters, a consequence of biotechnological breakthroughs that have been challenging the ethics of human life. The narrative is analysed from the angle of the characters' short lifespan, since they must donate their organs around their twenties, and in turn, time and death are highlighted as categories imbricated in each other, hence opening the story to various interpretations revolving around what defines human life.

Earl Ingersoll compares what is happening in Kathy's world to detective Banks's issues in *When We Were Orphans*: Christopher is a detective whose "big case" does not occur until his thirties, whereas Kathy H. does not understand what she is until the end of the novel. The mysteries allow her to investigate her past in the manner of a detective, and, in turn, Christopher is a detective whose big case is to understand where he came from. Margaret Atwood also perceives proximity in the roles of a memoirist and a detective. Moreover, there is a parallel in the fact that, just as *Never Let Me Go* does not fall under the science fiction category, *When We Were Orphans*, despite being narrated by a detective, is hardly a typical detective story. Ingersoll warns against the trap of equating Ishiguro's narratives to their settings, and opines that commentators have often forgotten the metaphorical levels, which are central to understanding his novels: The academic comments on these two novels:

Just as many readers of *When We Were Orphans* were led by book reviewers to see him exploiting the genre of detective fiction to make statements about Western imperialism in East Asia, so too the earliest readers of *Never Let Me Go* have been encouraged to read his latest novel as an expression of Ishiguro's trying his hand at speculative fiction, perhaps even science fiction. (Ingersoll 10)

Although the core metaphors are key to examining Ishiguro's novel, the questions concerning historical and cultural backgrounds should be regarded as inherent components of his stories, as demonstrated in Chapters IV and V. For instance, if the

detective *genre* had not been well-established, there would be no foundation for Ishiguro's ironic architecture, or if Ono were not a Japanese old man living in an Americanized society, the effects of displacement and homelessness would become pointless or ineffective.

Nevertheless, the ambiguities surrounding his narratives have led to another debate related to his ethnicity, which has been a prominent factor in his career since his first novels included Japanese characters and settings. Critics have tried to find connections between his work and that of Japanese authors, to which Ishiguro replies that, indeed, his work does not have the same linguistic foundation as a British native speaker would have since he grew up in a Japanese home, which led him to a natural carefulness when writing prose, as well as to place his earlier characters in non-English-speaking worlds creating subtle linguistic effects. However, he insists that his work is not that of a Japanese writer since he has been influenced by the western canon, and the calm surface of his stories is a natural expression of his natural voice. In a conversation with Dylan Krider, he explains what he knows and what he does not know about Japan:

I was brought up by Japanese parents. I think I understood very deeply how a Japanese family works and about parents/child relationships, marriages, and so on. But I wasn't qualified to comment on the economic situation in Japan or what Japanese people did or didn't do in the 80's. These books were very much my own creations, and as a novelist, and as a novelist, I was wanting to write about universal themes, so it always slightly annoyed me when people said, "Oh, how interesting it must be Japanese because you feel this, this, and this", and I thought, "Don't we all feel like this?." (qtd. in Krider 149)

The novelist insists that, despite his Japanese origins, he is not writing about his own immigrant experiences in Great Britain, but rather focusing on the emotional

preoccupations of his protagonist's personal situation against the orchestrated background of devastation so that he can appeal to a wide audience. Ishiguro does not regard his novels as academic exercises, neither does he wish to write without communicating a vision to a widespread audience.

He believes that his stories were noted as a consequence of the moment through which literary criticism was passing in England in the early eighties. He connects academic interest in his work to a mainstream view in literary studies in the eighties, which sought to connect his stories to the experience of immigration and native land. The focus on ethnicity identified Shiva Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, Buchi Emecheta, Timothy Mo and Ishiguro as the key figures of the new internationalism in literary studies. Ishiguro explains that such a space was inaugurated by Rushdie. The author claims that their generation of writers represented a moment when Britain had to come to face-to-face with the fact that it was not the centre of the universe any longer, but was becoming increasingly marginal in relation to the rest of the world. However, Ishiguro observes that his narratives are aesthetically very different from those of authors seeking post-modern elements, such as Rushdie.

In an interview with Alan Vorda and Kim Herzinger (1991, p. 134-5), Ishiguro mentions that he received the Booker Prize after Salman Rushdie had been awarded it in 1981, and that he had the good fortune to receive a lot of attention because he had a Japanese face and a Japanese face which was what had repercussions at that time. However, although critics have compared his work to that of Salman Rushdie, Ishiguro asserts that his writing style is,

almost the antithesis of Rushdie or (Timothy) Mo (1950). Their writing tends to have these quirks where it explodes in all kinds of directions. Rushdie's language always seems to be reaching out— to express meaning that can't usually be

expressed through normal language. Just structurally his books have this terrific energy. They just grow in every direction at once and he doesn't particularly care if the branches lead nowhere. He'll let it grow anyway and leave it there and that's the way he writes. I think he is a powerful and considerable writer. (qtd. in Vorda and Hessinger 135)

In another interview with Gregory Mason (336) he confirms his major authors influences as originated from Dostoyevsky (1821-81), Chekhov (1860-1904), Charlotte Brontë (1816-55) and Dickens (1812-70). However, when asked about Japanese influences, he also mentions the novelists Junichiro Tanizaki (1886-1965), Yasunari Kawabata (1899-1972), Masuji Ibuse (1898-1993) and Natsume Soseki (1867-1916). He adds that the Japanese movies of directors such as Yasujiro Ozu (1903-63) and Mikio Naruse (1905-69) have been even more influential on his work. When introducing the Nobel Prize winner Yasunari Kawabata's short novels, *Snow Country* (1935-7) and *A Thousand Cranes* (1949-52), Ishiguro stated that,

Kawabata was a writer who quite deliberately aspired to a 'classical' tradition of Japanese prose writing pre-dating the influence of European realism—a tradition which placed value on lyricism, mood and reflection rather than on plot and character. Read either of these novels for a tangible, developing plotline—adopt a 'what-happens-next?' attitude — and one is bound to reach the end with a feeling one has missed the point. Kawabata needs to be read slowly, the atmospheres savoured, the character's words pondered for nuances. (qtd. in Kawabata 2)

By referring to the aspects he finds important in Kawabata's stories, the novelist also suggests which aesthetically and humanly relevant *motifs* should be included in his stories. Hence the extensive number of diverse review responses which approach the

subtleties as well as the complex arguments Ishiguro develops, including those concerning Japanese culture.

Ishiguro's versatility lies in stories ranging from issues surrounding class, ethnicity, nationhood, place and morality, to concerns with artistic representation. At the core of his books, "the careful crafted narratives invite us to invest our time and emotions in his fictional worlds and characters. This ethical imperative is Ishiguro's signature [...]. They are not necessarily likeable characters, but (his) craftsmanship transfigures our imaginative response to them and provokes a human, sympathetic response" (Groes and Lewis 1, 2). The novelist asserts that he feels ,

a certain kind of relationship with my readership. There is a readership out there that will follow you into all sorts of interesting places. Particularly today, there is this highly sophisticated mass-readership out there. [...] They're not intimidated by strange things: they don't just like boring, pretentious self-indulgence. There's a readership out there hungry for new adventures. (qtd. in Groes and Lewis 261)

Although aware of the contradictions and ambiguities that he creates for his characters through their subtle reminiscings, the novelist also furnishes them with the notion that their actions do matter. He modulates our emotional and intellectual engagement with the characters, creating an ethics of empathy. The dramatic irony is embedded in the fact that we know how deluded the characters are, which leaves us powerless. Moreover, gaps, blanks, shifts in time and geographical dislocation also reveal the protagonists' traumas and buried desires. Despite the various techniques applied, he "does not succumb to the powerful pull towards the colourful language of affliction pervasive in contemporary writing. His texts prefer stoicism, which encourages the reader's steadfast acceptance of the detrimental situation" (Groes and Lewis 4).

One of the techniques to provoke empathy used in *The Remains of the Day* and *Never Let Me Go* is the way Steven and Kathy H. address the reader with a “you”, placing the reader in the same category as themselves. Since the “you” is not universal, Andrew Gibson (1999, p.199-200) observes that a “split-space” is generated where “identities twist round into each other and the reading subject becomes a profoundly ambivalent construction. Our view of their blindness in sustaining perverse social systems, reassures us that we ourselves can—and must—forge a renewed agency” (Groes and Lewis 4).

In other words, as a contemporary writer, his work explores issues of the world today along with the universal themes approached. The expansion and development of new technologies have enhanced our experience of a virtual world. Groes and Lewis (5) argue that these forces of globalization diminishes our autonomy as human beings, as well as our ability “to take responsibly for ourselves and others, and also, crucially, our ability to feel and feel for”, which Ishiguro’s ethic of empathy criticizes. Patricia Waugh agrees that “the emotional absence and ethical failure enacted as (the theme of Ishiguro’s books) is ironically and disturbingly redeemed by our recognition of the cultural apathia of an increasingly posthuman age” (qtd. in Groes and Lewis 5).

Although a writer of the postwar era, Ishiguro does not offer spectacular and sensational plots like his peers, writers such as Ian McEwan, Graham Swift or Martin Amis: “his narratives are quiet and shrewd, and closer to ethical questions and dilemmas evoked by J.M. Coetzee’s work” (Waugh qtd. in Groes and Lewis 6). Coetzee wrote about the Jewish-Russian exile Joseph Brodsky (1940-96), who never addressed politics directly, but instead looked at literature, philosophy and religion for redemption, by establishing the literary form as “an example of moral and ethical purity and firmness” (158).

Although indirectly, Ishiguro can also be related to the earlier generation of writers, such as J. G. Ballard, Saul Bellow and Primo Levi. They lived through the intensely violent events between 1939 and 1945, witnessing the effect of dehumanizing forces. Ishiguro has focused his attention on the atrocities and disasters of the twentieth century, which he has explored since his first novels, *A Pale View of Hills* and *An Artist*, through the indirect meditations on the consequences of the destruction of Nagasaki and Hiroshima by the atomic bomb. The role of Japan in the Second World War is once again approached in *Orphans* from another perspective, as well as in the screenplay of the motion picture *The White Countess*. Although *The Remains of the Day* is set in England, British fascism also appear as a similar issue that appears in his previous novels set in Japan and China, which the scholar Christine Berberich considers a warning against “the dangerous social and moral regression of the Thatcherite celebration of Englishness and Victorian moral values”, (qtd. in Groes and Lewis 6). Generally, it can be asserted that his novels focus on episodes in modern history, insisting the reader to reflect on the limits of our humanity and on the issue of making sense out of an ultimately senseless world.

However, considering the emotional force of his narratives as his main achievement, Ishiguro also addresses how these psychic worlds also need to be addressed on how they are projected through the employment of memory to explore the ambiguities of identity formation in his novels. Therefore, in the next chapter, both psychoanalytical and cultural issues surrounding identity in the stories are discussed with different reviewers, who approach these books from varied viewpoints. Moreover, identity is examined with the aid of cultural studies theories which anticipate the debate that will be further developed in Chapters IV and V with a focus on *An Artist* and *Orphans*.

## 2. MEMORY AND IDENTITY

### 2.1 Memory and Identity as the Main Strategies in Ishiguro's Novels

Ishiguro states that he tends to write the same book repeatedly, taking the same subject-matter in order to refine it, even though he varies the settings in the stories. For instance, the theme of wasted life is recurrent not only from a career perspective but especially in the personal arena of the characters (Jordison 1). Malcolm Bradbury points out that Ishiguro's novels maintain a coherency and integrity which he calls his "aesthetic invention". The first-person narrators are ordinary people "who cannot see beyond their immediate surroundings and who are at the mercy of what this world immediately around them proclaims itself to be" (qtd. in Mason 341). The novelist explains that the narrators in his novels use the language of "self-deception and self-protection" (qtd. in Mason 337), which "tends to be the sort that actually suppresses meaning and tries to hide away meaning" (qtd. in Vorda and Herzinger 135). As they offer their past reconstructions, they "attempt to conceal the overbearing shame associated with their past" (Wong 144), so that their truths are slowly revealed to the reader while the characters fail to see themselves.

Shaffer (*Understanding Kazuo Ishiguro* 8) argues that "these novels readily engage historical and political realities, but history and politics are explored primarily in order to plumb the depths and shallows of the characters' emotional and psychological landscapes and only secondarily to explore, say, World War Two, Japanese fascism, or the English class system". He claims that the novelist is concerned with the psychological

defences and the emotional arena which unveils the suppression of emotion and the idealization of the self (*Understanding Kazuo Ishiguro* 8). The critic adds that the relevance of a psychoanalytical reading of Ishiguro's novels since Freud (*Five Lectures on Psycho-Analysis* 22) had mapped out this emotional arena previously a "whose anatomy of repression does as much as anyone's to open up Ishiguro's psychologically charged works. Indeed, Ishiguro betrays a debt to Freud when he remarks of his characters, 'I'm not interested in the solid facts, but in the emotional upheaval'" (*Understanding Kazuo Ishiguro* 9).

The characters use defence mechanisms, especially repression, to bury intolerable or unwelcome memories and desire. Shaffer insists that "Ishiguro's novels focus on individuals who repress wishes that they cannot face or even admit – wishes that, in Freud's phrase, prove to be incompatible with their ethical and aesthetical standards" (*Understanding Kazuo Ishiguro* 9). In that manner, the superficial quietness and slowness of the plot, which avoid fantastic twists and over the top melodramatic escapades, hide the deeper turbulence of universal emotions and preoccupations to be found in between the lines of the narrator's understatements. Ishiguro comments that the protagonists,

know what they have to avoid and that determines the routes that they take through memory, and through the past. There's no coincidence that they're usually worrying over the past. They're worrying because they sense there isn't something quite right there. But of course memory is this terrible treacherous terrain, the very ambiguities of memory go to feed self-deception. (qtd. in *Understanding Kazuo Ishiguro* 9)

In other words, his themes are closely related to memory and identity; the latter refers broadly to the assumption that identity implies a group membership involving social, political and power dynamics as well as the individual's subjective experience. Moreover,

it is the result of the answers we produce to the question “Who am I?”, in other words it is the way one mirrors oneself. Memory is strictly related to identity in Ishiguro’s novels, since it is through the recollection of past events that the protagonists attempt to understand themselves. However, that does not equate to keeping records, but rather it serves the important function of reconstructing past events in such a way that they signify in the present moment, once the characters select and interpret relevant experiences in retrospect. It can be said that memory is closely associated to identity in Ishiguro’s stories, insofar as it defines a course of history in relation to the world which the character inhabits, while simultaneously mirroring his or her subjective world. In the same direction, Janet Feigenbaum explains that memory reshapes the historical world inasmuch as it is reshaped by new experiences acquired over the years:

We know from research that autobiographical memories are not accurate historical accounts of events as they happened at the time of encoding, but rather a reconstruction based on a number of affective and motivational factors. Memories are contaminated with information from similar events and so change over the years as we encounter new experiences. What we remember about an event depends on when and for what purpose we are remembering, reflecting our beliefs about ourselves and the world at present. Thus, memory is continually reprocessed and reinterpreted with changing contexts and perceptions. (Feigenbaum 14,15)

Ishiguro is able to depict in his narratives how memory works as the narrators recount the same event from different periods in their life, changing the perspective on what actually happened. By interplaying memory and identity, the protagonists examine their past with a sense of nostalgia for missed possibilities, wondering about the kind of person they might have been. According to the Ishiguro, his permanent interest in memory allows him

more freedom to explore a story than a plotline. He explains why his work is focused on first-person narrators and memory:

I like memory, at various levels. At a purely technical level, I like it as a method of telling a story – it gives me plenty of freedom ... And I just like the texture of memory as well. I like that the scenes are necessarily foggy around the edges, because they're open to manipulation and they're open to self-deception and embroidery. And they're often tinged with nostalgia, some kind of strong emotion. I like all these layers that come with a scene. Thematically, I have been interested in memory itself. (qtd. in Liquori 1)

Furthermore, Shaffer (qtd. in Groes and Lewis 10) also relates memory in Ishiguro's work to the representation of trauma as a constant tension force, which is never resolved. According to the commentator, what connects the novelist's early work to the later novels is the very representation of trauma, maybe due to geographical displacement (between Japan and England), or due to the atomic bomb on Nagasaki, or familial and generational conflicts; trauma persists as the result of these common *motifs* that appear in his stories. Remembering traumatic historical times is what creates tension in the narratives, as Cynthia Wong comments:

Speaking in the period after turbulent historical times, the first-person narrators set private experiences into a public realm. The characters seek to induct the reader, in terms of a witness into their stories. They make an admission that their seemingly ordinary tales will be insufficient, given the limitations of memory but, in establishing the fact of forgetfulness and the gaps in retelling, they also critique world events from their uniquely estranged perspectives. In his novels, Ishiguro's narrators join two realms – personal experience and historical event – to produce an unusual narrative tension. (*The Shame of Memory* 127)

She explains that, in admitting their limitations to remember their stories, the narrators reveal their search for freeing themselves from those traumatic periods of time, traumas which they actually invoke themselves in their narratives. By referring to Maurice Blanchot's concept of torment of language, she claims that,

to tell a story is to put oneself through the ordeal of this first forgetting that precedes, founds, and ruins all memory. Recounting, in this sense, is the torment of language, the incessant search for its infinity. And narrative would be nothing other than an allusion to the initial detour that is borne by writing and that carries it away, causing us, as we write, to yield to a sort of perpetual turning away. (*The Shame of Memory* 127)

The first attempt of the narrators at self-comprehension as they try to master their memories reveals a form not only of self-knowledge, but also self-dispossession, a need for “unworking” the memories and “turning away from one's past” (*The Shame of Memory* 127); thus, their expression of personal and disastrous world events is explored in the tension between the speech and the speechlessness.

For instance, in *A Pale View of Hills* (1982), speech and speechless narration are explored as the traumatic displacement of Setsuko (the Japanese middle-aged widow living in England), a feature that had already appeared in ‘A Strange and Sometime Sadness’ (in *Introduction 7: Stories by New Writers*, 1981). Etsuko tells the story of a friend she had back in Nagasaki just after the war as she tries to come to terms with her daughter's suicide. Generational tensions, along with cultural and political transformation in Japan after World War II, are also depicted in *An Artist of the Floating World* (1986), which had likewise been anticipated in his short story ‘The Summer after the War’ (1981). The viewpoints in Masuji Ono's narrative are taken as conflictive in the face of his

daughters' and grandson's inherited ideologies and are further analyzed in the following chapters.

However, Ishiguro emphasizes that the sense of loss arising from exile does not sustain violent anger, but it is portrayed through a tone that constitutes Ishiguro's personal and artistic temperament. In relation to memory as a device in the creative process, Ishiguro explains:

For me, the creative process has never been about anger or violence, as it is with other people; it is more to do with regret or melancholy. I don't feel I've regretted not having grown up in Japan. That would be absurd. This is the only life I have known. I had a happy childhood, and I've been very happy here. But it's to do with the strong emotional relationships I had in Japan that were suddenly severed at a formative emotional age particularly with my grandfather. (qtd. in *Understanding Kazuo Ishiguro* 116)

Memory, trauma and contingency are key elements performing their roles in Ishiguro's first-person narrators' identity. However, the cultural and social arenas are also present as they create ambivalences during the protagonists' trajectories:

Memory, both individual and social, plays a large part in a cultural context and thus the framing axioms of literary historicism are commonly represented by the texts themselves as forms of memory. Memory thus becomes the mediator between the present and the past. It is now widely believed that memory is the foundation of personal identity, and that anything that damages it will threaten the self (Lalrinfeli 14).

Memory is an active element in shaping identity, and as such, it acts on the past, reshaping and distorting it. For Ishiguro, identity also depends on a social context, which when it suffers drastic change, leaves the characters in estrangement. Their narratives encompass

both their own knowledge and blindness towards the events they remember. Etsuko, Ono, Stevens and Banks depict themselves as both virtuous actors and the victims of historical circumstances. Mark L. Howe explains that:

Both memory and self [identity] are dynamical systems, neither remain static during the interval between event encoding and autobiographical recall. In fact, both the content of memory and the element that constitute the self are thought to change as a function of new experiences, knowledge, and reorganization of what already exists. Interestingly, such changes can include the creation of false memories about past events, false memories that tend to be constrained by our self-concept. In particular, false memories about our past are more easily thought to be authentic if they are consistent with our cultural view of ourselves. (45)

Thus, memory cannot be accounted for as mere reflections of the past but constitutes selective reconstructions of the past according to the needs of the present fluid identity, which in turn, leads the characters to learn more about who they really are, and with the aid of their memory, finally accept their identity.

Despite Ishiguro's experimentation with surrealistic tones, there is nothing unrealistic about the way the novelist portrays his characters' psychology. The reality the reader perceives is the reality apprehensible by the mind. The changing world the mind encompasses can be detected in the identity the characters show or try to hide when faced with the shifting values of their societies. The concept of identity is explored from different perspectives and is further analysed in the following section. As in other novels, *An Artist* and *Orphans* reveals the changing world the characters' minds encompass and project as identifications developed in a parallel with wartime for instance, even if they try to conceal the undesirable effects that have set down in the present. In other words, the concept of identity can be typically intertwined with individual and collective

memories, with internal mood and emotional shifts as well as with the cultural reality in Ishiguro's work, hence the need to explore them from broad theoretical perspectives which do not disregard the different cultural and psychological components that may transform or distort the stories.

## 2.2 Identity: Theoretical Perspectives

Considering the narrative strategies Ishiguro articulates in his novels, be they discursive, linguistic, or historical, memory from different perspectives is a concept that needs to be addressed in its relation to theories encompassing identity formation.

One of the recurrent themes explored in Kazuo Ishiguro's narratives is wartime spaces and moments of intense political and social crisis. In his first novel, *A Pale View of Hills* (1982) as well as in *The Remains of the Day* (1989), his third novel, Ishiguro portrays characters inhabiting the world subsuming to pressures due to conflicts raised during World War II. What is distinguished in *An Artist* and *Orphans* is the fact that they have in common narrators who experience first-hand wars in the East. It is no coincidence that Ishiguro seems to be particularly interested in these two novels to explore different linguistic, as well as cultural territories. Whether we focus on Ono's and Banks's emotional and psychic traits, or else on aspects surrounding their historical and social settings, both protagonists enunciate from different lands to which they do not belong any longer; they live and try to survive in a world in transit, unveiling to the reader that the fantasy idea of fully belonging to an idealized community is constantly at stake.

According to Nikolas Rose (qtd. in Hall and DuGay 128, 129), human history needs to be conceived from the perspective of ideas attempted to be understood in their

interconnections with philosophy, cosmology, aesthetics and literature, but also needs to be approached as changing ideas, practices and techniques of everyday life, while not excluding the psychic dimension of the *self*. Although Ishiguro's work points to universal metaphors, it does not exclude the more concrete reality of the world in which the protagonists live. Since the narratives include historical, sociological and psychic dimensions, cultural studies theories be of assistance in examining their interplay.

Identity and culture are understood as necessarily related; but if culture is historical, then, when we think of the American or European culture, we ideologically replicate the ethnocentric and imperialist view. Therefore, the umbrella term multiculturalism offers a problem, since it is in fact a normative ethnical concept for the reason that societies cannot not be multicultural because they constantly rearticulate and negotiate their culture through differences. This may be why Ishiguro rejects the label of Japanese or British writer and prefers international writer, a helpful label when one wants to avoid such normative binarism.

In cultural studies, identity is constituted by three strands: difference, individuality and temporality, which encompass those of otherness and productivity; it is incomplete, fragmentary, relational, and unstable and its relations are established upon differentiation. This is one of the basic fundamentals to bear in mind when approaching *An Artist* and *Orphans*, considering memory as part of fluid and open ideas which cannot be in alignment with an integral, originary and unified construction. Therefore, identity is discussed in the novels as part of a contextualized scenario of World War II and its aftermath, thus being capable of bringing to the debate different spheres such as ethnics, race, nationality, while exploring universal facets of the human condition.

The deconstructive philosophical approach helps to examine key notions like identity under some blurriness, some distrust, indicating they can no longer offer a

totalizing, unifying and complete explanation. They do not serve to think with anymore, but, since there are no substitutes or replacements for them, there is nothing to do rather than to think with them, keeping in perspective that they are, indeed, detotalized and deconstructed in their forms. Such an approach seems productive to reflect on the very structures of Ishiguro's narratives, which without exception, always strive for unclosed endings, temporal fluidity and generous gaps on detailing, while resisting complying with the reader's urge to confine them to one meaning or to one world. Thus, the novelist relies on identification as a source that can draw its significations from a discursive, psychoanalytic repertoire as well as from historical contexts, without being limited to those— therefore, the identity of the narrators is always portrayed as incomplete from a discursive viewpoint since they keep changing as they are retold upon flawed memories. Ishiguro seems to agree with Stuart Hall (qtd. in Hall and DuGay 1-3) about the fact that identity is a strategic and positional concept rather than an essential one. It is not determined, and it is always thought in the articulation between subject and discursive practices.

From a psychoanalytic perspective, Freud asserts in *Mourning and Melancholia* (161-178) that identity is not constructed in relation to that which binds one to a present object, but it rather emerges in that relation to an abandoned object choice. Hence it is a process that seeks and finds in the relation to the other, that is, through alterity, a compensation for the loss of the libidinal pleasures of primal narcissism. The loss of the other can be processed in mourning, a loss that may be related to some abstraction which has taken the place of the lost object, such as fatherland (motherland), liberty, an ideal, a nation and so on. Hall relates that loss to the discursive process Derrida describes as being subject to the play of *différance*, which views identity not as formed by the imposition of, for instance, an ideal of nation, or else not moulded within a common stable

history, but rather as fragmented and fractured and subject to an ongoing transformation. Thus, Hall defines identity as our possibilities of the representation of ourselves and to the other, which is inevitably constructed discursively, as he explains:

We need to situate the debates about identities within all those historically specific developments and practices which have disturbed the relatively “settled” character of many populations and cultures, above all in relation to the process of globalization, which I would argue are coterminous with modernity [...] and the processes of forced and “free” migration which have become a global phenomenon of the so-called “post-colonial” world. Though they seem to invoke an origin in a historical past with which they continue to correspond, actually identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being. (qtd. in Hall and DuGay 4)

Identifications are constituted within the play of power, and are therefore more a mark of exclusion and difference than all-inclusive sameness because they are constituted in relation to the other, the one which is not the same, and which is not the one essential-immutable other, which means that such connections emerge out of both the symbolic and social dimensions. From this angle everyone has some form of subjectivity that can occupy more than one position since modern subjectivity functions to authorize experience itself, producing an epistemological value, an authority for the subject. When Derrida explains the assemblage of *différance*<sup>1</sup> he compares it to Nietzsche’s concept of different forces, Freud’s impression and delay effect, and to the difference Heidegger established between the ontic and ontological worlds. Heidegger (1998) had hinted on

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<sup>1</sup> According to a brief explanation in the Oxford Dictionaries, “différance is in the philosophy of Jacques Derrida the impossibility of any sign within a system of signs having a fixed meaning; the process by which meaning is endlessly deferred from one sign to another within such a system” (<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/difference>, accessed 16 June 2018).

how to think outside the binary mode, as he deconstructed traditional ontology, displacing the idea of “Being” from the abstracted and detached conception of the Platonic tradition, and placing it as *Dasein*, an ontic entity closer to men’s experiences in the world which are far from being an isolated and idealized abstraction.

Homi Bhabha (qtd. in Hall and DuGay 55) agrees that the idealized Hellenist and Hebraic notion of culture is at issue today in cultural and post-colonial studies since identity becomes the temporal construction of difference. In other words, identity arises at the intersection between these non-identical areas, therefore being apprehended in-between, in the fractures and divisions of individual and collective representations.

Ishiguro is able to work with the symbolic and social spheres in order to show the different positions Ono and Banks occupy as they grow older— Banks grows up occupying different social positions as he goes from being an orphaned child to become a detective in adulthood; the symbolic position movement includes his being adopted by Uncle Phillip to becoming the adopter parent of Jennifer. Likewise, Ono occupies different positions in the hierarchal social and symbolic order of art students and *Sensei* and he is confronted with the question of obedience or rebellion throughout his career. Identity arises at the intersection between these two non- identical areas, therefore being apprehended in-betweens, in the fractures and divisions of representation. Hall cites Peter Osborne’s review of Lacan’s mirror stage to explain that:

The mirror stage (Lacan’s essay)<sup>2</sup> is not the beginning of something, but the interruption- the loss, the lack, the division- which initiates the process that

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<sup>2</sup> According to the Oxford Index, the mirror stage is “the stage of childhood development in which the ego is formed according to Jacques Lacan’s psychoanalysis. His theory is based on the so-called ‘mirror test’ conducted by his friend, the psychologist Henri Wallon, who compared the reactions to a mirror of 6-month-old human babies with similar aged chimpanzees. What was noteworthy about the experiment to Wallon, and hence Lacan, was the fact that the chimpanzees showed only limited interest in their reflection, whereas the human babies were utterly fascinated. misrecognized the image in the mirror as their actual selves. For the first time in their lives, the babies obtained an image of themselves”.

“founds” the sexually differentiated subject (and the unconscious) and this depends not alone on the instantaneous formation of some internal cognitive capacity, but on the dislocating rupture of the look from the place of the Other. [...] Furthermore, that place has only meaning in relation to the supporting presence and the look of the mother who guarantees its reality. (qtd. in Hall and DuGay 9)

Hall criticizes Lacan's exaggerated focus on the process of the development of subjectivity as being exclusively dependent on the resolution of the Oedipal crisis, not considering the context, as if the image of the child constituted an abstract absolute being. When Hall criticizes Lacan's exaggerated reading of the process of the development of subjectivity as being exclusively an abstraction, his review can be associated with Heidegger's pre- deconstructive method and Derrida's deconstructive approach. He draws attention to the fact that when Foucault (63) in his later work shifts from the archaeological to the genealogical method, he describes operations of power on the subjectification as “genealogy's task, [...] to expose the body totally imprinted by history and the processes of history's destruction of the body” (63). Therefore, the ontology of the human being is necessarily historical; men are not an abstraction since there is the dimension of the body participant in the production of meanings to constitute identities. Hall also examines a difference between the historical construction of the “self” and the history of human relationships as it is studied in genealogical studies: “we give meaning to experiences through devices of meaning production that stabilize and disseminate practices in schools, families, street, workplaces and courtrooms. Ages produce different human beings, bearing different psychological characteristics, different emotions and pathologies” (Hall and DuGay 11). That is reflected in both Ono's and Banks's trajectories as they suffer the impact of transitioning into the dawn of a new age where

they feel their differences and identifications are exacerbated, which in turn, enhances the multiple facets and experiences of the narrators and deepening their complexities.

Furthermore, Hall refers to Judith Butler as one of the commentators who assertively analyses identity as being constituted in a dimension less concrete and more volatile since she investigates with psychoanalytic theories what was given as historically constituted. Butler explains how imagination and the capacity to symbolize play a part in identity formation:

identifications belong to the imaginary; they are phantasmagoric efforts of alignment, loyalty, ambiguous and cross-corporeal cohabitations, they unsettle the I; they are the sedimentation of the “we” in the constitution of the I, the structuring present of alterity in the very formulation of the I; Identifications are never fully and finally made; they are incessantly reconstituted and, as such, are subject to the volatile logic of iterability. They are that which is constantly marshaled, consolidated, retrenched, contested and, on occasion, compelled to give away. (BUTLER 105)

Significations composing multifaceted identities can only exist in relation to an imagined project according to Freud. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1962), this project emerges out of the delay in achieving gratification, which constitutes this gap between the ideal image one has of who oneself can become, and the realities of the present, a gap that functions as the driving factor behind identity formation. In other words, there is a concrete present reality as well as an idealized path which one should be able to take to attain the ideal. Freud approaches this concept by observing the capacity one has to project oneself into the future, through a mechanism of the delay in achieving gratification, which constitutes this gap between the so-called *Lust-Unlust* principle, or the primary processes and the secondary processes; such different realities of the present

constitute a driving factor in identity formation (FREUD, 1962). That aspect is enhanced in Banks's and Ono's narratives when their desires emerge through meanings they try to conceal and the facts they try to deny or manipulate.

Nonetheless, if identity is not a stabilized concept but rather emerges out of differences and is incomplete, Avtar Brah (in DONALD and RATTANSI, p.143) asks: "How do the symbolic order and the social order articulate in the formation of the subject? In other words, how can both social and psychic reality be articulated in the constitution of identity?" If these psychic mechanisms are examined at the level of the functioning of cultures, also as difference, it allows us to think of what Habermas (1987, p. 346) calls the "differentiation and condensation at once— a thickening of the floating web of the intersubjectivity threads that simultaneously holds together the ever more sharply differentiated components of culture, society and person". Such intersubjectivity threads also appear in Ishiguro's stories through hybrid features of the protagonists' discourse. Ono's and Banks's hybrid discourses are constituted in the intersections between individual and collective voices representing conflicting forces, which can be manifest in their unstable world translated not only as their general conflicts, but also as a catalyst to Banks's constant dislocation and disorientation and to Ono's awkwardness towards his family.

One of the key elements is the interplay of the "differences" in their relationships. Homi Bhabha defines hybridity as the dialectic territory of differences that is constituted at the cross-roads between decentralized voices, minority positions, inscribing versions of collective memory. The scholar refers to Bakhtin to explain this territory as a space of interconnected knots which have not been assimilated with each other, as we can read in the passage below:

The hybrid is not only double-voiced and double accented [...] but also double language; for in it there are not only (and not even so much) two individual consciousnesses, two voices, two accents, as there are (doublings of) socio-linguistic, consciousness, two epochs [...] that come together and consciously fight it out on the territory of the utterance [...] it is the collision between differing points of view on the world that are embedded in these forms historically: they are pregnant with potential for new world views, with new ‘internal forms’ for perceiving the world in words. (Bakhtin 360)

Bhabha understands that Bakhtin asserts that the dialogic negotiation opened by the hybrid agencies does not imply assimilation or collaboration but makes possible the creation of a space in-between which refuses the binary representation, since it is free from determinism. Banks and Ono are the personification of the hybrid agency: while Ono is caught in the extreme political changes in Japan, Banks is caught in the geographical transit between continents, which ultimately leads to their sense of displacement.

Another dilemma presented to Ono is related to modernity as something exterior, a concept invented by Northern Europe and North America, based on the polarization between tradition and modernity. Moreover, the Orient as it was before that, existed independently of these processes. Colonialism produces a different subjectivity from that of the colonized and it also creates impediments to certain possibilities of subjectivity. Spivak (1988) questions the concept of subjectivity as she understands it is a western category in the colonial relation, as the West can then name its “other” in the Imperialist world. Therefore, for Spivak, the agencies of difference and diversity constitute two of the modes aimed at managing the politics of race, class and gender, creating the marginal and the oppressed.

Furthermore, Ricoeur (123) asserts that, in western culture, modernity is established through a constant negation, moving things into a constant change, without limits as opposed to the imagined static Orient. The dual polarization established the “other”, the orient as the opposition to the western world project of development. This project was admired by those who were not modernized yet made themselves open to development, suffering in the end, from not having the expected outcomes. The efforts to imitate did not result in authentic modernization, in other words, “the exposure to modern culture (that is to say, western culture) resulted, not in cultural creativity and emancipation, but in conformism and dependency, which was the consequence of an excessive openness” (23) .

In Ishiguro’s novels, the creation of flawed characters who possess a certain inability to assess the different angles of their identities in face of their changing social contexts is employed through the aesthetics of simplicity and quietness to bring to light the fragmentary and marginalized identities of Ono and Bank. The characters’ undergoing transformations are depicted as hybrid identities, which cannot be in alignment with either an integral or originary and unified ideal of human beings. Ono’s and Bank’s reminiscing mechanisms work similarly to the rest of the narratives in Ishiguro’s work. Barry Lewis (2011, p.199-224) refers to these memory junctions in Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go* (2005) as provoking a concertina effect in the narrative, which slowly unfolds the truth about the characters’ existence as clones created to donate their organs. This effect in the narrative structure is mimetic of the work of memory, which does not belong to a frozen detached past, but rather modifies according to the present collectively in society.

For Halbwachs (173), before reminiscing we need to speak of that memory, put it in words, a notion that Ishiguro explores magnificently, through the voices of narrators who are always attempting to put into words what they remember as their experienced

realities. They do not retell their memories in chronological order; they arrange them according to the meaning and relevance they have had in their own experiences, they outline some passages at certain points in time and space, while completely erasing other junctions of their pasts. Moreover, Halbwachs (1975) explains that in doing so, the mind is nourished with memories, just as it receives fuel from religion, moral and technical notions. Therefore, in reminiscing, it is possible to separate the passage of time, in past and present periods.

Thus, the concept of identity might be distorted upon cultural constructs leading to falsehoods, such as binary divisions between supposed opposites— the west versus the east, the old versus the new, the victors and the vanquished. Moreover, the treacherous terrain of the illusive psyche mechanisms has been discussed as participant in identity formation, as it apprehends realities through multiple layers of identifications. The issue that needs to be addressed in the following chapter is that of warfare and destructive interference in the identities present in *An Artist* and *Orphans*, considering that Ono and Banks are reminiscing from extremely fragile positions in wartime.

### 3. THE SECOND WORLD WAR: CULTURAL IMPACT IN THE EAST

This chapter focuses on pertinent aspects of the conflict between Japan and the United States during the aftermath of World War II, which is the setting of *An Artist*, as well as on the conflict between Japan and China that had been undergoing since World War I, the background in *Orphans*. The aim is a discussion beyond the stigmatized identification of the vanquished involved in the wars, a poignant reminder of the misconceptions embedded not only in the accounts of historical and cultural facts, but also present in the identifications attributed specially to the Japanese people. Moreover, the chapter works as a point of reference for the discussions raised in the analyses of both novels, which seem still to lure some reviewers of Ishiguro's work into gross misconceptions of what it means to be Japanese.

#### 3.1 The Road Towards the Second World War and the Sino Japanese War Stage

When Commodore Mathew Perry arrived in Japan with a small fleet of four coal-burning vessels in 1853, the country was small and secluded from intercourse with foreigners, which had been prohibited by its feudal shoguns. The isolation meant lack of scientific development and no industrial revolution, giving the impression to Americans and Europeans that the small island was insignificant compared to its neighbour civilized China. In 1868, a dissident samurai established a government in the name of the emperor, a powerless and remote figure until then. However, the new nation-state quickly learned

the arts of war and peace surviving the imperialist world, as a line in a popular Japanese song of the 1880s put it, “There is Law of Nations, it is true/ but when the moment comes, remember, /the Strong eat up the Weak” (qtd. in Dower 21). In 1895, the imperial army defeated China, leading to a “scramble for international concessionary areas torn from the very body of the sleeping giant. Slicing the Chinese melon was the pleasant way westerns came to speak of this” (Dower 21).

The war yielded Formosa to Japan, after ten years of costly battles on land and amazing victories at sea, giving it a strategic position in Manchuria which would allow it to conquer Korea as a second colony. The war was financed by loans raised in New York and London, while the Western powers turned the other way to the appeals of the Korean people. In World War I, Japan joined the Allied side to punish Germany, moving against German holdings in China, and was rewarded as one of the “Big Five” nations to sit at Versailles peace conference, being the only non-white, non-Christian people “to play the great game of global power and influence at this level, but no one could anticipate the disastrous breakdown of security that lay ahead” (Dower 21).

During the 1920s and 1930s, the country’s leaders took advantage of the aggravating global disorder and depression seeking to control and exploit the resources and markets of Asia:

*Dai Nippon Teikoku* — The “Great Empire of Japan” — spread like a monstrous stain. (On Japanese maps, the empire was always colored red.). 1931 saw the takeover of Manchuria; 1937, the launching of all-out aggression against China; 1941, the attack on Pearl Harbor as a part of a strategy of seizing control of the southern reaches of Asia and the Pacific. At the peak of its expansion in early 1942, Japan bestrode Asia like a colossus, one foot planted in the mid-Pacific, the other deep in the interior of China, its ambitious grasp reaching north to the

Aleutian Islands and south to the Western colonial enclaves of Southeast Asia. Japan's "Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere" briefly embraced the Netherlands East Indies, French Indochina, the British colonial possessions of Burma, Malaya, and Hong Kong, and America's Philippine colony. There was talk of reaching further to take India, Australia, possibly even Hawaii. *Banzai* calls to the glory of the emperor's holy war and the invincibility of his loyal soldiers and sailors pierced the heavens in myriad places at home and overseas. Poets, priests, and propagandists alike extolled the superiority of the "Yamato race" and the sublime destiny of the Imperial Way. (Dower 21, 22)

The euphoria that followed the first half-year of the Pacific War soon turned out to be revealed as a megalomaniac dream the Japanese themselves referred to as "the victory disease" (Dower 22). They had not counted on the endurance of Chinese resistance, and American psychological and material influence in the long run. The leaders all the way up to the emperor were blind to surrender, driving the country to become a victim of their own propagandist rhetoric: "the holy war, death before dishonour, blood debts to their war dead, the inviolability of the emperor-centered 'national policy'" (Dower 22).

The Americans believed Perry in neglecting the historical hindrances such as imperialism, colonialism and the breaking down of the global economy that had enabled Japan to become "a blood-soaked monster. From the rape of Nanking in the opening months of the war against China to the rape of Manila in the final stages of the Pacific War, the emperor's soldiers and sailors left a trail of unspeakable cruelty and rapacity" (Dower 22). Likewise, they had also left a trail of self-destruction, in enforcing suicide charges, abandoning combatants in the field to starve to death, or exterminating them before they fell in the hands of the enemy, and simply murdering civilian compatriots in Saipan and Okinawa, while they watched fire bombs destroy other cities. The aftermath

left 15 million Chinese and 3 million Japanese dead, which drove Japan into a phase of seclusion under the order of the victors. Between the beginning of the war against the Allied powers with Pearl Harbor, and the ending of the war after the atomic bombings of Nagasaki and Hiroshima, Japan struggled for three years and eight months, which was followed by the occupation that began in August 1945 and ended in April 1952, almost twice as long as the war.

### **3.2 The Post-War Relations with the United States**

In *An Artist*, Ono's narration begins three years and a half after the occupation, in October 1948, and ends one year and ten months before the end of that period, a time when

Japan had no sovereignty and accordingly no diplomatic relations. No Japanese were allowed to travel abroad until the occupation was almost over; no major political, administrative, or economic decisions were possible without the conquerors' approval; no public criticism of the American regime was permissible, although in the end dissident voices were irrepressible. (Dower 23)

Dower (23) points out that, despite the arrogant idealistic agenda of demilitarization and democracy that was imposed at first and the conservative post-war state, the ideals of peace and democracy became part of an experienced life rather than a borrowed vision, which was founded through many diverse and non-consensual voices. Nonetheless, there was no precedent for the kind of relationship that was established in the wake of the war: Japan was the symbol of the Oriental and pagan society that had succumbed to the colonial power enforced by the "messianic fervor of General Douglas MacArthur"

(Dower 23), a unilateral control from which Germany had escaped since the spoils of war were divided between the United States, England, France and the Soviet Union. In *Orientalism*, Said explains how “the Orient” was perceived in the West during that period, and continues to be perceived:

Beginning in the twenties, and from one end of the Third World to the other, the response to empire and imperialism has been dialectical. By the time of the Bandung Conference in 1955 the entire Orient had gained its political independence from the Western empires and confronted a new configuration of imperial powers, the United States and the Soviet Union. Unable to recognize "its" Orient in the new Third World, Orientalism now faced a challenging and politically armed Orient. Two alternatives opened before Orientalism. One was to carry on as if nothing had happened. The second was to adapt the old ways to the new. But to the Orientalist, who believes the Orient never changes, the new is simply the old betrayed by new, misunderstanding dis-Orientals (we can permit ourselves the neologism). (Said 105, 106)

The mistaken idea of a static Orient was critically far from Japan’s relationship to the Americans and their reactions were far from fallen under an unchangeable or submissive state, as it first appeared to the Americans. The wake of the war created a confusing and ambiguous cross-cultural moment— while the Americans anticipated a traumatic confrontation against the fanatical emperor worshippers, they were surprised “instead by women who called ‘yoo hoo’ to the first troops landing on the beaches in full battle gear, and men who bowed and asked what it was the conquerors wished. They found themselves seduced (far more than they realized) by polite manners as well as by elegant presents and entertainments” (Dower 24).

What happened was that the population, exhausted by the war, blamed the calamity of their situation on the militarists who had driven them into disaster, wishing only to forget the past. The early post-war years were described as both “the American interlude” and the “epoch of forced Americanization” (Dower 24). What is known for a fact is that Japan was driven to the margins of the subsequent Cold War Era context, a time when the discussions followed the American agenda and tone, despite the Japanese reciprocal and constant attention to the reading of classified documents that could teach them more about the conqueror during the occupation.

Dower highlights the complex implications and relations that emerged from the Japanese-American cohabiting during those years, experiences that were told and retold from the American perspective at first, an orientalist viewpoint disregarding

the effect the losers might have had on the victors and their agendas, or how that “American interlude” might have reinforced rather than altered tendencies within the defeated country. It has been difficult, certainly for outsiders, to grasp the defeat and occupation as a lived *Japanese* experience. Half a century later, however, we can begin to see things differently. Shattered lands, shattered peoples, shattered empires, and shattered dreams have been one of the central stories of our times. Certainly, there is much to be learned from the world as viewed through the eyes of the defeated— not only about misery, disorientation, cynicism, and resentment, but also about hope, resilience, visions, and dreams. (Dower 24)

The fact is that World War II did not really end for the Japanese until 1952. Those years became, no matter how much the country developed economically, the hallmark for thinking about national identity and personal values. There was no “Japanese response to what had happened, but rather they reflected kaleidoscopic views, far distinct from the

Washington and London old bureaucrats' vision of the Orientals as an obedient herd, who invented a cartoonist Japanese personality based on their intelligence agencies' briefings, to which in turn, the Japanese agencies would also produce lists of "American characteristics" (Dower 25).

However, it was also apparent in the early years of defeat that the great racial and social solidarity values that had charged the militarist propaganda seemed to prove inexistent, since individuals enriched themselves through militarist industry and public resources, while ordinary men and women looted and hoarded, expressing their disgust for yesterday's respected leader (Dower 26).

It was in this unstable and changeable context that the Americans were taken by surprise in different ways, as for example the support for communist and socialist agendas, the beginning of a labor movement, the emersion of mid-class bureaucrats as supporters of serious reforms, and the creation of the distinct iconoclastic culture of defeat and decadence by black markets and prostitutes. The publishing market responded to a hunger for words that went from popular-low-cost-magazines to critical journals, as well as books and translations of western works. Concepts such as "love" and "culture" were obsessively discussed and the word "new" was coupled with promiscuous abandon to nearly every other term in hand. New heroes and heroines were discovered, and celebrities launched the new pop-culture. Messianic religions spread all over the country while new pretenders to the throne appeared. The population massively spoke up in community meetings, the press and letters to the occupation authorities, hoping for the same material affluence the Americans enjoyed (Dower 26).

Along with the simplifications regarding the energetic emancipation of the defeated Japanese, the implemented Americanism was equally misunderstood. The

agenda was heavily inspired by the liberalism of the New Deal, labour reformism, and Bill of Rights idealism which was already being rejected in the United States. The reform was unique and was never implemented in any other occupied territory such as the southern half of Korea and the Southern region of Japan, including Okinawa and the Ryukyu islands. It was a schizophrenic administration, proposing an extreme democratic idealism that would have been repudiated in the United States, and at the same time imposing an authoritarian rule. It is usually seen that August 1945 was the demarcation between militarist Japan and a new democratic nation. Although this was a turning point, it is also true that the country remained under militarist control from the early 1930 until 1952 (Dower 26).

General MacArthur created a white-men's hierarchy that outranked those of the occupied territories, pushing the Chinese, Koreans, Indonesians, and Filipinos to an invisible role, even the contributors to their victory, making it easier to forget the crimes that had been committed against Asian people. Nevertheless, because the Americans had no linguistic or cultural access to the losers, they had no other choice but to use the existing governmental structure generating contradictory outcomes, not only due to the two-tiered "mandarinate" formed by his government and the Japanese bureaucrat, but also to his support for Emperor Hirohito for ideological purposes, going to the extreme of praising him as the leader of the new democracy as he was convinced to exonerate the emperor from all war responsibility (Dower 26, 27).

The theme of war responsibility came close to becoming a joke. If the emperor's men who had conducted foreign and military policies were not to be held responsible, why would ordinary individuals do so? And yet, military and civilians were found guilty in showcase trials organized by the victors, whereas the men of Yamato's atrocities committed during the war were ignored, reinforcing the popular view. The binational

phenomenon is responsible for “much that lies at the heart of contemporary Japanese society — the nature of its democracy, the intensity of popular feelings about pacifism and remilitarization, the manner in which the war is remembered (and forgotten)—derives from the complexity of the interplay between the victors and the vanquished” (Dower 28).

*An Artist* tackles on the issue of the responsibility for war crimes when Ono repeats his state of shame regarding his fascist collaborations, while Noriko, his younger daughter, disagrees and sees his past as harmless as she speaks from the new pacifist agenda of the younger generation that starts to be built. The confusing vitality of the years that followed defeat also created a space for debating political models other than state-led capitalism, which stimulated dreams of an international role instead of crawling under America’s nuclear umbrella. Like Ishiguro, Dower explains that,

hardship often has its retrospective attractions, and nostalgia sometimes sweetens the recollections of that time. Personal memories have, in recent years, been buttressed by an outpouring of publications in Japan that shows little sign of abating. [...] Many celebrities who made their names in the wake of defeat are only now passing away; and each such departure is usually accompanied by a piercing and poignant evocation of those years, so long ago and yet still so palpably connected to the present. (Dower 28)

But there has also been an exaggerated version of Japanese uniqueness told by outsiders who had a hermetic view of that culture as well as by Japanese neonationalists and essentialists, who stressed cultural differences to the extreme, attributing to those trends the fact that Japan was able to emerge as a global capitalist power in the 1980s as a consequence of its essential and unique powers. Nonetheless, what actually happened in those years of defeat and occupation was that the Japanese were forced to struggle in

different ways and to question about fundamental life issues to which “they responded in recognizably human, fallible, and often contradictory ways that can tell us a great deal about ourselves and our world in general” (Dower 29). This texture is brilliantly captured in the novels examined in the present thesis, even though they are told from the individual and intimate perspective of the narrators— both Ono and Banks are propelled into questioning their own experiences in the context of the wars, exposing their concern with these fundamental questions Dower highlights, while they exhibit myriads of contradictory answers, which gives us a depiction of the fallible human condition.

Ono is representative of how the majority of Japanese threw away a decade of militarist indoctrination, revealing the fragility of the ideology of totalitarian regimes. If, on the one hand, the Emperor’s warriors and sailors suffered the contempt of society as they returned from a lost war, on the other hand, their own misery contributed to the amnesia of the suffering they had inflicted on others. Dower points out that ,

the patterns of remembering and forgetting are most meaningful when seen in the broader context of public memory and myth making [...] What they were doing, however, was what all people do in moments of traumatic change; they were finding— inventing, if need be— something familiar to hold on to. Everyday language was itself a bridge that enabled many men and women to cross from war to peace without experiencing complete psychological disorientation— for many totemic words, catchphrases, even texts that had been popular during the war proved perfectly adaptable to radically altered interpretations and objectives in the postwar years. Again, giving familiar language new meaning is one of the ways people everywhere rationalize and legitimate substantive change. (30)

Although some have felt the need to re-empower under a neonationalist voice in contemporary Japan, what has become the touchstone of postwar Japan is their

reaffirmation of a commitment to democracy and peace. In the years of war, Japanese men had been instructed to choose death over surrender, so much that the emperor never addressed explicitly Japan's surrender or defeat, concluding in his iconic and understated speech on the radio that the war "did not turn in Japan's favor, and trends of the world were not advantageous to us", summoning his subjects "to endure the unendurable and bear the unbearable" (qtd. in Dower 36). The dimensions of the defeat did not sink in until the formal surrender ceremony on the USS Missouri battleship on September 2, 1945, when the national hopes and aspirations came to an end.

### **3.3 Demilitarization, Exhaustion and Despair**

The imperial navy had ceased to exist, adding to the country's humiliation and subjugation. The nation, which had celebrated its mythic 2,600-year anniversary in 1940, proud of never been invaded, was now flooded with well-fed and equipped white men. In Japanese eyes, it meant that the West, basically the United States, was rich and powerful whereas Japan was weak and fragile, which carried profound political implications: the scene in Tokyo Bay in the wake of the nuclear destruction of Nagasaki and Hiroshima stuck as the material strength and power that could be achieved under American-style democracy (Dower 42, 43).

Since Commodore Perry had forced Japan open, its leaders had been obsessed with reaching the status of an *itto koku*, a country of the first rank, an idea that moved the nation to go to war against the West. Nine days after the surrender, MacArthur reopened the wound in observing that the Japan had become a *yontoo koku*, a fourth-rate

country (Dower 44). The deaths of civilians and servicemen after August 1945 amounted to 2.7 million, roughly two to three percent of the country's population, which added to the 1.74 million figure of deaths of armed forces up to the surrender, and the 4.5 million of injured or ill servicemen. In addition to those murky numbers, the Allied assault had destroyed one-quarter of the island's wealth and forty per cent of urban areas leaving thirty per cent of their population homeless (45).

The statistics are particularly relevant to Ono's opening in *An Artist*, as the description of his house and its history seems to be of importance to the painter. The reconstruction of the country is also approached in one of his paintings as it is examined in Chapter IV. Despite the reconstruction efforts and,

the mild Buddhist tradition of care for the weak and infirm, despite Confucian homilies about reciprocal obligations between social superiors and inferiors, and despite imperial platitudes about all Japanese "being a family" under the emperor, Japan was a harsh inhospitable place [...] it was an especially conspicuous phenomenon in Japan at war's end, when whole new categories of "improper" people felt the sting of stigmatization, These included the survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, with their taint of—really, their *pollution* by— radiation; war orphans and street children, forced to live by their wits outside "proper" society; war widows, especially if poor, in a society inherently unkind to women without men; and the homeless ex-service men or any other kind of abandoned people who clogged public places such as Tokyo's Ueno Station. [...] mental illness remained a taboo [...] Physical handicaps or deformities provoked a similar public aversion. (Dower 61)

In August 1946, cartoonist Katoo Etsuroo documented the first year under American occupation, feeling awkward about his lack of courage to oppose the war, a feeling Ono displays as well. Like Ono, Etsuroo had also,

thrown his considerable skill wholeheartedly into the war effort. It was he who had produced one of the more grisly war posters of 1942, depicting Roosevelt and Churchill (or Uncle Sam and John Bull, for these personal and national renderings tended to shade into one another) as figures with bestial hindquarters, being speared by a gleaming Japanese bayonet. The legend on the poster read “The Death of These Wretches Is the Birthday of World Peace” Using a convoluted metaphor to explain a convoluted sketch, Katoo commented that until capitulation he had drawn not with his hand but with a foot wrapped in military gaiters. (Dower 65)

The artist made this comment on the first anniversary of the surrender. What did not change immediately was the fact that the Japanese continued to undergo food rationing, one of the consequences of the irony of the American promotion of freedom under unconditional surrender. The democratic revolution from above had an inherent passivity and superficiality to it, like the mechanisms used by the militarists and nationalists to manipulate ordinary people during the war. The playwright and critic Yamazaki Masakazu, who had returned from Manchuria as a ninth-grader in 1948, recalled how democracy was given “too easily” that failed to establish roots, tending to reinforce the “logic of irresponsibility”, in a place where everybody is taught to bow to the order from superiors as well as to a colonial mentality (qtd. in Dower 71). The Potsdam Proclamation signed by the United States, United Kingdom and China declared that

Japan would be placed under military occupation; “stern justice” would be meted out to war criminals; the authority and influence of those who “had deceived and

mislead the people of Japan into embarking on world conquest” would be eliminated “for all time” [...] military forces would be “completely disarmed”; the economy would be demilitarized but eventually permitted to return to world trade; and the government would be required to “remove all obstacles to the revival and strengthening of democratic tendencies among the Japanese people”.

(74)

The document made it clear that demilitarization and disarmament should be permanent and individuals who had advocated militarism or nationalism should be purged. Bureaucrats believed that, beyond demilitarization, they needed to change the psychology of the Japanese people through democratization as a weapon against the possibility of the rise of nationalism once again or communism. The Potsdam documents also emphasized that the occupation authorities bore no responsibility regarding the recuperation of the Japanese economy. They dissolved the industrial and economic monopoly of the old and new *zaibatsu* who had been leading the economy since the early nineteenth century. In order to legitimize the imposed reform, it became common place to defend the idea that “such an alien system would free the people that had fallen short of their free will under the imperial government” (75-77).

On account of their different race and culture, the Japanese attracted an ethnocentric missionary zeal under MacArthur’s administration, something unseen in Germany’s occupied territories: “Where Nazism was perceived as a cancer in a fundamentally mature ‘Western’ society, Japanese militarism and ultranationalism were construed as reflecting the essence of a feudalistic, Oriental culture that was cancerous in and of itself” (79-80). The mission of the winners became public in the war crime trials of top leaders in Tokyo, which followed the Nuremberg trials, holding responsible “Class A” war criminals for committing “crimes against peace and humanity”, and establishing

new international legal premises (80). Conversely, the elite continued to speak out against the reform as they defended that the Japanese people were not capable of self-governing and anyone who opposed that was blinded by ethnocentrism or left-wing propaganda. The ideology of the elite is also present in Ono's narrative through conversations he has with former propagandist colleagues as is demonstrated in the next chapter.

The post-war period was a very fluid moment never seen in the history of Japan, and which has never been repeated so far. The American regime was welcomed by many and cracked open the authoritarian structure of the former society, liberating individualities and forms of popular expression; however, no one could foresee what the future might hold. However, in 1948, the disorientation of the population was still evident. The son of a former influential admiral was found wandering the streets wearing sandwich boards. The starving and exhausted population criticized the occupation's introduction of summer time (*sanmaa taimu*, in katakana alphabet) since it extended their daily difficulties (Dower 106). Due to the disruption of families and communities, they created public group marriage meetings (*shuudan miai*) as an alternative to traditional *miai* (arranged marriage), due to the shortage of family members who would act as marriage intermediaries. Even among the children the changes were dramatic; for instance, if, before 1945, boys played with headbands and wooden spears pretending they were heroic pilots and sailors who saved the country against mock-ups of Roosevelt and Churchill, now, in defeat and in the absence of indoctrination, they replaced samurai helmets as they learned to fold paper into GI-style hats. They bought a commercial ten-centimetre Jeep toy that was associated Jeeps carrying cheerful GIs who handed out chocolate and chewing gum. Most kids' first words in English were "hello", "goodbye", "jeep", and "give me chocolate" (110).

A new space began to open in society as people behaved differently while considering a life free from state dictatorship. The climate that encouraged personal autonomy contradicted the period before August 15, when the state had defined,

what the “cardinal principles of the national polite” were; what the correct “way of the subject” was; how it was essential to observe one’s “proper place” in the established hierarchies of class and gender; which “decadent” and “corrupting” foreign thoughts or cultural expressions were forbidden; what could be said or not said in virtually every situation. (Dower 122)

After the surrender, everything changed in more than terms of interactions with what was foreigner, also in terms of competing contradictory feelings: *kyodatsu*, the word that designated the prostration, exhausting and depression that pervaded the Japanese people coexisted with *akarui* meaning “bright”, a word that defined the focus on the newness expressing a spirit of optimism for an imagined future, which was emerging on the radio, film, popular music and publishing industry (172).

Ono reflects both conditions: the urge to understand why hierarchy was no longer as meaningful as it previously was, while clinging to an optimistic hope. However, such expressions of optimism were often deliberately crafted in Japan: “Films and serious prose often moved, stylistically, from darkness to light. Even practical undertakings such as teaching English were carefully wedded to an explicit philosophy of accentuating the positive” (173). Catchphrases from wartime gained new meanings in the new democratic and antimilitarist context as people carried out and popularized two main slogans from key themes of war propaganda: “Construct a Nation of Peace (*Heiwa Kokka Kensetsu*) and “Construct a Nation of Culture” (*Bunka Kokka Kentsetsu*), which were written and rewritten by school children in their calligraphy lessons. Coincidentally, Ishiguro

mentions in his Nobel Speech how familiarized he had been with the concept expressed by the word *heiwa* since childhood.

In fact, Japanese men and women at all levels of society eventually started to worship General MacArthur as they had once worshiped the emperor. Hundreds of letters and postcards addressed to General MacArthur arrived at GHQ, reflecting great emotion from the correspondent individuals: they praised his “exalted and godlike benevolence” for ending the war and becoming “a living savior” (229). Ordinary men and women confessed their sins as militarists and venerated the man who had,

unburdened themselves of their deepest fears and hopes [...]. They equated him to the great transmogrified concept of these years: love. [...] The supreme commander may have been likened to the emperor in his august power, but clearly he was deemed more approachable, more directly accessible. Here lay the paradox, and challenge, of an authoritarianism that offered the promise of democracy. (229)

Maurice Halbwachs (156) explains that “a society can hardly adapt itself to new conditions without redesigning its structure either by modifying the hierarchy and the relations among its various parts or by amalgamating, in whole or in part, with neighboring societies”. The nationalist approach did not comprehend that ideologies travel across continents and time, and that purity of art or life actions is an abstraction because the world is not divided into only two opposite sides. What happened to Japan after the war was that the vanquished learned through a very harsh and murky period to incorporate rather than borrow some of the values of the victors to the extent that they became part of a new historical era. Ishiguro creates outcomes for Ono in Japan that depict this transitional period, leaving the endings with a tone of openness that reach out to future possibilities.

In the next chapters, the concepts of identity, memory, history and culture during wartime are closely examined in their interplay with the psychological functioning of each protagonist, in order to track down their paths insofar as hidden key metaphors are explored. Some reviewers claim that these novels must be read in the light of psychoanalytical theories in disregard of the cultural references, while others insist these novels must take into consideration the cultural and historical backgrounds. The following chapters are aimed at demonstrating that Ono's and Banks's identities and stories require an approach that denies binary criticism, defending instead, the prevalence of a flexible critical review, encompassing different theoretical resources, taking into consideration both psychological and cultural aspects. The analytical chapters, in particular, aim at raising questions based on Freud's fundamental thoughts to further explore what some commentators like Brian Shaffer have inaugurated with the employment of Freud's concepts in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1913), in dialogue with the concepts of memory and identity from the viewpoint of cultural studies theories. This study explores Ishiguro's narration techniques to discuss how their many levels recreate on paper the deepest emotional states of characters undergoing traumatic experiences at wartime, offering us a unique view of how the psyche, history, private relationships and society have an impact on how Ono and Banks remember, and therefore, how their identities are constantly open to change and reassessment.

## 4. AN ARTIST OF THE FLOATING WORLD

### 4.1 Introduction: The Initial Response

In *An Artist of the Floating World* (1986) narrator Masuji Ono dwells on his personal history: his early endeavours as an artist around 1913, when he studies as an apprentice; his subsequent fame, reaching its pinnacle around 1938; and finally, his post-war decline. The main narrative is set between October 1948 and June 1950. When he starts out describing his house and how he and his wife acquired it at the auction, he highlights the fact that their background was checked before the sale (Ishiguro 9), which implies that his honourable credentials and high status were confirmed by the government. According to Bennett, the techniques employed by Ishiguro “create an impression of consciousness that is gathering fragmented memories of the past to form a self-justifying narrative in the present. [...] (he) shows through this process that memory is not just fissured, but always in flux” (qtd. in Groes and Lewis 88). The pre-war social political system is criticized along with the competing ideologies imposed upon the country after the defeat. Ono’s pride in the ideology of the empire is no longer allowed in the aftermath of the war. The creation of a new self-imagining involving social hierarchies and identities has collapsed, leaving Ono in denial about his moral perspectives. The ephemeral trait of identities is at stake when Ono perceives that their supposedly trusted timeless and absolute values were being substituted.

As the story opens we also learn his wife and son have died in the war, leaving him with two daughters. Setsuko is the older married daughter and Noriko is the younger. Noriko lives with her father and is still single. We also become aware of Ono being

indirectly held accountable for the death of his wife Michiko, who was in one of the bombing in Nagasaki, as well as the death of his son, Kenji, who fought overseas in Manchuria. Suichi, Setsuko's husband, believes Ono is responsible for their deaths since the painter endorsed the ultranationalist group that "led the country astray (Ishiguro 56), and has led millions of the emperor's soldiers and sailors to death, who got killed on brutal action like "that hopeless charge across the minefield" where Kenji died (Ishiguro 57).

The artist starts his reminiscing because he is worried about a possible interference in his daughter's marriage negotiations on account of his support for the nationalist government, which compels him to undertake a self-evaluation of his career. He takes the reader back to the time when he had difficulties with his father; to the time when he worked at the art studio that produced cheap copies of stereotypical images of Japan; to the time when he worked at the bohemian Mori-san's villa trying to capture the floating world; and back to his success as a nationalist painter. Always navigating on the blurred edges of these worlds, he motivates a suspicion in the reader, who is presented with blind spots where Ono might be leaving information out or different versions of the same fact that might indicate he is not forthcoming.

Nominated for the Booker Prize and winner of the Whitbread Award, *An Artist* was received well. Nigel Hunt's review (37) praises the articulation between the theme and the language: "Beautifully written, Ishiguro's book presents its themes clearly but without sacrificing any of the integrity of his story. The features of his system reach us in a way which enables us to feel something of the place between the pages". Science fiction scholar Patrick Parrinder (6,7) focuses on the Americanization of Japanese culture and the generation gap. Geoff Dyer (25) observes how the novels "uncertain reminiscences coax nuances out of hinted ambiguities". He also contrasts the artist in the novel and the

artist of the novel: “While Ono abandons the ‘fragile lantern beauty’ of the floating world for a strident, political art of thick black outlines and bold calligraphy Ishiguro impresses by how much history he can contain within— and between— his frail lines”. Kathryn Morton (19) notes the impact on the readers as it “stretches the reader’s awareness, teaching him to read more perceptively”.

Beedham (25, 26) observes that critical readings of the novel have gone in different directions, revealing many of the issues that have captured the interest of the readership, some towards a socio-historic interpretation, others towards its cinematic qualities. The language used in the novel, an atypical English that conveys a Japanese-like sensibility, has also been the subject of investigation, which means that despite writing in English, the author creates a discourse that mimics the voice of an old Japanese artist. Norman Page (166, 167) suggests that part of the solution was to create an “English dialogue that is quite unlike contemporary speech in the English-speaking world in its extreme and sometimes archaic formality”. Ishiguro explains that Ono,

is supposed to be narrating in Japanese; it’s just that the reader is getting it in English. In a way the language has to be almost like a pseudotranslation, which means I can’t be too fluent and I can’t use too many Western colloquialisms. It has to be almost like subtitles, to suggest that behind the English language there’s a foreign language going on. I’m quite conscious of figuring these things out when I’m writing, using a certain kind of translationese. Sometimes my ear will say: “That doesn’t quite ring true, that kind of language. Fine if these were just English people, but not here”. (qtd. in Mason 345)

For King this pseudotranslation implies the mood of what goes on behind the formalities and he argues that,

one of the delights of the novel is the notation of Japanese speech. Ishiguro shows how conventions of politeness and fear of showing disrespect lead to artificial behaviour, absurd conversation and failure of communication. The characters avoid shaming each other by denying that anything of a critical nature is intended; yet their subtle hints can be the cause of suicide. (King 208)

Some critics believe Ishiguro's own ethnicity is influential in the book, just as they had drawn attention to it in his first book. Michele Field (74), for example, focused on the issue of nationality on her review. Anne Chisholm (162) argues the opposite to what Ishiguro asserts about the novel when she remarks that it is "instructive in presenting the change happening in Japanese society", whereas Ishiguro argues that he has no special knowledge about Japanese society. He does not seek to portray a stereotypical Orientalist view of a Japan that should be explained to foreigners like Master Takeda's paintings for tourists do. However, Ishiguro does acknowledge that "the Japan in my books probably more-or-less corresponds to post-war Japan", and he adds that he is "not bothered if it doesn't match exactly" (qtd. in King 207). Despite not producing a socio-realist novel, he does find "that Japan triggers off images, memories and thoughts in me" (207).

Beedham (27) observes that some critics have constructed stereotypical readings of the novel comparing them to Japanese poetry or prose; for example, Bruce King asserts that Ishiguro's "instincts are for the nuanced, the understated, elegant but significant gesture, similar to the deft brushwork of Japanese paintings" (207). Ishiguro sets the issue straight and insistently remarks that he has set the novel in Japan because he,

had personal reasons for doing that – a big emotional need to make up my own Japan, and so on. [...] But people in the West took it as a documentary representation. You know, they'd say, if you're going to Japan on a business trip, do read *An Artist of the Floating World*, it'll help you understand the Japanese

mind. I thought, “look, this is just me riffing on human nature”, or whatever. (qtd. in *The Uses of Oblivion* 1)

Ishiguro has commented on the portions of information that he retrieves from his memory, not only from when he was a child in Nagasaki, but also from the time he spent as a child in England, when his mother read samurai stories in Japanese and when his family were not concerned with immigration issues since they were expected to return to Japan. Thus, his cultural heritage, including his family life, plays a crucial part in the way he conveys the social manner family members use to address each other in Japan. Although he speculates about an imaginary Japan and it is not his goal to portray a realistic Japan, the setting still echoes some real and personal Japan, and not a Japan from fantasy or fantastic books, as he explains: “All the way through my growing up, I had these memories of this place that was very precious to me, and it was the place that I thought I was going to return to at some point. [...] It was like a memory of a whole world. [...] Right at the foundation of my writing impulse was this notion that creating a world in fiction was an act of memory preservation [...]” (Ishiguro 2015). On the other hand, at the core of his stories, universal conflicts are portrayed, like for example, familial relationships, those between parents and children. His primary concern is to use his memory to speculate and imagine a world where characters are having trouble dealing with their repressed desires, sense of guilt or internal conflicts, be it in Japan or in mythical England as in the case of his most recent novel, *The Buried Giant* (2015).

Ono’s denials and motivations, expressed through what he reveals and does not reveal, convey an original instability to the reader’s interpretation. This experiment is not Ishiguro’s first according to Shaffer (*Understanding Kazuo Ishiguro* 39), who asserts that Ono is the “fleshed-out version of Ogata-San”, Etsuko’s first husband in *A Pale View of*

*Hills* (1982): “both are former artists and art teachers, former fascists, and aging widowers who have children whose political views contrast sharply with their own”.

In *A Pale View of Hills*, Etsuko, while resident in England, reconstructs her identity in the present time, as she works through her mourning and tries to free herself from the responsibility for her daughter’s suicide in the past. Similarly, in *An Artist*, Ono uses his memory to reshape the past in order to serve his own end. Like Etsuko, he is not so certain of the past and tries to hide the fact that he is considered a traitor in Japan after the war. Jeffrey Prager notes that:

The construction of a self depends upon our capacity to provide a coherent, consistent, cohesive, continuity-producing account that, partly by reference to the past, locates us meaningfully in the present situation in relation to ourselves and to others, and poised to reckon with the future. (Prager 91)

Ono’s entries in his diaries allow him to change and reshape the narrative as he tells his story. Wong (*Kazuo Ishiguro* 41) observes that, when Ishiguro allows his characters to show their flaws unintentionally, they are able to regain dignity, “a quality important to the author’s version of how people accept and deal with failure in their lives”. Dignity is not greatness achieved, but rather the result of being human— Ono has dignity because in the end he accepts his smallness in the world.

The painter’s story is also compared to Stevens’ account in *The Remains of the Day* (1989) in some ways. Both men are looking back to the post-war period and their involvement with fascism in the 1930s. They both have their identities challenged as the ideologies in the world around them fall apart, creating a conflict between their own self and the society they live in. Brian Shaffer (*Kazuo Ishiguro* 10) explains that they seek to hide painful memories from themselves (and from their reader) and they attempt, unsuccessfully, to remake themselves in the light of what they fear were shameful, even

damning, past decisions. Ishiguro (qtd. in *Kazuo Ishiguro* 12) claims that characters like Ono live an ordinary life, and yet they long to achieve great deeds, as he explains: “I’m very interested in people who have a great desire to do something of worth, something to distinguish themselves, but who, maybe in the end find that they don’t have it in them to be more than ordinary”.

Ono’s narrative is set against the backdrop of an ambiguous and contradictory society that has taken an abrupt turn towards a new direction in history. Having worked as a painter to support the fascist government, the artist struggles to adapt to a new scenario in Japan once World War II is over, and, he is caught in the intersection between his individual narrative and the collective conflicting tensions surrounding the changing and fluid values that his society has been forced to adopt in the war’s aftermath. Through his lens the reader is able to observe conflicting positions that emerge from different ideologies in dispute at a time of intense political upheaval in Japan, since the characters expose their divergent values in the face of the nation’s need to make the transition from being a colonial empire to accepting a new form of democratic system imposed by the victors.

#### **4.2 Ono’s career**

Shaffer (*Understanding Kazuo Ishiguro* 51) organizes Ono’s career chronologically in three stages. His early stage coincides with his work and apprenticeship at the Matsuda Firm, where Master Takeda privileges quantity and not quality, as they produce stereotyped orientalist works with the primary objective of commercializing them for foreigners. The ambiguity of Ono having broken free from his father’s materialism is manifested once more in his decision to work at a commercial business. At the firm, those

who work fastest are rewarded, whereas those who paint slowly, like Tortoise, are chided. One of the students defines the firm, as being “more like a firm producing cardboard boxes” (*An Artist of the Floating World* 73).

Conversely, Ono finds the next seven years crucial to his career (*An Artist of the Floating World* 137), when he works for Seiji Moriyama, Mori-san, in a decaying villa where artistry and self-expression are emphasized as sheer aesthetic values, disconnected from the commercial, materialist world. Ono explains that Mori-san’s art longs “to capture the fragile lantern light of the pleasure world” (174), “the intangible and transient (beauty of the) pleasure houses after dark” (150), and to transcend reality in celebration of the “floating world” (150) of the title.

The last stage of Ono’s artistic development starts following a meeting with Chishu Matsuda who is a member of the nationalist-imperialist Okada-Shingen (New Life) Society. Matsuda is described as a seductive but also threatening character, who insists that Ono will be able to enjoy the possibilities of enhancing his reputation (88) and developing his craft (89) once he joins the society. In order to seduce him, Matsuda flatters Ono by saying he is someone “of immense talent (173)”. Matsuda is depicted wearing “an elegant summer jacket” and “a hat slanted down stylishly (165)”. However, it is also suggested that he provokes fear due to his fascist connections when they are at a bar and Matsuda tell some intoxicated troublemakers to leave, which makes Ono apprehensive they will react, and, instead, Ono explains that “something about my companion seemed to unnerve the man, and they left us without comment” (170).

Attempting to lure Ono, Matsuda takes him to Nishizuru District, “a shanty district”, with “open-sewer ditches” (166), that “grow everywhere like a fungus (167) and is completely overlooked by the authorities, business men and artists. Ono suggests the artists should assemble to make an exhibition as to minimize the effects of poverty and

cheer up their spirit. Matsuda replies that that is an escapist and naïve idea, “a little good-hearted charity” (172); he poignantly claims that artists cannot enclose themselves in a dreamlike world and close their eyes to the fact that Japan is about to subdue to a crisis, as he replies “it is simply not enough for an artist to hide away somewhere, perfecting pictures of courtesans” (173), and they need to awaken to “the real world” (172), and the reality is that “Japan is headed for crisis. We are in the hands of greedy businessmen and weak politicians. Such people will see to it such poverty grows every day. Unless, we, that is, the emerging generation, take action [...] the Okada-Shingen exists to help the likes of you open your eyes and produce work of genuine value for these difficult times” (172).

Shaffer (*Understanding Kazuo Ishiguro* 53) comments on Ono’s wish to reflect the real world of Japan in his art at the third stage of his career, as he then serves the new patriotic spirit, that is, the militarist, imperialist and economic aspirations of Japan, by joining the “arts committee of the State Department” (63) and becoming a *Sensei*. In 1938, he reaches the pinnacle of his career as he is granted the “Shigeta Foundation Award”, which coincides with what he assumes to be the successful completion of the “New Japan Campaign” (202). He begins to consider the previous stages frivolous and decadent and is now committed to “rise above the undesirable and decadent influences that have swamped us and have done so much to weaken the fiber of our nation” and to affirm the “new spirit”, “the finer, more manly spirit” (73). The paradox this time is that, while trying to distance himself from Mori-san’s life style, Ono still persists in his the old habit of heavy drinking, but now in the company of his fellow artists who are “unflinchingly loyal to His Imperial Majesty the Emperor” (74). The Migi-Hidari bar where they meet is filled with thematic propagandist and “patriotic banners and slogans suspended from the rails of the upper balcony” (74), and also with “an enormous illuminated banner [...]

bearing the new name of the premises against a background of army boots marching in formation” (64).

The restrictions of the fascist regime are also depicted in Ono’s paintings of his experiences in Nishizuro district. The first version is called *Complacency* and depicts three boys “in front of a squalid hut” possibly torturing something like a dead animal (167) with “scowls in their faces” which do not express “guilty defensive scowls of little criminals caught in the act”, but rather “manly scowls of samurai warriors ready to fight” (168). Above their heads, the image fades “into a second image— that of three fat, well-dressed men, sitting in a comfortable bar laughing together. The look on their faces seem decadent; perhaps they are exchanging jokes about their mistresses or some such matter. These two contrasting images are moulded together within the coastline of the Japanese islands” (168). A caption on the painting reads “But the young are ready to fight for their dignity” (168).

In the later version, *Eyes to the Horizon*, the same motif appears but showing now the influence Matsuda has gained over Ono, as the description of the painting shows:

The upper image was again of the three well-dressed man conferring, but this time they wore nervous expressions, looking to each other for initiative. And these faces [...] resembled those of three prominent politicians. For the lower, more dominant image, the three poverty-stricken boys had become stern-faced soldiers; two of them held bayonet rifles, flanking an officer who held out his sword, pointing the way forward, west towards Asia. Behind them, there was no longer a backdrop of poverty; simply the military flag of the rising sun. (*An Artist of the Floating World* 168, 169)

Now the new caption reads, “No time for cowardly talking. Japan must go forward” (168, 169). None of the poverty depicted in the first version comes up in the latter, whose

emphasis lay solely upon the political militarist campaigning, mimicking Matsuda's discourse. Ono also serves as a bureaucrat, directing the China Crisis poster campaign and joining the "Cultural Committee of the Interior Department" as an "official advisor to the Committee of Unpatriotic Activities" (182).

Ono submits his art to political endeavours and his work is now a propagandist vehicle. Shaffer (*Understanding Kazuo Ishiguro* 58) points to the visitation from a police officer about which Ono comments, "a chief of police I had never met before" has come to "pay his respects" (202), clearly indicating the extend of "prestige" Ono is receiving as a member of the Okada-Shingen Society, which reveals the institution to be a political organization rather than an art institution, despite "co-opting Japan's leading artists to support a restoration of 'his Imperial Majesty the Emperor'" (*Understanding Kazuo Ishiguro* 58). The militarist imperial goals are explained by Matsuda:

Japan is no longer a backward country of peasant farmers. We are now a mighty nation, capable of matching any of the Western nations. In the Asian hemisphere, Japan stands like a giant amidst cripples and dwarfs [...] It's time for us to forge an empire as powerful and wealthy as those of the British and the French. We must use our strength to expand abroad. The time is now well due for Japan to take her rightful place amongst the world powers". (*An Artist of the Floating World* 173, 174)

By supporting the restoration, they will reject the "businessmen and their politicians" (173, 174), who are representatives of the new democracy coming from the west, proposing an open economy despite the social inequality it generates. Moreover, Matsuda embodies the discourse of the leaders in Japan, who, as examined by Dower (44), had been obsessed with reaching the status of an *itto koku*, a country of the first rank, an idea that moved the nation to go to war against the West.

Shaffer (*Understanding Kazuo Ishiguro* 58-9) analyses that Ono's most critical deed at this stage is his betrayal of a student, Kuroda, turning him in to the police, as part of his censorship duties against unpatriotic activities. Kuroda is interrogated, tortured and has his paintings burned as "unpatriotic trash", being labelled "a traitor" (*An Artist of the Floating World* (183) just as happened to Ono had it happen to him when rejecting Morisano's ideals (165). Ono has taken up the same authoritarian, totalitarian and repressive sensei. Ono does not seem to develop as a result of his experiences in enclosed worlds, be they solely commercial, aesthetic or political. Shaffer (*Understanding Kazuo Ishiguro* 59) points out the fact that Ono's name is a palindrome in English, and might be suggestive of his circular fate, of "his failed past", in other words "his chasing his own tail", like Stevens' circular motor journey in *The Remains of the Day*. Moreover, like Stevens, Ono also falls on the wrong side of saving Japan's soul. They are both more obsessed with their work standards and with the values embedded within. Moreover, Ono's narration is ultimately an attempt at the reconciliation of irreconcilable facts. Ishiguro comments that "their lives are spoiled because they don't have any extraordinary insight into life. They're not necessarily stupid, they're just ordinary" (qtd. in Vorda and Herzinger 152), just as Matsuda remarks to Ono that "we turned out to be ordinary men. Ordinary men with no special gifts of insight" (200).

Nevertheless, Ono covers up such ordinariness with a sense of having prestige, for instance when he talks about the auction in which he bought his current house he says that "one's moral conduct and achievement are brought as witnesses rather than the size of one's purse" (*An Artist of the Floating World* 9), which Shaffer (60) understands to be a lie: "He is only falsely modest in his claim to being constantly 'surprised by the extent' of his influence". He repeats: "I have never at any point in my life been very aware of my own social standing (*An Artist of the Floating World* 19), and soon he once again

claims “I have never had a keen awareness of my own standing (21). The same idea will reappear when he confesses that, although he is not concerned with matters of esteem (64), he knows that the students have “an ear open for another piece of knowledge I might impart” (73). Peter Wain (191) agrees that “as well as his desire to conceal this past of his, there is a pressing vanity that makes him want to be known”.

In the following section the effect of false modesty as well as naïve demeanour are examined as the result of the concealments, gaps and memory erasures Ishiguro constructs through his narrative techniques.

#### **4.3 Narrative Techniques**

The Japanese setting of the novel, despite having invoked misconceptions regarding the interpretation, has also inspired useful commentaries referring, for instance to the repressions exposed by the concealment of the rationalizations in the narrative Malcom Bradbury highlights:

The novel [...] is a work of fine shadings, a novel of concealments in which the hidden secrets of a cunningly constructed narrative merge with the practiced concealments of a mannered and civil culture. By choosing to present the story as Ono’s own narration, Ishiguro sets the narrative in a world of high stylization and complex aesthetic awareness. [...] The result is a world that is topographically designed and abstractified so that every instance of the verbal composition feels like a certain kind of Japanese art. Ishiguro hence forces us to read exactly, aesthetically, as few modern British writers do. The story hides behind itself, forcing the reader persistently to unlock it, since the strange distances of politeness, respect, deference and reserve that dominate Japanese

social and expressive practice allow little to be said but much to be implied. (364, 365)

Bradbury sees a connection between the concealments in the narration and wider aspects of Japanese culture. King (208) also understands that the indirect politeness and conformity to conventions in the novel seem to be a parody of Japanese social practices. For Dower (1999), politeness seems to be embedded in that culture, but conformity to conventions is far from being the case in the Japanese society of the aftermath. Ono's individual conformity and rebellion to conventions will be addressed later. Nonetheless, beyond that, King understands that "that is the basic method (of indirect polite) circling around a subject, the significance of which only becomes clear later. (Therefore), did the narrator gain his house, of which he is proud, through his prestige as an artist, or (as seems more probable) through his political power?" (208). The detail of the prestigious auction shows that despite Ono's artistic influence, he was probably able to buy the house due to his political power rather than to his artistic talents.

The incompleteness in the narrative is analyzed by Lewis in comparison to layers of filmic editing composed of flashbacks and flashforwards which join two passages. One example is when Noriko tells Ono about a chance meeting she had with Jiro Miyaki, with whom she had been in a relationship a year earlier (*An Artist of the Floating World* 55). Ono tells her that he had also met Jiro the previous year when the couple were together and is worried that what he said that day to Jiro, about the suicide of the President of the company where Jiro worked, may have resulted in Jiro ending his relationship with Noriko. Lewis (62 63) outlines that the technique is applied to Ono's flashback within the context of Noriko's flashback, making him question his role "within the context of Noriko's broodings about the Miyakes", connecting "the guilt and shame of father and daughter". Similarly, when characters and themes are introduced in the early stages of the

story, but do not have their significance disclosed until later, Lewis (63) compares the book to that effect of flashforwards. For instance, Kuroda is introduced when Ono's memory places him at the end of the war (*An Artist of the Floating World* 77), but his significance in the story will only be revealed later.

A second film editing technique Lewis (64 65) associated with the narrative is the fading out and in, the dissolving between scenes. He mentions the scene in which Setsuko arrives at Ono's house, making him think of his father's house and the episode of the burning of Ono's paintings, soon returning to Setsuko's request, which creates an elision of "Ono's determination — despite his father's antagonism — to forge a career as an artist".

A third editing technique Lewis (64 65) observes is the jump cut, or the way a sequence of action is cut hence omitting some events and creating a discontinuous and elliptical effect to the shot. For example, the time Ono spends at the Takeda studio, an apprenticeship that can be condensed into five short scenes, as well as the time he spends at Mori-san's villa are reduced to two short scenes. Lewis (65) also makes a parallel with cross cut shots, used to alternate between two or more separate actions in different locations simultaneously; but in the narrative, he considers the alternation of actions are separated by time rather than space. An example is the Migi-Hidari bar during its prime and its decline in Ono's present (74 75). Lewis asserts that the role of these scene is to echo the years of Ono's accumulated experiences.

The fourth technique is compared to the match cut like the two visual matching shots in the anthological *2001: Space Odyssey* (1968) by Stanley Kubrick, which opens with a pre-historical man throwing a bone up into the air that is matched to a spacecraft orbiting in outer space, indicating the advances in technology. Lewis demonstrates that a similar effect is present in the way the boys from the shanty district of Nishizuru are

matched to the boys in Ono's painting "Complacency", having their looks going from criminals in the district to samurai-like in the painting. Moreover, in the second painting, "Eyes to the Horizon", they are depicted as soldiers (*An Artist of the Floating World* 168). Lewis infers that these matched cuts translate Ono's trajectory from humanitarian views to hostile nationalism (66). Another level of examination to that scene is the fact that Ono in the present seems suspicious of his own repetitive conviction as he examines his past towards the end, when he adopts a complacent view concerning the fact that Japan is changing and that he can only wish that the same mistakes will not be made by the next generation (*An Artist of the Floating World* 206). The closing scene does not seem to be the case of the expression of someone in denial, but rather of someone who is beginning to open up to the possibility breaking out of self-denial.

The fifth technique is compared to establishing shots, long-range shots that establish the location, like shooting the skyline of a city before the streets. Three of the four parts of the novel — October 1948; April 1949; and June 1950 — open at the Bridge of Hesitation, which can work as "a girding for the rest of the narrative" (67). The final effect is the overlapping of scenes, in which the sound from one scene overlaps with the next scene; for example, the recurrent scenes when Ono is trying to remember the exact participants and words in past conversations.

Beedham (31) highlights the accurate association with film editing because of how Ishiguro avoids linear narratives and relies on the juxtaposition of scenes. In an interview when asked about the digressiveness of the plot, Ishiguro argues that other criteria, such as tone, can determine the sequence of events in the story because that is how people talk. He adds that "What is important is the emotional aspect, the actual position the characters take up at different points in the story, and why they need to take up these positions" (qtd. in Mason 342).

The narrative technique allows the first-person narrator to reinterpret his past while he attempts to deny the reader access to “incidents and their relevance which he does not wish to consider at the moment” (Hunt 38). Rebecca Walkowitz examines the difficulty in establishing what is behind Ono’s omissions and repetitions. For example, he does not say much about his wife and son. These blanks are connected to an important characteristic of the narration:

The telling of the stories turns out to be the subject as well as the strategy [...]. As ‘reliable’ and ‘unreliable’ narration is usually distinguished, one is either the master of a narrative, one who possesses knowledge, or one is the narrative, the object of knowledge itself. In *An Artist*, however, the narrator’s inability or unwillingness to maintain these distinctions, to make it clear for the reader whose experiences he is describing, produces a life of several histories and several perspectives. (Walkowitz 107)

After the war, once the fascist ideology has changed, Ono claims “that even if he was wrong, at least he was influential: that it is more important to have made one’s mark than to have been a right-minded nonentity” (*The Novels of Kazuo Ishiguro* 59). Despite pretending that he is not concerned about prestige, he occasionally admits that he was wrong in supporting the Nationalists. That thought may be a projection of what he finds himself to be, which also works as a means of convincing the reader of his modesty. Ishiguro explains that “Ono’s diary entries allow Ono to make slight changes he can modify as he goes” (qtd. in Mason 34).

Wong understands that Ono’s technique stems from his struggle to be recognized as a prominent artist and his preoccupation with holding his position as the family patriarch. The narrative does not lead him to the path of discovery but rather allows the artist to adjust the facts to a version of himself, in which he wants to believe. Wong also

asserts that “what occurs instead of discovery is the narrator’s own version of life made more palatable in the very act of telling it. Indeed, though he does not ‘lie’ about his past in any conventional sense, he is anxious that some details from that period do not emerge” (*Kazuo Ishiguro* 38). He is aware that he is deceiving himself when he believes that he is trying to understand his life. Wong bases this argument on his recognition of Ono’s faults as a narrator: “At the same time he proclaims to be telling the truth, he calls attention to his own distortions; Ono’s slips may be read as accidental, or as moments when his façade shows through. Literally, Ono leaves traces for the reader’s detection of his insincerity, while he remains ambiguous about his own knowledge of those slips” (*Kazuo Ishiguro* 39). For example, when he starts his story highlighting his prestige, he also pretends that it is something trivial and attempts to divert the readers’ attention away from that information. Despite Wong’s strong argument, Ishiguro has explained that he is interested in depicting why a character takes up different positions; hence Ono ambiguously moves back and forth while understanding and misunderstanding his past.

Scanlan (144) agrees with Wong and suggests that Ono’s description of his struggle with his father is a deceptive attempt to depict himself as the hero of a Western portrait of the artist”. Wong ( *Kazuo Ishiguro* 41) perceives that, although Ono initially attempts to be forthcoming, he breaks off his story, blaming his bad memory, suggesting that he might be omitting rather than revealing details. When Ono talks about Tortoise’s self-portrait he still keeps, he comments: “But to be fair, I cannot recall any colleague who could paint a self-portrait with absolute honesty; however accurately one may fill in the surface details of one’s mirror reflection, the personality represented rarely comes near the truth as others would see it” (*An Artist of the Floating World* 67). Wong sees this passage as an example of Ono’s slips:

Intent on preserving his reputation now that the war has tarnished it, Ono unwittingly reveals that he does not truly recognize himself as the person he is constructing. Whether he accepts the futility of conveying to others the same fictionalized self that he envisions, Ono warns the reader that his own accounts may be questionable and may not correspond to the way others saw his character.

*(Kazuo Ishiguro 41)*

She asserts that, when Ishiguro lets his characters unconsciously reveal their flaws, they manage “to salvage dignity, a quality important to the authors vision of how people accept and deal with failure in their lives” *(Kazuo Ishiguro 41)*.

In the opening of the book, Ono realizes that his daughters are talking about him and do not see him as a patriarch, so he goes back into his past to reassure himself and the reader of his status. Wong argues that the reconstruction of his past is not to protect his family, but to bolster his pride. She observes that when Ono takes “precautions”, it is “to remember the person he felt he was and had become” *(Kazuo Ishiguro 43)*. He mourns his lost self since he can no longer play the role he remembers playing. Another aspect of what Wong highlights is the fact that, if Ono is not interested in protecting his family, he is unconsciously protecting himself, using his self-defence mechanisms to react against the role the daughters attribute to him at the present.

Wong examines the strategies that Ono uses to put his story together in non-chronological order with himself in the centre, but which is not a unified centre. When Ono tells Shintaro that he must own up to his past, Wong asks what owning up to the past means, and she asserts that, as the title suggests, “Ono is suspended between two states, one that denies causing shame to Japan and one that responds to the effect of misguided principles” (44). For instance, he believes the suicides of men who acknowledged their mistakes during the war to be a wasteful gesture.

In relation to Ono's daughter Noriko, Wong points out that he can only mention his side of the interactions with her, leaving "gaps in the narrative, that then, may be read as Ono's blindness to other people's dimensions at a time when he is so desperate to salvage his own dignity" (45).

Nevertheless, Wong does not assume that those gaps are manipulative. In the key scene, when Ono betrays Kuroda, readers can guess what Ono thinks about his former student all the time, but the artist does not feel remorse for doing wrong to him, which can be confirmed after he sees Kuroda in a rundown neighbourhood, when Ono mildly comments that his former student has aged. Wong understands that his attitude towards Kuroda is also an attempt to salvage his dignity, since, "also unspoken is Ono's jealousy that his own student has far surpassed him in his artistic career. Confronting him again under the guise of smoothing over the past for Noriko's sake represents another moment when Ono acts as if he is the wronged man" (46, 47).

The implications of the nationalist movement in the case of his wife's and son's deaths are difficult to be discussed since Ono only mentions them in passing. Once again, as a means of self-protection Ono avoids connecting his support for the war with his son's death while in service in China, as well relating his pride in the Sugimura house to his wife's death in the bombing that struck the house; thus, "giving (his) seeming commitment to family, failure or refusal to say more about their absence is in accord with Ono's narrative strategy" (49).

Beedham (36) argues that Ono's support for the war is closely related to his wife's death since she has died as a direct consequence of it. However, a simpler aspect the critics do refer to is that Ono may still be mourning their deaths and consequently might not be in the position of articulating more clearly about their tragedy as he has not managed to distance himself from his losses yet. Moreover, the theme of family loss or the loss of

family members has been recurrent in Ishiguro's narratives, such as when Banks's parents disappear in *When We Were Orphans* (2000), or in Axl's and Beatrice's search for their lost son in *The Buried Giant* (2015), as well as in the parentless nature of the clones in *Never Let Me Go* (2005). In *a Pale View of Hills* (1984), the opening of the book already announces that Etsuko has lost her oldest daughter, who committed suicide, whereas, in *The Remains of the Day* (1999), butler Stevens and his father barely communicate and are completely absent in each other's life. Finally, in *The Unconsoled* (1995), Ryder meets who seems to be his wife or partner and son in a dreamy plot but seems unable to hold on to them.

Wong (*Kazuo Ishiguro* 49) has a less sympathetic reading of Ono's omissions though, as she argues that, despite drawing, in and causing us to sympathize with his story, he cannot be redeemed due to all the lies he tells. King understands his manipulations as a form of rhetoric to survive the changes in his society: "He pretends to be an old fool, but this is a protective mask—many of the nationalist acquaintances commit suicide as a form of apology to society— which allows him first to avoid, then adapt to the attitudes of postwar society. Eventually and with subtlety he indicates his sorrow for past behaviour in such a way as to lose nothing" (207). The critic pushes further his reading of a Machiavellian Ono by suggesting that Ono has adapted to different ideologies as he follows whoever is in power. Peter Mallet (12) believes that one of the ways Ono differs from Stevens, in *The Remains*, is that we learn about Ono through how the other characters react to him. The latter argument underestimates Stevens's abilities to elude the reader and the former sees Ono as consciously manipulative.

Ono and Steven are compared by a number of critics, like Page who observes the main theme in the books is to take "responsibility for past actions in both the private and public spheres" (166). He understands that the difference between Ishiguro's second and

third novels is that one is in English and the other in Japanese. For Margaret Scanlan, their similarities lie in the fact that both approach the “death of humanism” at a historical period of instability:

(Ishiguro’s) narrators, both old men looking back from the post war period to their involvement with fascism in the 1930’s, in some ways resemble the unreliable narrators of the older fiction. But Ishiguro uses them to explore the extent to which identity is socially constructed, and the consequent instability of selves formed in a traditional culture when that culture dies. Identity in these novels is not an essence but instead depends on a social context that has changed so radically as to leave characters floating in an unfamiliar world. Through his first-person narrators, Ishiguro dramatizes the connections between public history and an ‘I’ dependent for definition on its circumstances, suggesting that the unconfident and marginalized self of the posthuman world view is drawn to find authority in totalitarian politics. (Scanlan 141)

Although memory may fail because of age, it may also fail when defence mechanisms are set to protect Ono’s self from remembering what he wants to forget— for example, the betrayal of his student Kuroda and the connection, even if indirectly, between war and the loss of his wife and son.

Scanlan also notes that another motivation for the loss of memory at that period is the fact that society had suddenly lost its memory; therefore “Ono is especially conscious that Japan seems to have lost its memory, that people around him are wilfully discarding values maintained proudly during the war” (142). Scanlan cites anthropologist Dorinne K. Kondo to refer to the instability that the first-person singular pronoun “I” in Japanese assumes, which may be the expression of a flexible psyche. Ono’s identity demonstrates flexibility despite the strict control of approved styles in his training:

These structures of authority are the structures of his identity as a painter— his success in following one style, his courage in breaking with another; the maxims of his great teacher and their transmission, with a few necessary emendations to his students; his teacher’s praise; his students’s (sic) adulation; his winning of the Shigeta Foundation award. Indeed, he is well aware that much of what might seem to constitute his personal identity has been acquired from other people. (Scanlan 142, 143)

To be able to affirm that Ono is evading responsibility for his past deeds, the premise that he is evaluating his past against the values of present society must be considered:

Now most of the people around him are adopting American values: His grandson plays at being the Lone Ranger, until recently a forbidden activity; corporate presidents and once-famous musicians commit suicide to apologize for their part in the war while the occupiers execute generals and a mentally retarded man is beaten up by neighbors tired of hearing him shout old fascist slogans. His paintings are hidden away; he has no students; no one cares for the prizes he regards as uncontaminated measures of worth. (Scanlan 143)

The instability of Ono’s identity is also perceived in the cinematic overlapping of scenes, like when he remembers the event that took place with Moriyama and then jumps to the scene with Kuroda (*An Artist of the Floating World* 177, 178). Scanlan also observes that Ono uses “a trick of attributing to his teacher words that might actually have been his own” (144). Beyond that, she observes that the “repetition of situations, and even words blurs these scenes together, not only in Ono’s mind, but in the reader’s” (144); for instance, there may be more than one character nicknamed “the Tortoise”, which demonstrates the loss of fixed identities, a strategy Ono uses to delude the reader: “Confronted with a painful situation, he is likely to abstract it, generalize about it; when he talks about other people, he frequently appears to be talking about himself. This trick,

of course, is a familiar psychological defence, but in Ono's case it seems to point to a more fundamental confusion of himself with the people he discusses" (145). However, the commentator overlooks that aspect of her earlier analysis regarding the instability of the pronoun "I" in Japanese and the way it slides over different significations, which might also contribute to the blurriness in the scenes.

Lewis examines how Ono uses self-deprecation when referring to his contributions to the nationalist party, in order to make the reader believe he was an important player in the historical events. As the story progresses, Lewis explains that after the *miai*, Ono's unreliable memory cannot be ignored in face of the success of the event:

It could be that Ono's guilt is not registered by the others at the *miai*, for the simple reason that he reveals no specific names or crimes. He assumes, almost certainly incorrectly, that Saito is familiar with the propaganda work that he did in support of the militaristic regime immediately before and during the war. He also does not mention the betrayal of his former pupil Kuroda, the unwholesome facts of which are withheld from the reader, too, until after the *miai*. Given this vagueness, it is little wonder that Ono's listeners are overwhelmed by his revelations. Another option is that Ono has vastly overestimated his importance in the scheme of things. There are many signs that he is a vain, self-serving man who is desperate to be admired by others for having made a contribution to something. (Lewis 54)

Scanlan points out the moment when Ono's contributions are put under suspicion as his daughter clearly disagrees on what sort of influence her father had:

At the end, his daughter tells him that all of this self-dramatization is unnecessary, for his contributions to the war effort were scarcely on the scale of the composer Mr. Naguchi's: 'Father's work had hardly to do with these larger matters of which

we are speaking. Father was simply a painter. He must stop believing he has done some great wrong” (ISHIGURO, 1986, p.193). In this speech, Setsuko undermines the one point on which many readers may have been willing to take Ono at his word, his view that his propaganda paintings played a key role in militarizing Japan. (Scanlan 151)

Mallet also understands Ono’s effort to make his life sound more than ordinary:

(he) may not always have the correct perception of reality and truth, but he does show everything, including incidents from his past and reactions of others to him which are far from favourable, so that at the end of the novel we see the truth: that he was, like Steven, just an ordinary man who was trapped into behaving in the way he did by the times in which he lived and the values that were current (1996, 18).

Ono is so forthcoming that he allows us to see a truth, which is unrecognizable for himself from where he stands; that is the irony in his narrative. For Mallet and Scanlan, there is no epiphany here, but rather an adjustment on and back into life. Ono remembers his success over Mori-san’s failure, but, by the end, he “has learned to appreciate Americanization and hence to merge his perspective with that of the group” (Scanlan 152).

The slow realization of the changes around him can be compared to the traditional Japanese drama film, the *shomin-geki*, according to Lewis:

Although essentially realistic in tone, this type of film has comic overtones and a desentimentalised mix of smiles and tears. The typical hero or heroine is someone who is ready to give up at the intractability of the world, but then finds the strength to continue by compromising with the way things are. They do so with passive acceptance, and not through the grand emotions of valour and rapture.

This concentration on the small victories and defeats of ordinary people as they grapple with their everyday lives is also mirrored in Ishiguro's work. (69, 70)

Ono also grapples with the new perception of the outcome of actions of the nationalists and the unquestionability of the American influence. The artist is reluctant to accept that he has acted in accordance with his time, conversely to what he professes when he flatters himself on his rebellious positions and prestige. Ishiguro comments on the rhetorical technique of Ono addressing the identity of the reader as an important device for creating a mental world where the reader can relate his own human fallibility to Ono's blindness. Ono's old fashion view leads him to his downfall, which, according to Ishiguro, stands for "the inability of normal human beings to see beyond their immediate surroundings, and because of this, one is at the mercy of what this world immediately around one proclaims itself to be" (qtd. in Mason 341). King associates that with the importance of change throughout the novel; the floating world or changing world is depicted in,

The descriptions of the growth and decay of various urban areas, changes in painting and building style, as well as in the career and attitudes of the narrator. The novel reflects Japanese culture over half a century, from the supposed decadence of the early 1900s through the nationalism of the thirties to the Americanized new society of the postwar years. Changing notions of art mirror politics and manners. (208)

As suggested in the novel's title, this theme is one of the most relevant to the story. Although critics have approximated Ono and Stevens as men who try to justify their past and find some dignity, Ono is caught up between worlds, historical periods and generations, hence being catapulted from pride to shame; "it's the story about the old man who's overtaken by history, so that the things he was once proud of become the things he's ashamed of; and about his relationship to the younger generation, how he

doesn't fit in" (Tookey 34). Ishiguro maybe elucidates the association with Stevens: "I'm interested in people who, in all sincerity, work very hard and perhaps courageously in their lifetimes toward something, fully believing that they're contributing to something good, only to find that the social climate has done a topsy-turvy on them by the time they've reached the ends of their lives" (qtd. in Lewis 29).

King (207) examines the binary rationality of the world in which Ono lives, stemming from the opposition between the older and the younger generations: "If the old order is tyrannical and unrepentant, the younger generation is necessarily selfish. The choice seems to be between the living death of the past, which provides protection and guidance, and the new American democratic way, which offers opportunities and insecurity". Beedham (41), however, insists that the novel cannot be contained in only one world and that its instability allows the reader to place it in other worlds presenting similar troubles concerning the moral order at stake. The questions related to the values presented in the novel are many and still to be answered according to Beedham (2011, p.42). Kathryn Morton suggests some points that have not been approached:

What do the superlatively polite but insistent elder daughter and the sassy younger one see when they look at their father? To what are his former friends and colleagues reacting when on one hand they flatter and on the other snub him? Which honorifics are - or were - deserved, which were merely formal, and which may even be a means of avoidance? What does life add up to when society's values change? Is it enough to have meant well at the time? And what course does an honourable man take whose well-intentioned actions as a war propagandist have led others to suffer. (19)

Such questions are all imbricated in each other. In the next section, the aspects related to the changes in the Japanese society are discussed in relation to the concept of nation and the impact they have on Ono's narrative.

#### **4.4 Identity and Nation in the Floating World**

As discussed previously, Ono's narrative characterizes the contradictions of a society that takes an abrupt turn towards a new chapter in its history. The possibility of expressing a stabilized identity based on an idealized totalitarian regime is placed under suspicion with the fall of the imperialist regime. His story is constituted in the intersections between his individual narrative and the collective conflicting tensions surrounding his relations. In other words, through a hybrid aspect of his reminiscing, the reader is able to observe his conflictual positions in the face of different ideologies in dispute, which emerge as he reminisces about his interactions with his daughters, grandson and old friends. In one passage he ironically finds himself a "freethinking, critical artist-citizen", as he utters: "I do not think I am claiming undue credit for my younger self if I suggest my actions [...] were a manifestation of a quality I came to be much respected for in later years—the ability to think and judge myself, even if it meant going against the sway of those around me" (ISHIGURO, 1986, p.69). He remarks he is proud of defying "authority" and of never joining "the crowd blindly" (1986, p.73), although his trajectory proves otherwise at times.

Shaffer (*Understanding Kazuo Ishiguro* 48) detects an ironic passage when Ono defies Shintaro, his former student, to "face up to the past" since "there is no need to lie about yourself (*An Artist of the Floating World* 103, 104), hence suggesting that the

tensions embedded in verticalized relationships, such as those between student and *Sensei* (teacher and master), are at the heart of the novel. Ono's development, against his father's wishes, progresses from being discouraged, to apprenticeship, and eventually to leadership as a *Sensei*, depicting "the tensions [...] between authoritarian art teachers and rebellious students (that) mirror the broader social and political events leading Japan into World War Two" (*Understanding Kazuo Ishiguro* 49).

The change in the country's ideology is also depicted in Ono's story of the Hirayama boy, a retarded child who mimics patriotic speeches and old military songs (*An Artist of the Floating World* 59, 60): before the war people would "stop to give him money (61); however, after the rendition the child would get beaten up for his chanting" (p.60). Shaffer affirms that the boy is an irony related to Ono's lack of vision and culpability, considering that he has also been "shown to mimic patriotic themes and slogans, and to be incapable of understanding why his message no longer falls on sympathetic ears" (*Understanding Kazuo Ishiguro* 48).

According to Zygmunt Bauman (24), the idea of belonging to the ideal of a nation-state suffers changes once identity becomes less predetermined, hierarchical and non-negotiable, while it becomes more relevant on an individual basis. That is the moment in history when the global market and the idea of global migration, of both people and capital, will coexist with the idea of nation, despite bringing the hierarchy of identities to a halt. Such hierarchic issues also become apparent in Ono's relationship with his family. For instance, in his intimate moments with Ichiro, his grandson, the boy is enthusiastic about super heroes from the West such as Zorro, Popeye and The Lone Rangers (*An Artist of the Floating World* 54), while the painter tries to show his paintings to the child, who does not pay any attention. The tensions are deepened by the fact that Ono is the father of Ichiro's mother, a relation that in a patriarchal system may not be considered real

kinship since the artist is not an ancestor on the patriarchal side. Bauman (*Identity* 78) explains that, although sudden changes surface out of some nations' openness towards new democratic values, some traditions are usually kept by modern societies in general, such as the family institution, for instance, to be passed down to future generations; thus, kinship becomes both traditional and modern sources of identity.

The generational clash is also present in Ono's relationship with his daughters, for example in the passage when Setsuko says: "Father was simply a painter. He must stop believing he has done some great wrong" (*An Artist of the Floating World* 193). Their conversations cannot be established fully since a gap in their references finds no correspondence in each other's memory. From a generational perspective, Halbwachs (48) explains how old people seem keen on reviving the past going through old papers, unlike to the young. However, that does not mean that they remember better than the young, since it is not the case that "old images, buried in the unconscious since childhood, regain the power to cross the edge of consciousness only in the state of old age." Beyond that, the social spectrum of exclusion is portrayed in Ono's life as he becomes old. We learn that he spends his days fixing things around the house and, in June 1950, the artist is in a fragile health condition and walks aided by a cane in the present (*An Artist of the Floating World* 197-8).

On the societal level, Ono's trust in a nationalist discourse identified with a power nation has suddenly become out of place in the new context where the American ultra-liberal discourse of modernization, progress and internationalization has acquired positive nuances. Bauman argues that the question of identity becomes an issue once you are exposed, not only to a community of individuals that live together, but also to a community that is "welded together by ideas and principles" (11), hence driving individuals to try and come to terms with the contradictions and impossible demands of

society. After leaving Warsaw in March of 1968, Bauman reports that he never felt in his habitat again; a feeling of something out of place was constantly accompanying him and the sociologist observes: “It is because there are many such ideas and principles around which ‘communities of believers’ grow that one has to compare, to make choices, to make them repeatedly, to revise choices already made on another occasion, to try to reconcile the contradictory and often incompatible demands” (11-12).

Despite being welded together by ideas and principles, Hall (5) demonstrates that the unit, the internal homogeneity, which the term identity treats as foundational is not a natural one, but a constructed form of closure that is unreal. What becomes evident in Ono’s case is that he attempts to negotiate with the different “other” as well as with himself, and yet often fails. Another aspect of the heterogeneity of identity negotiations resides in the fact of different collectively lived experiences. The sociologist Lewis A. Coser ( qtd. in Hawbawchs 21) refers to his own experience after arriving in the United States just before the bombing of Pearl Harbour to explain how memory interplays with collective experiences, functioning either as an obstacle or as a bridge between people. He explains that there was a barrier between Americans and himself since he could not share with them any experience of having, for instance, watched games and worshiped American football teams. His memories were of a completely different reality and made little sense to his friends. Collective memories depend upon lives lived in societies expressing singular cultural realities, be it due to geographical or generational differences. Such differences can generate unbridgeable gaps in people’s communication; such collective experiences can also create the desire for erasure: “the effect of an uncomfortable collective experience from the past that makes people want to forget them” (qtd. in Hawbawchs 22), for example, the awkwardness of the writer’s Soviet colleagues in discussing the historical figures vilified and persecuted during Stalin’s regime, which

a few years later were displayed as heroes and brave Bolsheviks. When people find themselves in situations of having to face new harsh truths about their own history, it may be easier to just forget them. Therefore, identity is not formed by the imposition of an ideal of nation, it is not moulded within common stable history, but it is rather fragmented and fractured and open to an ongoing transformation insofar as it is embedded in,

all those historically specific developments and practices which have disturbed the relatively “settled” character of many populations and cultures, above all in relation to the process of globalization, which I would argue are coterminous with “modernity” and the processes of forced and ‘free’ migration which have become a global phenomenon of the so-called “post-colonial’ world. Though they seem to invoke an origin in a historical past with which they continue to correspond, actually identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being. (Hall 143)

Ono’s internal conflicts are connected to the harsh truths of transitions in the historical contexts, living at the threshold between two eras, between the modern, and what some have defined as the post-modern world.

In his article *From Pilgrim to Tourist: A Short History of Identity* (qtd. in Hall and duGay 18, 36), Bauman establishes an analogy for the faulty way in which collective memories are affected by different perspectives of the world in that historical moment: he asserts that the symptoms of the so-called post modernity had already been manifest since the period in between the two world wars. He analyses how the figure of the pilgrim, from ancient Christianity, has gained a new twist in modernity. Whereas the pilgrim connected his present with a history of the past and a possibility of the future, through the delay of his gratification in time and space, or in Freud’s terms in *Beyond the Pleasure*

*Principle* (1920), the distance between the ego ideal and the institution of the *reality-principle*, the figure of the tourist is that of a systematic seeker of experience:

The tourist willingly experiences the bizarre and strange, so that he can tame and domesticate it, notwithstanding he has a home. And yet, this home is both his shelter and prison. For the pilgrim, beyond identity building, identity preservation is important. For the tourist, however, the effort is to prevent the sticking to one identity, as he keeps his options open in an ever-ending sequence of *nows*, of presents, without either a past or a future. (qtd. in Hall and duGay p.18, 36)

Historically, Bauman (*Identity* 17) argues that one of the characteristics that starts to change after World War I is the fact that people started to believe in identity as something to be created rather than to be discovered, a process still current and intensified in modern societies in late capitalism. In the era of nation-states, the power play needed to be legitimated through a fiction embedded in identity.

In the following Chapter, the devoted ease to *When We Were Orphans* with which Christopher travels from one continent to the other, and his obsession in deciphering conundrums (taming paradoxical realities) will be examined. He seems to be closer to Bauman's figure of the tourist, whereas Ono's inability to cope with the fast-changing ideologies of his time, as well as his efforts to preserve every element of his identity as they were once in history, seems closer to the figure of the pilgrim. Despite both protagonists being contemporaries, Christopher's narration is set between 1930 and 1958, whereas Ono sets his story in a more condensed chronological time, between 1948 and 1950. Both diachronic figures Bauman describes can be analogically and synchronically paired as Banks—tourist and Ono—pilgrim, since they maintain a coinciding relation in historical time. In the modern era, the figure of the tourist is the more present one, that of a systematic seeker of experience, as opposed to that of the pilgrim, to whom, beyond

identity building, identity preservation is important, which is crucially reflected in Ono's feeling of no longer belonging to his habit.

Like the pilgrim, Ono takes an active role in supporting the ideal of a forever victorious empire and the nation-state totalitarian purism is translated in his art through a homogeneous and uniform aesthetic, which takes him long years of practice and technique learning. He can prove his patriotism throughout the well-condensed repertoire of themes, colours, shapes and materials. Since such a pre-modern society created an artificial national identity, the purposes of national patriotism were both to struggle against "'local particularism', in the name of a shared national fate and interests and against "rootless cosmopolitanism that threatened the nationalists" (*Identity* 77). In other words, national identity formation took a lot of force, subjugation, vigilance in order to maintain the cohesiveness of the aggregate, holding centralistic ambitions insofar as belonging became seductive when opposed to exclusion. Ono's attachment to the ideal of a nation may be related to the fact that, in the pre-war period, people were part of an era when they were born and died in the same place. Beyond that, the artist's belief in the fascist dogmatism gains shades of religiosity since the nation seems to possess a sort of supernatural power, which Ono cultivates through that thematic repetitive religiosity of symbols in his paintings, which were taught to him in his different apprenticeships and are the common manifestation of actions associated with sacred rituals intended to substantiate the gestures of heroic survival in times of conflict.

The gap between the Japanese mindset before the war and the postwar Americanization is reflected in Ono's interactions with his grandson when he discovers that the boy has no fear of the older generation (*An Artist of the Floating World* 31). In his intimate moments with Ichiro, the boy makes references to superheroes from the West, such as the Lone Ranger, Zorro or Popeye the Sailor man (*An Artist of the Floating World*

154), while he tries to show Ichiro his paintings, which fail to interest the child. Their conversation cannot be established fully, as a gap is installed between different collective references inhabiting their minds, producing fragments of memory for which one cannot find a correspondent in the memory of the other one. Such tensions are deepened by the fact that Ono is the father of Ichiro's mother, which in a patriarchal system may not be considered real kinship, since the artist is an ancestor on the matriarchal side. The child asks if Ono used to be a famous painter, to which he confirms, but the child also adds that his father "says you had to finish. Because Japan lost the war" (*An Artist of the Floating World* 32). Ichiro's father, Suichi, expresses his sentiment as he remarks that "the American heroes are the better models for children now" (*An Artist of the Floating World* 36); hence, it is far better for Ichiro, his grandson, to idolize "cowboys than that he idolizes people like Myamoto Musashi" (36). The same sentiment is also displayed by Noriko's husband, who is mentioned in June 1950, when he says: "By and large, the Americans have an immense amount to teach us" about "democracy and individual rights" (185). Setsuko also echoes Suichi's belief in the new values as she requests Ono to take certain precautionary steps to avoid the "misunderstandings" of the past "to arise again" (67) as she demonstrates she is worried about the possibility of her father committing suicide as a symbolic honourable way to apologize for his mistakes in the past, an action which seems never to be considered by Ono himself.

While worshipping his masters, who had taught him to paint, as well as the emperor of Japan, the painter experiences hostilities within controversial interactions that will be revealed to be quite different from what Ono had first claimed at the beginning of the story. In the first lines we read a description of his house as occupying a place that stands out on top of a hill, about which "you may find yourself wondering what sort of wealthy man owns it" (*An Artist of the Floating World* 7). Halbwachs asserts that when

we observe the house of a rich man, we are indeed considering the power the owner of the house possesses. Therefore, “wealth has a principle of power that does not reside in material goods but rather in the person of the one who has acquired and retained them” (146). However, it gradually becomes evident that that is not the case from Ono’s daughters’ perspective. The ambiguity in the relationships is not only related to the generational differences and the daughters’ new political ideas, but there is also an controversial fact regarding Ono’s son-in-law, Suichi, who has become a salary man for a big corporation in the modes of the multinationals from the West.

Since the nationalist discourse in Japan has been replaced by the modern liberal ideology, advocating progress and internationalization, the artist faces the dilemma of both belonging and not belonging to the old ideals of nation, community and family any longer. In the passage when he expresses concern about Noriko’s marriage negotiation (*miai*) during a conversation with Matsuda, the man who works for the Okada-Shingen (New Life) Society promoting the militarist and artistic cause, Ono asks Matsuda to answer any questions regarding their past “with utmost delicacy” (*An Artist of the Floating World* 94) during the *miai* ceremony, to which Matsuda replies: “I realize there are now those who would condemn the likes of you and me for the very things we were once proud to have achieved” (p.94). Matsuda is the man who convinces Ono to serve the imperialist government, hence launching his career into success.

When dealing with the interaction between memory and identity, Homi Bhabha considers it fundamental for a society to understand its history in relation to the constitution of an open future in order to,

reinscribe the past, reactivate it, relocate it, *resignify* it. More significantly, it commits our understanding of the past, and our reinterpretation of the future, to an ethics of ‘survival’ that allows us to work through the present. And such a working through, or working out, frees us from the determinism of historical

inevitability, repetition without a difference. It makes it possible for us to confront that borderline, the interstitial experience between what we take to be the image of the past and what is in fact involved in the passing of time and the passage of meaning. (qtd. in Hall and duGay 59, 60)

Ono struggles to find a path to work through or work out of empty repetition, which becomes gradually apparent at the end of the narrative, when he can start envisioning a future for the country instead of dwelling solely on his past.

The transition from one emotional state to the other, is re-enacted as the artist reinterprets and relocates his memories during the reconstruction of Nagasaki; he struggles to work through the past and gradually finds consolation in the present, while hoping for a different future free from the same mistakes his generation has committed. Nonetheless, the artist repeatedly reassures the reader, or primarily himself, that his past deeds are noble as he seeks confirmation, for instance when talking to his former colleagues and *Sensei* Mori-san about how much they contributed to the nation. The artist's shameful past is echoed throughout the lines as the word "shame" repeatedly comes up in conversation, in passages such as when he says "there is surely no great shame in mistakes made in the best of faith. It is surely a thing far more shameful to be unable or unwilling to acknowledge them" (*An Artist of the Floating World* 125).

Although Dower (1999) argues that the trials of war criminals were an American performance to condemn the pagan Orient symbolized by Japan, Ono's claim seems to be particularly meaningful regarding the present embarrassment of the Japanese government, which has been troubled by past ghosts since after the rendition to acknowledge responsibility regarding the atrocities committed during wartime. The *Yasukuni Shrine* in Tokyo remains a controversial symbol, revering both the people who died during the war and over 1,000 convicted war criminals.

Ishiguro explains he “needed to portray this world where a leader figure held this incredible psychological sway over his subordinates. And for subordinates to break free, they had to display a remarkable amount of determination, as he explains: I’m pointing to the master-pupil thing recurring over and over again in the world” (qtd. in Mason 340, 342). Ono’s transitions and positions in society, occupying both the place of the subject and subjected, furnish Ono’s fluid identity (Hall 143). The contradictions in subject and subjected positions are clearly observed throughout Ono’s career. When his father tests his vocation for arts, he asks the twelve-year-old boy to come to the reception room. Ono is puzzled since only guests were allowed in the room. The father is sitting “at the centre of the light” (*An Artist of the Floating World* 43) and Ono remembers:

I sat in silence while my father looked through my work. He would regard each painting for a moment, then lay it to one side. When he was almost half-way through my collection, he said without looking up:

‘Masuji, are you sure all your work is here? Aren’t there one or two paintings you haven’t brought me?’

I did not answer immediately. He looked up and asked: ‘Well?’

‘It’s possible there may be one or two I have not brought.’

‘Indeed. And no doubt, Masuji, the missing paintings are the very ones you’re most proud of. Isn’t that so?’ (p.43)

The scene reveals the cruel ritual in which his father engages when carefully pointing out that he recognizes Ono’s skill before the smell of smoke impregnates the house. His mother opposes him, justifying her attitude with the priest’s assessment of Ono’s flawed disposition. Victor Sage (qtd. in Groes and Lewis 32) observes that the theme of “loyalty to a group and the ritual exclusion of dissent” will re-emerge in Ishiguro’s later fiction. A

lot of Ono's reminiscing about the pre-war regards Mrs. Kawakami's bar, the last place standing in the midst of bulldozers of the post-war reconstruction. There is an earlier ominous scene before Mori-san expels Ono from the villa. Sasaki, the leading pupil of Moriyama-San's apprenticeship is excluded from the group of pupils for questioning the Master's methods. As he lies awake in his room, Ono overhears Sasaki going from room to room asking for a response, but there is only silence. Sasaki finally approaches his best friend's room and begs:

‘You and I have been good friends for many years’, I heard him say. Won't you at least speak to me?’

There was no response from the person he had addressed. Then Sasaki said:

‘Won't you just tell me where the paintings are?’

There was still no answer. But as I lay there in the darkness, I could hear the sound of rats scuttling under the floorboards of that decaying room, and it seemed to me this noise was some sort of reply. (*An Artist of the Floating World* 142, 143)

The scene is just as cruel as when Ono's father burns his paintings; Sasaki has nothing to take with him after being rejected. When he turns and asks his friends to wish him well for the future, they do not utter “even one word of comfort” (p.143). The absence of personal motivation appeals to the reader who is obliged to supply the emotions in the place of those of Ono and the students. Sage also highlights that the effect is enhanced since Ono has already commented on the master's reaction to the leading pupil, who can see beyond the Sensei's work, and is always one towards pointing to him as a traitor (qtd. in Groes and Lewis 35).

Ono also shows one of his paintings to an old friend, the “Tortoise”, who calls him a traitor and spreads the news among Mori-san’s pupils. The conversation between Ono and the Master takes place in a pavilion at one of the parks at twilight, while Mori-san asks him to light some lanterns. They enter a storeroom and, although the Master has not instructed the apprentices in their conduct, they have mobilized to reject and humiliate Ono out of their fanatic loyalty. Like Ono’s father, Mori-san also wants to lay his hands on the subversive paintings that Ono has also produced, and before predicting his career will be a failure, asks him if he has made appropriate arrangements (*An Artist of the Floating World* 180). Later, when working for the Cultural Committee of Unpatriotic Activities, Ono turns in his talented pupil, Kuroda, leading him to prison and to the destruction of his paintings, and consequently to the ruin of his career. His moral passivity not only leads him to fascism, but also to copy Mori-san’s acts. However, after the war is over, while Ono is vilified, Kuroda is perceived as a martyr and gains a post at a college. Sage observes that when Noriko’s *miai* is arranged, Ono feels it is important to denounce his political past, to which Setsuko responds that his outburst just puzzled everybody, including the Saitos (qtd. in Groes and Lewis 35, 37).

Shaffer reinforces Ishiguro’s remark that the conflict between leaders and subordinates is a central plotline; the critic argues that the tensions embedded in verticalized relationships, such as those between student and *Sensei* (teacher and master) are at the heart of the novel. Ono’s development, against his father’s wishes, progresses from being discouraged, to apprenticeship and eventually to leadership as a *Sensei*, depicting “the tensions [...] between authoritarian art teachers and rebellious students (which) mirrors the broader social and political events leading Japan into World War Two” (*The Novels of Kazuo Ishiguro* 49).

Therefore, if on the one hand Ono is subservient to the fascist cause, on the other hand he has broken free from what was expected of him as a child, since pursuing the artistic career was seen as an alternative to fixing his flawed character from his family's perspective. There is a level to Ono's experiences that denies authority and breaks free from the authoritarian impositions of his businessman father, who regards useful finance as the opposition to useless art. He recalls a priest predicting that Ono was born "with a flaw in his nature. A weak streak that would give him a tendency towards slothfulness and deceit" (*An Artist of the Floating World* 45), and that therefore, "we've had to combat his laziness, his dislike of useful work, his weak will (since) artists [...] live in squalor and poverty. They inhabit a world which gives them every temptation to become weak-willed and depraved" (46). As a result, the father burns his paintings, to which Ono replies: "I have no wish to find myself in years to come, sitting where Father is now sitting, telling my own sons about accounts and money [...] What are these meetings I'm so privileged to attend? The counting of loose change. The fingering of coins, hour after hour" (47, 48).

He stands up to his father in terms of pursuing an artistic career, despite showing subordination in surrendering his paintings to be destroyed, an episode that will be repeated when his master Mori-san accuses him of artistic insubordination and treason for exploring "curious avenues" (142). The punishment should be the confiscation of the paintings and the traitors "would then abandon the painting, or in some cases, burn it along with the refuse" (140). Since Ono refuses to bring his paintings this time, he is expelled from the villa. Mori-san assures him: "You will no doubt succeed in finding work illustrating magazines and comic books", but "it will end your development as a serious artist" (180).

Ono's fluid subject-subjected positions are also depicted when he becomes supportive of the imperialist government, since he will in turn be supported by the government to further his art through becoming a *Sensei*, hence projecting him higher in the hierarchy as opposed to Mori-san, at a time when Ono becomes an accomplice to the authorities burning one of his student's paintings. The affair makes Ono worried though, since he hears the government worker's remark: "Bad paintings make bad smoke" (184). The smell reminds him of the previous wartime: "It's not so long ago it meant bombing and fire" (200).

Moreover, by endorsing the imperialist regime and the aesthetics of purity, Ono is sceptical of Mori-San's attempt to modernize the art tradition by some European influences, expressing a certain degree of xenophobia in rejecting what is considered foreign. The former *Sensei*'s art is detailed as if,

he had, for instance, long abandoned the use of traditional dark outline to define his shapes, preferring instead the Western use of blocks of colours, with light and shade to create a three-dimensional appearance. And no doubt he had taken his cue from the European in what was his most central concern: the use of subdued colours, Mori san's wish was to evoke a certain melancholy, nocturnal atmosphere around his women. (*An Artist of the Floating World* 141)

When Ono is drawn closer to the nationalist ideology, he criticizes Mori-san for trying to embrace new European painting techniques, understood as "fundamentally unpatriotic" (202, 203), as he remarks to his former *Sensei*: "It is my belief that in such troubled times as this, artists must learn to value something more tangible than those pleasurable things that disappear with the morning light. It is not necessary that artists always occupy a decadent and enclosed world" (180). He declares himself to be aware of "the steady decline of Mori-san's reputation in the city" (202) since he attempted to "bring European

influence into the Utamaro tradition” (202). Consequently, Mori-san’s art is marginalized and regarded as unpatriotic by the imperialist government as he is exiled to smaller exhibition venues.

The reference to Kitagawa Utamaro (1753-1806) to invoke Ono’s belief in “pure art” is also contradictory if we consider that the *ukiyo-e* (Japanese block print portraits of the floating world) artist from the Edo period (1615-1868) in the eighteenth century had become popular due to his previous experimentations with new techniques, thus being a kind of rebellious artist himself in portraying women in a softer manner, not previously seen. His models were women or kabuki artists found in the red-light districts, like Yoshiwara pleasure quarter in Tokyo, at a time when they offered a wide range of sensory experiences in an era of great economic prosperity in Japan, a time when the term *ukiyo* (floating world) became popular in respect of the new urban and extravagant life style. Utamaro’s prints and illustrations arrived in Europe in the late nineteenth century through smuggling, mostly in France, where they had quite an impact on the impressionists (Kobayashi 67). Likewise, Mori-san also experiments with new techniques to adapt and transform his art, which Ono disapproves of, despite considering Utamaro’s art with the utmost respect.

When Ono begins to work with Mori-san, he claims that the master’s art longs “to capture the fragile lantern light of the pleasure world” (*An Artist of the Floating World* 174), “the intangible and transient (beauty of the) pleasure houses after dark” (150), and to transcend reality in celebration of the “floating world” (150). Shaffer (*Understanding Kazuo Ishiguro* 52) observes that, in a stereotypical bohemian world, they have no routine and indulge in heavy drinking and sensual pleasures, which Ono’s father most feared for him (*An Artist of the Floating World* 87). Despite the suggested freedom, Ono depicts the environment as being just as authoritarian as the previous ones (Wain 187), when he

describes their relationship: “We lived throughout those years almost entirely in accordance with his (Mori-san’s) values and lifestyle, and this entailed spending much time exploring the city’s ‘floating world’—the night-time world of pleasure, entertainment and drink which formed the backdrop for all of our paintings” (*An Artist of the Floating World* 144, 145).

Mori-san’s art reflects the decadence of the empire from the perspective of the imperialists, whereas it had mirrored the flourishing economic prosperity of Japan’s previous period in history. In Ono’s case, the political changes and the new democratic ideology alter his trajectory from a central position endowed by the imperialist government into a shadowy peripheral position; however, while in Mori-san’s case the problem resides in his lack of support for the propaganda, in Ono’s case the situation stems from his support for it, which the younger generation has learned to be ideologically shameful, another reason for him to be even more suspicious of Mori-san’s new endeavour.

Ono repeats some of his reminiscing as if he is trying to have some key event disclosed before his eyes. The reader understands that, just like any other narrative, Ono’s story is not to be fully trusted, since his repressed memories and resistances leave gaps, or distort the relevance and signification of some facts. Despite the lack of an eye for part of his history, the fact that he sees other possibilities regarding a political and social order reveals his working through some of the changes, moving his position throughout his own floating identities in a floating world.

#### **4.5 Remembering, Repeating, Projecting, Denying and Working-Through**

In June 1950, when Ono is in a fragile health, he walks with the aid of a cane (197, 198) across the Bridge of Hesitation (7, 204, 205). Besides appearing as an element of Ishiguro's technique to recreate the blurred quality of memory, the same bridge had also appeared in *A Pale View of Hills*, which according to Shaffer (*Understanding Kazuo Ishiguro* 42) "sums up Ono's present mental state" as shown in the passage below:

On three or four evenings a week, I still find myself taking that path down to the river the little wooden bridge still known to some who lived here before the war as 'The Bridge of Hesitation'. ...

We called it that because until not so long ago, crossing it would have taken you into our pleasure district, and conscience troubled men— so it was said— were to be seen hovering there, caught between seeking an evening's entertainment and returning home to their wives. But if sometimes I'm to be seen up on that bridge, leaning thoughtfully against the rail, it is not that I am hesitating. It is simply that I enjoy standing there as the sun sets, surveying my surroundings and the changes taking place around me. (*An Artist of the Floating World* 99)

Shaffer (*Understanding Kazuo Ishiguro* 42) describes the passage as the portrait of Ono's troubled mind, his hesitation between the covering up or the uncovering of his guilt. He suggests that the Bridge of Hesitation is an expression of Ono's psychological state: "He is a 'conscience- troubled' man, though he would deny it, who hesitates between owning up to his past mistakes and covering them up; between moral responsibility and psychological expedience; between uncovering and further hiding his lingering guilt" (42). Ono's troubles with his memory can be related to a meeting with Jiro Miyake a week before (*An Artist of the Floating World* 54), when he repeatedly says that the words he is quoting are probably not "the precise" words (*An Artist of the Floating World* 37-39).

Ishiguro explains the shifts in Ono's narrative: "The structure [...] is dictated less by plot than the changes in the main character's state of mind. For example, in the opening section, his position is that he's not ashamed of anything he's done; but gradually his point of view shifts and he starts owning up" (Tookey 34). Patrick Parrinder explains that the narrative is "carefully designed to conceal while appearing to reveal past culpability" (16,17). He filters his own past, selecting passages he conveniently remembers while repressing others. For instance, when going back to a time when he claims to remember "bravely" standing up for a colleague in trouble due to his propagandist work, at first, he immediately corrects himself, with a "of course, this is all a matter of many years ago now and I cannot vouch that those were my exact words that morning (*An Artist of the Floating World* 69). The ambiguity is intensified as the painter then admits that those "may not have been the precise words" he used, "for I have caused to recount this particular scene many times before, and it is inevitable that with repeated retelling, such accounts begin to take on a life of their own" (72).

Ono's denial of his own fears and desires is also projected onto other characters. He takes Ichiro to see a frightening movie, but, from his perspective, it is Ichiro's desire to see the movie and not his own. When their first attempt to go on the daytrip is frustrated, Ono also attributes to Ichiro the disappointment. He also narrates Ichiro's denial of being scared while throwing "a raincoat over his head" (82). In another passage, while spending time with his keens, he offers sake to Ichiro, which is forbidden by his mother. Although the reader perceives that Ono is the one crossed, the artist claims that it is Ichiro the one who has become upset for not having sake (188-9).

As the artist talks about others we realize some of his projections about his past. For instance, when he celebrates Sugimura, a civic leader who failed to accomplish his plan to improve the city, he says that "a man who aspires to rise above the mediocre, to

be something more than ordinary, surely deserves admiration, even if in the end, he fails [...] on account of his ambitions” (134). The same interpretation will be attributed to talk about his friend, Matsuda’s failures: “He may indeed have looked back over his life and seen certain flaws, but surely he would have recognized also those aspects he could feel proud of” (201).

Ono’s denials are evident when he mentions the Miyaki family, who rejected his daughter for the *miai* (arranged marriage). According to him, the last moment withdrawal must have been on account of the lower social status of that family, whereas the truth must be due to his wartime activities, as he explains:

My own guess is that there was nothing so remarkable about the matter. True, their withdrawal at the last moment was most unexpected, but why should one suppose from this that there was anything peculiar in it? My feeling is that it was only a matter of family status. The Miyakes, from what I saw of them, were just the proud, honest sort who would feel uncomfortable at the thought of their son marrying above his station. (*An Artist of the Floating World* 18-9)

Shaffer (*Understanding Kazuo Ishiguro* 46) outlines how Ono distances himself from the issue as he points to the Miyakes in order to negate his own involvement in the failure of the *miai*, while he delicately praises the family as being the “proud” and “honest sort”. However, there seems to be another denial overlapping the previous one: he attempts to convince the reader that the impossibility of an agreement was actually due to the noble honesty of that family in understanding that taking such an action would make Ono’s family socially degraded, since they belong to a higher rank in society. Hence, not are only the Miyakes noble, but also Ono’s family ought to be even nobler at their social status. He also believes that the “war came at a bad time for Noriko’s marital aspirations” (84). However, when Ichiro says: “Father says you used to be a famous artist. But you

had to finish because Japan lost the war” (32), Ono, nervously laughing at Ichiro, explains that his work “is tied away for just a moment. Shaffer (*Understanding Kazuo Ishiguro* 46) argues that, instead of owning up to his past deeds, Ono rather prefers to leave them psychologically tied away, since the artist repeats that “after all, if your country is at war, you do all you can in support, there’s no shame in that” (*An Artist of the Floating World* 55).

Shaffer (*Understanding Kazuo Ishiguro* 47) also compares the awkwardness of Ono’s ideas to that of a refugee from another world as incongruent as his own descriptions of the images of the old district and Mrs. Kawakami’s bar after the bombing, which according to the artist, are those of a shabby place “looking oddly incongruous in its new setting” (*An Artist of the Floating World* 205).: he alternates between descriptions of a devastated landscape and the reassurance that the bar “remains as pleasing as ever” (26). A little earlier in the book he had affirmed that “nothing remains” (23), that the area is a “wasted expanse”, filled with “heaps of rubble”, resembling “a graveyard” (27), where there are only “skeletons” and “burnt-out buildings” (77). Nevertheless, he believes the bombed area will possibly be reconstructed as he wonders “who is to say the old district will not return again? The likes of Mrs. Kawakami and I, we tend to make a joke about it, but behind our bantering there is a thread of serious optimism” (77). The awkwardness stems from Ono’s need to cling to good memories, while repressing and denying the painful ones to the extent of becoming incongruent as Shaffer argues, although not until the end.

If Ono does not come forward and claim to be in favour of a democratic liberal Japan, he suspects that the empire may not have been better than the new political opening to the west. Ono’s mental state at the end of the novel is transformed, as he accepts the defeat of the old system and the changes that the new order may bring to the nation. Even

in his bewilderment at not fully understanding the atrocities that took place during the multilateral, there is a sense of acceptance towards reality after the repetition of his denials, repressions and projections. He tries to work through some of the shame and pain of his contributions as he re-enacts to himself the possible reasons that caused him to support the nation, but resistance and denial against traumatic experiences during war turn into unattainable remembrance. The reader is able to penetrate Ono's attempts at resistance, whereas Ono himself fails to fully recognize them, despite being able to work-through some of them. The fact that he sees other possibilities of a political and social order seems to show his changing position, his own floating passage in a floating world.

#### **4.6 *Ukiyo no Gaka*: The Translation of Ono's Voice back to Japanese**

The translation "back" to Japanese of Ishiguro's idea of a notation in Japanese seems mistaken as an easy job for a Japanese translator, whereas it promotes difficulties. Novelist Clive Sinclair (342) tells a story about Malcolm Bradbury meeting the Japanese translator of *A Pale View of Hills* and suggesting that it must have been much easier to translate it because of its Japanese notation quality, to which the translator replied: "On the contrary, it is very hard because it is such an English book." Ishiguro responds that he writes like a Western novelist since his books "have strong plots and three-dimensional characters; whereas Japanese novels more closely resemble a diary with a hazy, ruminating narrator, little plot, and underdeveloped characters" (qtd. in Sinclair 37). To some extent, Ishiguro sees the surface of the narrative structure as a universal metaphor. Beedham reminds us that Ishiguro "treats people as people" (28) and, from Ishiguro's perspective, Japanese are "like everybody else. They're like me, my parents. I don't see them as people who go around slashing their stomachs" (qtd. in Mason 343). However,

Ishiguro shows in his early novels a great deal of interest in exploring the Japanese and Chinese territories during the Second Sino-Japanese war; although not limiting the novels to socio-historical themes. *A Pale View*, *An Artist* and *Orphans* evoke cultural and historical aspects of World War II in Japan, China and England, creating difficulties in the translation of the characters' Japanese voices into Japanese, since both cultural specificities and universal elements are embedded in the novels. Ono's voice in translation will be further approached in terms of its linguistic challenges as well as its cultural reception in Japan in this section.

*An Artist* was translated into Japanese by Professor Shigeo Tobita, known for producing translations with a deceptively simple style, and was published under the title *Ukiyo no Gaka*. Despite the appropriateness of his style in handling Ishiguro's work, the uncomfortable subject matter of *Ukiyo* made the novel unpopular in Japan. The settings had to be delivered in the modes of a realistic Japan, so as to become readable for Japanese readers. Sugano observes that the translator's decision on style was to not reinforce the voice of a pre-war elderly educated Ono, but to apply "the norm of contemporary novels to reflect the possible tone of voice that Ishiguro, in his thirties, might have spoken had he been writing in Japanese" (qtd. in Groes and Lewis 70).

Although translators usually transcribe the syllables of proper nouns into *katakana* (specifically used to transcribe loan words, onomatopoeia or to emphasize), in *Ukiyo* they are translated into *kanji*, the Chinese ideograms that contain specific meanings. Ishiguro had already suggested the use of *kanji* to translate the names of the characters in *A Pale View*, since they can be created from a wide range of combinations of homonyms conveying different meanings, thus being used as a vehicle to characterize. One of the advantages is that *kanji* does not obstruct the flow of the reading like *katakana*, according

to Tobita. However, he had to be discrete when exercising the combination of *kanji* to avoid undesirable connotations when referring to characters or places.

In *An Artist*, for instance, Setsuko is associated with the notion of restriction and discipline and with the name of the actress in Yasujiro Ozu's *Tokyo Story* (1953), bearing in mind that Ishiguro has mentioned in interviews that he is familiar with Ozu's movies. Noriko bears the same *kanji* as the heroin of Ozu's *An Autumn Afternoon* (1962), Ono loses the connotation of denial (Mr. Oh-No) and implies a "small field". When Ono travels to Matsuda's villa (85, 86), he mentions the places he views from the tram: Arakawa, Tozaka-cho, Sakaemachi and Minamimachi; if these areas were translated into *katakana*, they would compose a barrier to the readability, leaving Tobita with the choice of the familiar *kanji* to represent them, as opposed to the effect these foreign names communicate to the readers in English (SUGANO, in GROES, LEWIS, 2011, p.70).

Another variation is perceived in the arrangement of the syntax, choice of nuances in vocabulary in order to bring Ono's speech closer to the idea that he is narrating spontaneously. That can be verified when comparing the opening of the novel in both versions:

If on a sunny day you climb the steep path leading up from the little wooden bridge still referred to around here as 'The Bridge of Hesitation', you will not have to walk far before the roof of my house becomes visible between the top of two ginkgo trees. Even if it did not occupy such a commanding position on the hill, the house would still stand out from all others nearby, so that as you come up the path, you may find yourself wondering what sort of wealthy man owns it.

(*An Artist of Floating World* 7)

Sugano also mentions that the rearrangements in the translation present Ono as being more careful and self-conscious about his narrative:

From one end of the small wooden bridge that is still referred to around here as ‘Tamerai Bashi’ (The Bridge of Hesitation), there is quite a steep path leading to the top of the hill. On a sunny day, before walking very far up the path, the roof of my house between the tops of two soaring ginkgo trees will come into view. The house occupies the spot on the hill top with a particularly good view, and the size of the house would appear overwhelmingly large if it were built on the flat ground. Those who climb the hill would probably wonder what kind of wealthy man is living in such a grand residence. (qtd. in Groes and Lewis 72)

According to her (72), the zigzag movement in the translation intensifies the reader’s movement from low to high. The first sentence focuses on the bridge, then moves upwards to the top of the hill. The addition of the word “soaring” offers one more detail related to the high status of the house location. The greatest contrast is when Ono does not say that his house is grand directly, but rather states that such an imposing house would have to be on flat ground. That seems quite a reasonable adaptation, since bragging about oneself is considered impolite in Japan. One of the motives for the fluidity of the pronoun “I” in Japanese lies in that fact, since it is considered bragging if one utters the pronoun, which is generally omitted when one is referring to oneself, except on specific occasions when the pronoun will be used as several different words, depending on gender, age, social interaction or formality.

Another aspect Tobita understates is the usage of the second-person pronoun “you”, which Ono uses many times from the very first paragraph. Ishiguro’s narrators often address the reader in an intimate, yet distant tone, as the characters throw the reader into unknown territories. The reason for erasing the second-person pronoun is to follow the Japanese convention that avoids translating personal pronouns (such as ‘I’, ‘you’, ‘he’ or ‘she’) (qtd. in Gores and Lewis 73, 74).

Furthermore, the lengthy sentences Ishiguro articulates to create the effect of the arrogant manner of the older generations are broken into shorter sentences in Tobita's version. For instance, when making his point about rejecting Mori-san's art the "English" Ono says:

All he (Tortoise) would have recognized was that it represented a blatant disregard for Mori-san's priorities; abandoned had been the school's collective endeavour to capture the fragile lantern light of the pleasure world; bold calligraphy had been introduced to complement the visual impact; and above all, no doubt, the Tortoise would have been shocked to observe that my techniques made extensive use of the hard outline—a traditional enough method, as you will know, but one whose rejection was fundamental to Mori-san's teaching. (*An Artist of Floating World* 174)

The semicolons create the sense of a sophisticated rhetorical speech disguising a reasonably simple logic. However, one of the techniques to generate readability is to break the sentences into a list of motives. Beyond that, Sugano also explains that the Japanese language does not have grammatical equivalents for conjunctions or semicolons, which leads the translator to create a more cleaner and brisker pace, as demonstrated below:

He (the Tortoise= Kame-san) would have simply thought that Ono's painting imprudently disregards Mori-san's taste. His painting abandons the effort made by the whole school to capture the fragile light from lanterns in the pleasure world. It makes strong use of the eye-catching technique of bold calligraphy. And what is more, Kame-san must have been shocked to recognize my extensive use of bold outlines. As it is known, this is just a traditional technique, but it was Mori-san's policy to reject it. (qtd. in Gores and Lewis 73).

Some of Ishiguro's manoeuvres are not attempted in Japanese so as to generate readability. In English, names in Japanese, Ono's rambling speech, his redundant structure sentences and repetition of words create some strangeness and resistance to a continuous flow in the narrative come naturally since Ono's first language is not English. Such elements that create displacement and estrangement in English are not translatable as "foreignness" in Japanese. The painter's voice comes out more youthful, and yet more faithful to a discourse in Japanese (qtd. in Groes and Lewis 73, 74).

Like the translator, the reviewers of *Ukiyo* also tried to divert attention from Ono's consistent trust in militarism during the war, revealing the reluctance of the critics in Japan to approach such a taboo topic. If that subject would have been faced, Ishiguro might have been praised for his courage in referring to such a painful event. However, the trauma is still manifest in the collective memory of the country, or better, in the absence of a collective memory that works sometimes as an effort towards the amnesia of war and its accountabilities. Sugano lists some of the evidence on the issue:

The debate pertaining to the history of war covers broad areas: the government's authorization of history textbooks (e.g. the 'Ienaga Textbook Trials', disputed from 1963 to 1997); the issue of 'comfort women' (still not settled); the dispute over the status of the Yasukuni shrine (likewise an ongoing issue); and issues of historiography concerning the fifteen-year war between China and Japan, which forms the historical background of *Ukiyo* (qtd. in Groes and Lewis 75)

Even in fiction the translator's ideological viewpoint surfaces, and when approaching such delicate issues, Tobita's concern was to prevent the novel from being read as a story exploring the topic of war and Japan's accountability for it, since artists producing what became known as "war record paintings" is also another complicated matter. After the Manchurian Incident in 1931, which was the starting point for the fifteen-year war

between China and Japan, artists intensified their collaborations with the militarist government. The National Mobilization Law of 1938 forced the nation to contribute to the war effort and seized control over cultural activities. High-profile painters were also sent to the front to reproduce war scenes. After the war, the paintings were confiscated and sent to the USA. In 1970, they were returned as an indefinite loan to the National Museum of Modern Art in Tokyo. Only one or two of them could be exhibited at any time due to objections from neighbouring countries. They depict the military operations on the overseas front, representing the shame of violence that still haunts Japanese society (qtd. in Groes and Lewis 75-77).

In his review, Miura asserts that Ishiguro reanimates the forgotten debate on artists' responsibility. In 1945, the *Asahi Shimbun* published a debate between Tsuguharu Fujita, who justified his contribution to the country, and Shigeo Miyata, who defended that propagandist art should have avoided practice at that time. Goro Tsuruta replied to both Miyata and Fujita that artists had no other choice than to collaborate. Although Ono's "Eyes on the Horizon" is a poster and not an oil painting, it leads Ono to a similar fate of controversy. Although the National Museum of Modern Art in Tokyo published the war-record painting catalogue only in 1992, Ishiguro seems to have grasped the relevance of the debate about the artists' responsibility during wartime a few years before. To avoid associating the novel with such issues, another major change in the translation, made after consultation with Ishiguro, concerns the replacement of the statue of the Emperor Taisho in the Takami Garden (*An Artist of Floating World* 132-135) with the statue of the former Mayor Yamaguchi (*An Artist of Floating World* 175-179). The effect displaces the space of imperial celebration with a memorial for a former mayor whose name sounds generic, hence not subject to associations with war responsibility. Furthermore, the spot is described as a place surrounded by benches where Ono, Setsuko, Noriko and Ichiro meet

for chats and leisure, an unsuitable place for an Emperor image in the Japanese post-war cultural context of post war. Hence, the suppression of the reference seeks to prevent embarrassment among the readership (qtd. in Groes and Lewis 78). The translation also softens Ono's militarist nuances. Towards the end of the novel when he visits Wakaba province, as he catches a good view of Mori-san's villa from up the hills, he reflects:

For, as he (Matsuda) pointed out himself, the likes of him and me, we have the satisfaction of knowing that whatever we did, we did at the time in the best of faith. Of course, he took some bold steps and often did things with much singlemindedness; but this is surely preferable to never putting one's convictions to the test, for lack of will or courage. (*An Artist of Floating World* 201-202)

The translation reads as follows:

For, as he himself was saying, the likes of Matsuda and I are aware that, whatever it was, we acted in accordance with faith, and take satisfaction in that fact. Of course, we at times did adventurous things, and too often charged ahead like carriage horses. But our attitude was far better than that of those who never even try to act on their convictions because they lack enough will and courage. (*An Artist of Floating World* 272-273)

Ono reassures himself that his past deeds were conducted in the right direction, but the militarist implications are attenuated through sentences such as "bold steps", "adventurous things", and the word "singlemindedness" is replaced with the expression "often charged ahead like carriage horses", emphasizing an ironic image of progress (qtd. in Groes and Lewis 79).

Tobita highlights the fact that Ishiguro's narratives are ambiguous and open to a myriad of interpretations in his foreword to the translation of *An Artist*. He draws attention to the fact that, "when they are translated back to Japanese, there appears to be only a fine

line of difference between a historical parable that aims to achieve universality and the ‘real’ history, which must be considered in this particular situation” (1988, p.285). He also reminds us that the story is about human helplessness when clinging to a sense of self-righteousness, hence its universal significance. Despite Tobita’s commentaries, the book was still associated with war in Miura’s review. Sugano ( qtd. in Groes and Lewis 80) comments that *Ukiyo*’s references to responsibility and complicity in war, although not set in a “real Japan”, still seem to trigger a “mild form of (self) censorship for Japanese readers.

#### **4.7 Infantilization I: Children and Parents in *An Artist of the Floating World***

Caroline Bennett (qtd. in Groes and Lewis 82-83) asserts that one way to understand the traumas of the characters in Ishiguro’s earlier work is by tracing their relationship with children. Etsuko, in *A Pale View of Hills* (1982), Ono and Banks behave like children in order to deny their past and evade their responsibilities. The psycho-social behaviour of their young and old selves results in generational conflicts that can be analyzed as analogous to the post-war politics in which the dominant power of the United States inflicts an infantilizing effect upon former imperial powers like Japan and Great Britain.

The idea that adults are wise and children innocent is deconstructed in Ishiguro’s narratives, demonstrating the power of the literary imagination to address humanistic issues out of archetypal constructions. Ichiro (Ono’s grandson) and Mariko (Sachiko’s daughter) in *A Pale View* are constitutive of self-defence mechanisms, working as retroactive projections of traumatized adult characters, who in turn, regress to childish behaviour. However, when Ishiguro is writing, he does not intentionally attempt to

portray such a feature, as he explains: “I’m not aware of making any distinction between children and adults when I’m writing [...] We do not really say goodbye to our childhood, to our pasts. They haunt us, they determine the way we look at life” (qtd. in Ishiguro and Gallix 11). These novels suggest that the two roles are not separated as we have epistemologically been aware.

From his very first novel, the novelist was already specializing in the psychology of reminiscence, often depicting uneasy relationships between parents and children. In *A Pale View*, Etsuko is a middle-aged Japanese woman living alone in Surrey, who reflects upon the recent suicide of her daughter, Keiko. She recalls a summer in Nagasaki, in the aftermath of the atomic bomb and talks about an outsider, Sachiko, who neglects her own daughter, Mariko. Embedded in the subplot, Etsuko describes the time she spent with Ogata-San, her husband’s father. When her father-in-law visits his son, Jiro, and Etsuko, she enjoys light conversations with him. Although Ogata-San wants to convince his son about the high status of his teaching career, they disagree on the matters of politics, democracy and personal values, as in the relationship between Ono and his family. Despite his need to believe that he is powerful and is in control, Ogata-San admits that he feels “like a small child waiting for his father” (*An Artist of Floating World* 56), when he is waiting for Jiro to return from work for a chess game. Bennett (qtd. in Groes and Lewis 86) argues that the game is symbolic of their relationship, a battle to the death despite the civility. When Jiro gives up on the game, his father remarks: “Children become adults, but they don’t change much” (*An Artist of Floating World* 131), while ironically teasing Jiro about his childish behaviour. The next morning, he criticizes a relative for being an old “war-lord”, because he is acting belligerently, just as he had done the previous night (31).

In a discussion with his daughter about playing the violin, Ogata-San states that nothing you learn as a child is completely lost. Bennett (qtd. in Groes and Lewis 86) reminds us that that is also true in relation to childhood traumas. When Ogata-San tries to play the violin, Etsuko remarks that it is “hideous” (*An Artist of Floating World* 56), making explicit the fact that music is no longer part of their lives as she refuses to play it herself, while she jokingly says: “Father’s like a child these days” (57), and then, “the little child is feeling guilty now” (58). The affectionate tone defuses the awkwardness.

In the subplot of Part Two, Ogata-San visits Shigeo, an old pupil, now author of an article criticizing his pre-war teaching records in an educational journal, putting the debate of generational clash under the spotlight, as in *An Artist*. Shigeo accuses him of promoting dangerous ideologies and uses the word “evil” to refer to the old man (*An Artist of Floating World* 147). Ogata-San cannot understand the betrayal, since according to the Confucian philosophy, loyalty to one’s superior is the greatest duty. Bennet understands that that unquestioning acceptance of authority, in the manner of an adult-child relationship, is one of the reasons that led Japan into the war and into the horrors of fascism, when to have a dissenting opinion was a matter of betrayal: “for an adult to be childishly innocent in the face of atrocity is to turn a blind eye to iniquity” (qtd. in Groes and Lewis 87).

Ogata-san’s behaviour is relevant to Ono’s way of thinking, since Ishiguro has often stated in interviews that he is aware that he rewrites his stories. Thus, a character that had previously appeared in a subplot may take the place of the protagonist, as seems to be the case between Ogata-San and Masuji Ono. The traumas and generational conflicts of *A Pale View of Hills* are developed in *An Artist*. Although the passing of time might help Ono make sense of his life, he is too anxious to be seen as a likeable person and to achieve good status in his community.

Pre-war Japan possessed an absolute certainty concerning its values, which is depicted in Ono's father's disapproval of his son's professional choice, at a time of subservience. The same hierarchical system is perceived throughout Ono's narrative, which reflects the child-like subordination of the patriarchal Japanese society being challenged on the global stage. Like in the passages when Ogata-san feels like a child or is referred as being like a child, Ono's daughters also associate him with a child. Noriko tells Setsuko "You'll have to take father off my hands a little" (*An Artist of Floating World* 13), and then "Well, he can't rely on me to come back and cook when I'm married. I'll have enough to do without Father to look after as well" (14) suggesting that he is a burden. But Ono's position is quite different since he believes that, as a renowned artist of the empire, he may have caused Noriko's first *miai* failure since his family holds too high a social position.

The grandfather-grandson relationship is another example of the psychological projection inversion of roles. Ichiro speaks to Ono in a straightforward way and does not get told off, even when he says impatiently: "Can't you see I'm busy" and "I can't play with you just now" (29). When Ichiro plays alone he seems to be fighting with enemies (29), like his grandfather, who is primarily combating his sense of the past, despite their cultural references being completely dissonant. When the boy asks him why he retired from painting, Ono's reaction is to turn to a blank sheet from the pad, which may reflect his wish to start over, or to be free from responsibility for his past, or else, not to be restrained by his daughter's and son-in law's rules (29).

When grandfather and grandson talk about an outing to the movies, Ichiro suggests that the film might be too scary for Ono (33). It might be that the boy is hinting on how his parents treat Ono sometimes and is mimicking them, or he might be trying to distract people from his own fears. As they arrive at the theatre, Ichiro asks Ono why Mr.

Naguchi, the composer of patriotic songs, killed himself, while he keeps looking at his reflection in the glass window (154-155), hinting on his more reflective state of mind and showing a sense of nonconformity and maturity, unlike that of his grandfather (qtd. in Groes and Lewis 90).

Bennett (qtd. in Groes and Lewis 90) observes that when Ichiro plays the Lone Ranger, it not only shows the Americanization of the younger generation but also “an icon of the American values who never shoot to kill, only to disarm”. His identification with the white Lone Ranger seems to be similar to the cross-cultural identification that Frantz Fanon described among black boys from the Antilles in *Black Skin, White Masks* (146-147). Although the characters are not colonial subjects, they assume an infantilized position towards the Americans after 1945.

While Ichiro is not subject to patriarchal authority yet, his father is certain of the new ideologies and condemns the old ways, just like Jiro and Shigeo in *A Pale View of Hills*. Conversely, Ono seems to be willing to renegotiate his identity, despite not being sure to what extent, since that may invalidate his beliefs. Wong (*Kazuo Ishiguro* 43) observes that Ono is “resurrecting his former self as a process of self-bereavement, as a way of mourning that lost self”. As he makes his self-identity fluid enough to take in the new scenario, through the sense of coherence created by his discourse, Ono also makes allowances for the others, like his son-in-law, since he believes he must have suffered in Manchuria, during the Japanese invasion in 1930 (*Kazuo Ishiguro* 50).

Similar identity inversions between a child and an adult appear in *An Orphan* and are also analyzed in the next chapter. Thus, the fact that *Orphans* was classified as a detective novel is also put under suspicion, and Banks’s inability to uncover his own truths is explored comparatively to Ono’s denials. Moreover, the force of irony throughout Banks’s outcomes is debated as another paramount trait in Ishiguro’s work.

Finally, the discussion explores the childish behaviour Banks adopts as a defense mechanism like the magic beliefs of totemic societies, whereas Uncle Philip's sexual pervasions as an enactment of the psychoanalytical death instincts that prevail during wartime.

## 5. WHEN WE WERE ORPHANS

### 5.1 Introduction: The Initial Response

*When We Were Orphans* (2000) is set between 24 July 1930 and 14 November 1952; Christopher Banks is an orphanage detective who returns to Shanghai in 1937 to investigate the mysterious disappearance of his parents when he was a child living in the International Settlement in the early decades of the twentieth century. After he was orphaned he has been raised in England, where he stays until his return to Shanghai. By then, he has already established himself as a well-known detective, whose life mission was to find his parents. The processes of memory are present in all of Ishiguro's novels. Shaffer (2000, p.595) summarizes its role as "psychological mystery-voyages into the protagonist's problematic or compromised past"; Tova Reich (43) asserts that the novels depict "memory's stratagems, its selectivity, its obsessional quality, its refinements, its expedience and use". *When We Were Orphans*, Ishiguro's fifth novel, applies the same technique to depict a narrator, who, like Ono, admits uncertainty, recounting "the events [...] sometimes from a distance of only hours, sometimes from a great many years" (McDermott 25).

By focusing on detective Christopher Banks's narrative in *When We Were Orphans* (2000), whose binary positivist logics encounters a world in which the simplistic jigsaw-puzzle solving rationality is no longer of any use in signifying the new social and political context, now undergoing extreme ruptures, the novel is discussed in the light of the critical reviews as well as cultural studies theories. The focus is on the constructions

and interplay of identity in the detective's reminiscing. As argued previously, Banks's identity is understood to be a concept embedded in an incomplete, fragmentary, relational, and unstable process, insofar as relations are established through differentiation. Therefore, aspects of Christopher's psychic processes are considered, as well as the more concrete historical themes of immigration and colonial relations.

The reader immediately realizes that Banks's accounts of dates and events are entirely unlike a classic detective novel, those notebook structure of Sherlock Holmes or Hercule Poirot. The structure of a notebook of Banks's narrative, like that of Ono, provides dates and places at the beginning of each chapter; nevertheless, they must compete with his remembrance of facts. According to Reich (43), "despite this superficial fixing of time in his work, the narrative frequently spins wildly through different eras. The dates Ishiguro likes to fix are merely the dates of recall". Throughout the story, the detective restates over and over "that he is well aware of the fragility of recollection" (McDermott 25). Thus, in terms of narrative structure, *An Artist* and *Orphans* share the same techniques.

John J. Su (568) links the novelist's use of memory to nostalgia, an emotion that allows for the reconfiguration of the present. Within the British cultural context, he argues that nostalgia is "a much-maligned emotion (which the English undervalue) because it harks back to empire days and to the guilt about the empire". On the other hand, Ishiguro argues that "nostalgia is the emotional equivalent to idealism. You use memory to go back to a better place than the one you find yourself in" (qtd. in Mackenzie 10). The novel furnishes this memory of a previous era when depicting Shanghai's International Settlement, but also emphasizes amnesia: "Banks's growing amnesia, which arouses panic in him, is symptomatic of a generalised cultural amnesia regarding the British and European exploitation of China" (OATS 21). Instead of forgetting the past, the novel

proposes to incorporate the positive aspects of the past into the present, so that nostalgia can drive “us imaginatively to create a better world” (Mackenzie 10).

Unlike *An Artist* which had provoked a thoroughly positive reaction, *Orphans* was received with mixed reviews. Ishiguro’s fourth novel, *The Unconsoled*, had initially disappointed the critics, and, aware of the negative reviews, the novelist set out to try again creating the notebooks of celebrated detective Christopher Banks, born and raised in Shanghai until he is sent to England after the mysterious disappearance of first his father, and then his mother. While Michael Gorra from *The New York Times* describes the novel as Ishiguro’s “fullest achievement yet” (12), Michiko Kakutani finds the novel “disappointing” (7). Novelist Alice McDermott (1953) refer to the book as “by turns, brilliant and dull, absorbing and unfathomable, fascinating and a bit of a mess” (25).

Despite the differing reviews, readers mostly agree that the novel shares similarities with Ishiguro’s previous work. Gillian Harding-Russel highlights the recurrent theme of the search for truth: “The wonder of these tales is that the reader does not finally uncover the whole truth [...] as a sort of holy grail to be pursued and then known completely. And the narrative of this truth is never a straight line, nor even a serpentine one, but is found piecemeal, among the unstable memories of everyone concerned” (25).

There are many technical similarities with Ishiguro’s earlier works. Banks’s memory is unreliable like that of the earlier narrators. While he suppresses painful memories or lies to himself, he reveals himself to the reader. Shaffer examines the endings of Ishiguro’s earlier novels: “Banks, now fifty-three years old and rheumatic, is settling into late middle age and attempts to sum up his life. All of 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 or she would have us believed" (*Review of When We Were Orphans* 595).

One of the most important features in the novel is the reworking of the technique Ishiguro used in *The Unconsoled* (1995), which he calls "appropriation", where, as in a dream, other characters serve as projections of the protagonist's fears and desires. The negative reviews might have stemmed from the difficulty some readers find in negotiating this technique. However, this technique is not at the foreground of the novel as in *The Unconsoled*, and, because it is more realistic it makes it more difficult for readers to perceive it; as in Ono's case, it is subtler, and it takes a while for the reader to understand that there is a lot being left out of what is being said. While Banks's story appropriates Sir Cecil Medhurst's, Ryder's tale appropriates that of Brodsky. The failure to see that connection appears in reviews that attempt to separate the novel's mode into two. For example, novelist Benjamin Anastas (62) sees "profoundly mixed" results in the reconciliation of "the cloistered technique of his early works with the liberties of the *Unconsoled*.". Novelist Joyce Carol Oates (21) considers *When We Were Orphans* superior to *The Unconsoled*, since "the Kafkaesque compulsion to question, to puzzle over, to analyse is given a dramatic urgency that makes psychological sense, for Christopher Banks is an orphan who as a schoolboy is fascinated by the 'connectedness' that is taken for granted by his non-orphan classmates". This connectedness presented through the appropriation technique is a device that helps the reader to understand Ishiguro's work more thoroughly.

Similarly, novelist and biographer Andrew Barrow (15) regards Banks recollection of his charmed childhood in China as "extraordinarily seductive [...] precise, controlled, cautious". He describes the technique as narrative tricks: "New characters are slipped into the story by sleight of hand and readers are enticed into new sections with

rambling remarks” (44). Brian Bouldrey (5) also finds the way Ishiguro works with omissions productive: “Somehow, Ishiguro has achieved a disturbing balance between omission and intense, immediate action as seen through the wrong end of a telescope, where details, however complete, are misunderstood”.

Novelist and journalist Philip Hensher (11) sees Ishiguro’s virtues as architectural ones: “His timing and orchestration of events is practically unrivalled”. Despite his admiration for the structure of the novels, he believes that the failure of Ishiguro’s stories is not to provide “the particular concrete detail which pins down a scene to a locality and a time”, and that the lack of details makes Ishiguro a very non-Dickensian novelist, “for while Dickens reveals in details, for Ishiguro details are impeding and irrelevant”. Tova Reich (43) finds the omission of details problematic since the novel fails to describe “what the main character looks like or what he eats”. Hensher (11) also claims that the lack of phrasal verbs in the novel “gives his narrator a circumlocutious, cautious air which isn’t really helpful. More than that, it gives him a particular tone of voice which is not that of his social setting”. However, Beedham (126) sees a problem with Hensher’s review since he seems to confuse Ishiguro’s authorial voice with Banks’s narration.

Hensher’s criticism can be associated with one of the themes in the novel, the difficulty of being English, since, through his simplification, phrasal verbs are at the heart of English, and should be connected to Banks’s trouble being English, first in Shanghai and later in England: “Englishness — in fact, human interaction of all kinds — will remain for him a form of learned behaviour, in which he compounds the simulacrum of a character from both the gestures of the people around him and his reading in *The Wind in the Willows* (1908) or *Sherlock Holmes* (1892)” (Gorra 11). Consequently, Banks’s language emerges from his need to conform to society, which is an evidence of how “Ishiguro has been not deaf but bold in his gaucheish use of the (roleplay) of the time.

The reason he screwed it quite so tight is that Christopher is putting himself under the most deadly control” (McWilliam 4). James Woods (44) defines Banks’s language as one that “speaks to us — and thus the novel is written — in a style of English that seems, more even than in Ishiguro’s previous work, almost a spoof, something between a pastiche of Conan Doyle (1859-1930) and a parody of the kind of gossip, metropolitan, highly ‘English’ prose written by Anthony Powell (1905-2000)”. Woods (2000, p.45) translates that sort of language as an artificiality that shows Banks’s motivations and estrangement and that he uses “the artificiality of upper-class language to upholster his own artificiality”.

Banks’s character is further discussed below with some of the commentators of his work, in relation not only to similarities with Ono’s story, but also insofar as it presents similar elements to the other features of the characters depicted in Ishiguro’s novels.

## 5.2 Christopher Banks’s Character

Banks is a detective who cannot solve the great mysteries of life, even though he claims his primary mission in life to be fighting the great evil. Like Ono, he is entrapped in the delusional idea that he possesses a special position in society due to his detective abilities. Ono also possesses a very similar understanding of his work supporting the imperialist government, justifying his life through blindly serving the political elite, another parallel to Banks’s understanding of his important clients and important cases. The sense of being special is also explored in other novels: for example, Kathy H., in *Never Let Me Go* (2005), and her best friends believe they will have extra years of life on account of being students from Hailsham; the dutiful butler Stevens, in *The Remains of the Day* (1989),

proudly claims to be taking part in important historical events as he assists his Nazi employer. In order to come up with some sensible justification, they need to forget much of what is involved in their past choices, as James Woods explains:

It is typically the significance of absence, of what has been concealed or repressed. His complacent or muted unreliable narrators, like the painter Ono, in *An Artist of the Floating World*, or the butler Stevens, in *The Remains of the Day*, tell stories that mildly and self-servingly repress secrets, shameful compromises, and the wounds of the past. (Both of these narrators have reason to conceal or minimize their involvement with Fascist politics just before the Second World War.) Under this kind of pressure, blandness emerges as a traumatized truce, a colourless pact that holds the personal and historical present together at the cost of a sinful amnesia (44).

Banks also justifies himself by saying that he has become a highly skilled detective who will uncover the great mysteries of the world, whereas what the reader gets is a sense between the lines that he is leaving bits out, like Ono. Despite the childhood trauma of his father's and mother's disappearance, he does not connect his career choice to his unfortunate situation, nor his encounter with a detective at the time when his father went missing. Becoming a detective himself as an adult seems to be the way the protagonist finds of dealing with his loss and consoling himself, as if, in pursuing that, he might finally reencounter his father and mother, and through that process, become able to compensate for the traumatic absence he suffered.

Beedham (126) observes that, despite being a complex character, Christopher did not receive much attention at first, as reviewers emphasized his unreliability and inadequacies. Gorra (12) understands that, by describing Banks as a sort of "odd bird", Ishiguro "begins to orchestrate an ever-growing dissonance between the detective's own

judgments and those the book presents as normal.” Shaffer enhances the failures in marriages as a hint on Christopher’s unreliability:

It slowly emerges [...] that Banks’s golden childhood in Shanghai before the Japanese bombing campaign and before the mysterious disappearance of his parents was far less happy or stable than he would like (and like us) to believe. This is hinted not only in the hesitantly revealed facts about his parents’ less than ideal relationship but also in the details of the other marriages depicted in the novel, all of which are failures, and all of which, we come to understand, mirror that of Christopher’s parents. (Gorra 595-596)

His sense of self-confidence and status as he boasts at fighting the evil in the world is shaken by the time he is back in Shanghai. When the reader is most likely to become suspicious Banks suffers from delusions. William Sutcliffe (49) defines his unreliable quality as a “veneer of self-confidence (which) is paper-thin. Though Christopher never allows it to crack, Ishiguro’s hand lies confidently behind the text, showing us far more than our narrator thinks he has been shown”.

Woods offers a different focus on Banks’s difficulties by stressing his artificiality: “Christopher’s world seem to have been borrowed from an English novel, and this is surely Ishiguro’s intended effect. Christopher is producing a masquerade of a style that is already a something of a masquerade; he is not entirely real — not to himself, not to those who encounter him, and not to Ishiguro’s readers” (46). Moreover, Woods asserts that,

the goal is not to simply imply that “this kind of ‘Englishness’ does not exist, though the stability of the entity is certainly a casualty of his novel. It is more, I think, that he wants us to see Christopher as a man deformed by the effort of conformity — deformed into genre, into unreality, and if necessary, into falsehood. (46)

Barrow (46) agrees, describing Banks like other Ishiguro's heroes as "crippled by politeness, cursed with fear of doing something 'inappropriate' or 'unworthy'. On a superficial level, he admits to being 'quite fatigued' and 'somewhat overwrought' while underneath he remains confused and angry". Beedham (128) adds that this extreme motivation for conformity is associated with Banks's fixation with connections in society as a way out of the orphanage.

Reviewers have faced some difficulty in examining Banks due to the sudden change in tone, from the realist atmosphere in the first half, to the hallucinatory second half. The former resembles with the technique used in *A Pale View*, *An Artist* and *The Remains*, while the latter refers us back to the dreamy and unreal atmosphere in *The Unconsoled*, as Benjamin Anastas (62) explains: "It's one thing to create a fictional world with a skewed sense of logic, and quite another to change a novel's guiding force midstream. Banks is just-about-human one moment and shadow the next; his investigation is emptied of significance and becomes a novelist's lark". Maya Jaggi (8) highlights that, in the journey Christopher takes through the warrens in Shanghai, as an adult during the invasion of the Japanese in the Second Sino-Japanese war, there is a connection between landscape and psychological state, which "dramatizes Christopher's inner battle between perceived duty and the love he has momentarily allowed to lift a 'massive weight' from him". The passage caused controversy among the critics; for instance, Candia McWilliam (4) reads it as "the tightest and nearest description I have ever read of swarming hell", while Oats (21) describes it as a "protracted, dogged sequence [...] the weakest part of the novel".

The novels' ending is another sequence that provoked disagreement among the critics, some of which seem dubious; for instance, Alice McDermott's comment (26) on the undermining end in "the novel's denouement, Christopher is a parody of the detective

story's summarizing finale, (that) features a full confession by an all-by-moustache-twirling evildoer". Other readings seem to be frustrated by the fact that the ending does not offer a more positivist outcome, like for example James Francken's review (37), which laments that "Banks's mistakes [...] aren't shown to have had any consequences". Like McDermott, Whitaker (58) also misses the presence of a "pastiche detective genre", or perhaps "an attempt to illustrate the calm that flows from seeing 'through our missions to the end'", which is reflected into "a neatness of the resolutions (that) leave the ending rather flat and prosaic".

Contrary to the opinion that the ending was unsatisfactory and lacked a better resolution, Oats (21) offers another interpretation: "Christopher Banks is a public figure whose celebrity seems to be increasing, until, at the end of the novel, he is awakened from his deluded sense of mission. We last see him in old age, retired to private life, accepting his 'ordinary' status" [...] (It is a retirement) "with dignity, after having heroically struggled. If (Ishiguro's protagonists) don't succeed in solving the mysteries that confront them, they solve other, lesser mysteries". The sense of dignity also prevails at the end of *An Artist*, together with the sense of having to convince oneself of having accomplished something special in life. Although Oats understands that Banks had a real change in his status, one can never be sure whether this might have been truth or whether it is another delusion produced by his projected desires. What complicates these questions is the novelist's ironic take on the detective *genre* itself, which led to a variety of readings which attempted to place the novel within the English tradition of the hard-boiled detective novel, a question which will be addressed in the next section.

### 5.3 Detective Story?

A more productive review in relation to the detective genre is that of Gorra, which states that “this isn’t a detective genre, it only looks like one” (12), since it not only establishes conventions but also challenges them. He sees Christopher’s “bizarre belief in the ‘very best detectives’ [...] a typical Ishiguro tease”, a possible warning that the novel will not follow the detective genre. Barrow (44) also notes that “the final chapters may contain unexpected twists but there are no clues to ponder over and no descriptions of the great detective at work. In all Ishiguro’s novels, many events happen off-stage or between the lines”. Not surprisingly, many critics have described it as a new form of detective novel, or as some new hybrid form, “a curious amalgam of detective mystery, period romance, and fictional memoir” (McDermott 25).

The lack of details is one of the elements that distance the novel from the detective genre, and which places the structure closer to Ono’s narrative. Reviewers have pointed out that although the structure is like the notebooks of a detective (or personal journal), “what Christopher never does, in any detail, is close a case. Mostly this detective simply doesn’t detect” (Bouldry 5). Boyed Tonkins (12) informs that in an earlier version of the book, “Ishiguro devised a Golden-Age story-within-a-story to show the sleuth in cracking form. Then he ‘threw away about 110 finished pages’”. Gorra (12) comments on Christopher’s tone: “Our hero modestly alludes to such triumphs as ‘The Mannering case’ or the ‘Trevor Richardson affair’, allusions that, in proper Holmesian fashion, remain unencumbered by details. We never see him follow a case to what I am sure he would call its denouement”.

Although reviewers tend to perceive the lack of details as evidence of Banks having never closed a case, the omission seems to be related to leaving the conclusion open to the reader’s speculation, while also pointing to some insecurity regarding the

importance of the cases. Like Ono, who has a house he purchased at an auction, although maybe not due to his prestige as he claims, Banks may also have solved some cases, which did not turn out to be as famous as he claims.

Thus, Gorra (12) disagrees with the critics who attempt to categorize the novel as a parody of detective novels. He argues: “Ishiguro stops just short of parody, and though he won’t let his readers surrender to the genre, he doesn’t condescend to it either. By placing its clichés in Banks’s mind, Ishiguro makes their slight pomposity an essential part of the man’s character, a mark of both his limitations and of the psychic necessity that moves him”. The convention of detective novels falls apart as Banks is clueless about his own life, for example, regarding the detectives who came to investigate his father’s disappearance and who seem completely unrelated to his career choice; instead, he claims his goal as a detective is “to combat evil”.

There is a direct parallel with Ono’s joining the Nationalist Party. Ono and Banks both, believe they are fighting some dark force, be it some different ideology or supposed heinous crime, despite being blind to exactly what it represents; however, unlike Ono, who, at the beginning of the war, believes he should support the system against the emperor’s enemies, Banks never allows us to acknowledge what kind of crime he is fighting. However, Bouldrey explains that, although

Banks’s descriptions and immediate reflections on very important occurrences (are) faithfully and accurately rendered, (they are) never fully digested by an otherwise brilliant man. [...] (he) can find subtle patterns and piece together the conflicts that tear apart other lives, (but) he is astonishingly clueless about some obvious aspects of his own life. (5)

This is one of the most prevalent ironies in both novels. The ambiguity in Banks’s case is that: “The very skills that make him such a successful detective — his extraordinary

attention to detail, his unwillingness to distinguish between the incidental and the momentous, his childlike single-mindedness — lead him astray as he struggles to understand the tragedy that disrupted his childhood and the currents of his mind” (Charles 15)

Gorra (12) also notes that “Ishiguro’s real concern is with his main character’s unerring ability to miss the call of freedom, in the blindness that his sense of obligation imposes upon him”. Reich (2000, p.42) agrees, but highlights that the difference is in the fact that in *Orphans* Ishiguro portrays a detective who does not realize “the real case is himself, and its resolution involves self-knowledge”.

When preparing the novel, Ishiguro found that English detective novels from the 1930s were naïve in contrast to “the American hard-boiled tradition of the urban purgatory” (qtd. in Mackenzie 10) and that the “conventions of detective fiction are shown to be too neat: brilliant feats of detection don’t work in a wider, messier world” (Francken 37). For instance, “in a sleepy little Dorset village, the vicar has poisoned someone. And all that is required is for the detective to come along, go click, and everything is beautiful again. Everyone is happy, all the subplots are resolved” (Mackenzie 10). Ishiguro connects the detective novel to the historical period immediately after World War I: “The people who read those books in such great numbers had experienced darkness and evil in all its modern form. They knew better than we do the uncontainable aspects of evil” ( qtd. in Mackenzie 10). The Golden Age school of Agatha Christie (1890-1976) and Dorothy L. Sayers (1893-1957) represents the foundation of Banks’s belief “in the evil-genius theory of crime and disorder. Nail the culprit, and peace reigns again” (Tonkin 9). Kakutani (7) understands that such a structure is suggested at first pointing to the possibility of such a resolution: “Just as the detective story genre offers readers the consolation of an orderly narrative in which reason and

logic will triumph, so detective work offers Christopher the illusion that he is using his acumen to restore order to the world around him". As the story progresses, the faulty task of revealing meaning everywhere proves to be beyond a person: "The burden of that kind of vision is a weight of responsibility no man could endure. The disconnection between Banks's careful narration and his increasingly skewed interpretation of events creates a harrowing sense of tragedy that only the most extraordinary author could carry off" (Charles 15).

Like in *An Artist* and *Remains*, *Orphans* depicts "a man who thinks he has touched on the centre of important events, only to discover that the real sources of power lay elsewhere" (Charles 15). William Sutcliffe (49) points to the absurdity of the belief that one individual can change history. Moreover, in contrast to Banks's delusion that, as he solves his cases, he will be able to restore the order in the world, there is the passivity of the international community in Shanghai, which seems to hold an optimistic trust in Christopher's ability to resolve their situation, at least from what the detective infers. The colonial moral issues that Christopher's mother represents such as the complicity with Morganbrook and Byatt in the importation of opium into Shanghai, are reiterated by the failure of the international community to respond to the Japanese bombing of the Chinese sector of the city, having "its European elite clutching cocktails during the Japanese bombardment of the Chinese quarter as though watching a cricket match" (Jaggi 8). Jaggi reads the situation through postcolonial theories as she observes that Banks does not only feel guilty, but his feeling also reflects the guilt of England "which fuelled opium addiction as a matter of policy and abandoned the Chinese to Japanese invasion in their abject 'warren' dwellings" (8). Although the argument seems to read Christopher's narrative as reliable, which is one of the crucial problems in his mode of narration, the reading is plausible as the novel presents "a deft parable of colonial immoral earnings,

through a life built on tawdry spoils, ‘You see how the world really is — what made possible your comfortable life in England? Christopher is asked’ (8). The colonial references and the war context are further analyzed in the next section.

#### **5.4 From the Modern Realistic Shelter to Shattered Stories**

As the world becomes decentralized from its binary colonial political and economic truths, identities become fragmentary, allowing multiple voices to emerge in the narrator’s subjective memory. Alexander Bain (240) points to an interesting parallel between Ishiguro’s plot and the global historical scenario of chaotic wars, when expelled immigrants will become refugees if they are lucky enough or will be left to being politically and ethnically exterminated, “at the same time, economic globalization normally serves as a kind of substratum upon which developed nations and their citizens balance narratives of strategy and interest against those of ethics and obligation’, hence connecting far away crises and conflicts globally”, which seems symbolized in the space of the International Settlement. Moreover, Bain (242) observes that the novel was written during a period when Western countries and organizations failed to intervene in the Balkan, Somalian, and Rwandan crises, prompting “endless self-examination about values and interests”. The disruptive chaotic tensions of conflicts activate new disconnections, de-signifying and re-signifying what seems homogenous at an economic global level, since, in times of traumatic wars, meaning can easily be distorted, creating “schisms” or chaotic disconnections. Bain (241) also explains that in period of war periods the distortions of reality can be generated through manipulative discourses, for instance, those pseudo- humanitarian interventions performed by governmental

institutions like the United Nations and NATO. Said also draws attention to the fact that, from the late nineteenth century until the beginning of the twentieth century, there were “several revolutions, two world wars, and innumerable economic, political, and social changes (that) made the realities of 1945 an unmistakably, even cataclysmically, new object” (Said 106).

*Orphans* portrays a scenario which has been recurrent in a number of recent novels and films, in which there is a convergence between the globalized economy and the chaotic political and ethnical identities in struggle to survive a conflict. This novel can be schematized according to the following passage:

An impassioned citizen from a Western nation travels to a war-torn land for reasons that are, at least to the citizen, clearly defined. This citizen is armed with specialized professional competency and has a deep knowledge of the area which should allow for an effective but also thoughtful intervention. But, drawn into a politically opaque landscape in which no one is innocent, and no one can be trusted, the citizen is increasingly torn by competing demands that can't be satisfied, and by conflicting motives that can't be articulated. The result is cognitive breakdown, a rupture in habit which might presage some alteration in outlook or outcome. (Bain 241)

The scheme refers to the two key elements explored in the novel here: identity in relation to the reminiscings of Banks, who will develop an estranged vision of life when shaped in a world where values such as family, state and nation are crumbling, allowing repressed desires and traumas to emerge through the cracks (or schisms).

Hence, identities can be articulated in the interconnections of different remembered discourses that emerge from memories, be they individually or collectively generated, built in the middle of conflicting tensions, leading to the shattering of the

trusting positivist rational view of the world, like detective Christopher Banks's experience in Ishiguro's novel. What intensifies the problem of Banks's identifications is the double level of schisms, the cracks in his personal reminiscing as well as in the world at war.

Ishiguro plays with the fact that individual discourse is never fully reliable, allowing the contradictions and ambiguities to surface between what is being said and not said. Particularly in *Orphans*, Banks is also trying to find meaning in putting together his personal jigsaws as a detective. The contradictions are intensified since he moves in and out of Shanghai, London, Hong Kong and the countryside of England, and experiences the instability in the drawing of territorial lines among the empire and its colonies. The more intense the instability in Shanghai due to the war, the more intense the internal conflicts presented in Banks's narrative, which acquires an eerier tone in its increasingly disconnected approach to the events, reaching its murkiest passages when he crosses Shanghai during the Japanese attack. This might be the reason why the novel received some negative earlier reviews: particularly with regards to the way Ishiguro spins date and crosses time spans vertiginously.

Banks is out of the centralistic context, insofar as his experiences include the disintegration of his family, his homelands (Shanghai, London or somewhere else?), while he is caught within a new fragmented world. Bauman (*Identity* 24) claims that "once identity loses the social anchor that made it look 'natural', predetermined, and non-negotiable, 'identification' becomes ever more important for the individuals desperately seeking a 'we' to which they may bid to access".

The title establishes a connection between the past and the present in *When We Were* as well as with childhood in *Orphans*, which literally refers to children. According to Shaffer (*Review of When We Were Orphans* 596), this combination appeals to the

reader's emotions as a means of exploring "the awful burden of guilt that such children take on to correct or undo 'their orphaned states' and sees this guilt in characters' need to rescue' their parents and others [...] all, apparently, to no avail. In instance after instance, such attempts at rescue are 'betrayed'". Therefore, Christopher's memory of his childhood "is only the echo of a more universal 'chasing of the shadows of vanished parents', in which we all, in one way or another, engage" (Barrow 44). However, this child has a different set of tools: "Relying on the detective's tools of deduction and rationality, Banks tries to heal the wounds of his childhood" (Hartigan 637).

One of the greatest omissions in the novel lies in the pronoun "we", which suggests the presence of another or other orphans alongside Christopher. Banks never refers to that, "nor does the novel, in defiance of its title, really describe any moment when Christopher was an orphan: we see him as a happy child, and then as a successful adult. The time when he was 'an orphan' (at St. Dunstan's) is precisely the book's and presumably Christopher's painful lacuna" (Wood 48). The evidence can be found in the way Christopher refers to Akira's unhappy time at school (p.76), and Jennifer's time at St. Margaret's, which later unravels in her unhappiness (p.79-80), also associated with the difficulty of being English. Ishiguro explains the metaphor of orphans at a more universal level as a turning point in our lives, "that moment in our lives when we come out of the sheltered bubble of childhood and discover that the world is not that cosy place that we had previously been taught to believe" (qtd. in Wood 49). He adds that, "even when we become adults, something of this disappointment, I think, remains" (qtd. in Mackenzie 10).

The suggestive "we" may also indicate the urge of modern men to belong to a group. The verb in the past tense "were" installs the idea of a condition that is not real now, maybe expressing, on a universal metaphorical level, the condition of abandonment

human beings share, while they create mechanisms to repress and deny it; thus, the need to belong to a fatherland, a religion, a commune and so on. It is only in the last pages that Banks acknowledges the inexorable fact of the unavoidable abandonment that dwells in the human condition, as he seeks to come to terms with a present possible reality to be constructed yet; as he concludes at the end of his journey that “for those like us, our fate is to face the world as orphans, chasing through long years the shadow of vanished parents” (*When We Were Orphans* 335-336).

When a child in Shanghai, Christopher had to face two worlds, which include that within the walls of his colonial house, managed by his mother, who helps underclass people by promoting charity programmes as well as the outside poor neighbourhood surrounding the international settlements. His descriptions of the house mention the “grand stair case”, with a “gleaming banister rail following the curve of the stairs down to the spacious entrance hall” (*When We Were Orphans* 60). Nevertheless, the house was maintained by the company Morganbrook and Byatt, where his father worked. M&B is a company which, like other British companies, had engaged in illegal trade “by importing Indian opium into China in such massive quantities (that) had brought untold misery and degradation to a whole nation” (*When We Were Orphans* 61), according to Christopher’s mother’s claim, as she shames an inspector from the company when he comes to instruct her to get rid of her servants on the account that they lived in Shantung where “opium addiction [...] has now advanced to such deplorable levels that entire villages are to be found enslaved to the pipe” (61).

Said explains that the British were convinced of performing a good deed when they colonized the Orient. Hence it makes sense for Christopher’s father to engage in the British business that exploited the Chinese, selling opium and stimulating addiction. Said takes Marx’s perception of the British empire of enforcing social revolutions in Asia:

Karl Marx identified the notion of (what he called) an Asiatic economic system in [...] 1853 [...] with increasing conviction to the idea that even in destroying Asia, Britain was making possible there a real social revolution. Marx's style pushes us right up against the difficulty of reconciling our natural repugnance as fellow creatures to the sufferings of Orientals while their society is being violently transformed without the historical necessity of these transformations. (Said 154)

That seems to be the logic that Bank's father follows in Shanghai, insofar as he believes that their trade is indeed advancing the simplest, poor commerce in the area. Thus, while having their lives supported by the company, the Banks are caught in between the moral, social dilemma, of both perpetuating the economical impoverishment of the local community by the importation of opium and the labour-servant relations since the servants become addicted and slaves of masters. The irony underlies Christopher's mother's moral discourse in campaigning against the Chinese miserable social and economic conditions through charities and tea meetings. Nikolas Rose asserts that ,since the Victorian period, England had been defended the ideology of good morals; hence, virtue and the promotion of charity were representations of that, as he explains:

Victorian intellectuals were problematizing all sorts of aspects of social life in terms of moral character, threats to character, weakness of character and need to promote good character and arguing that the virtues of character— self-reliance, sobriety, independence, self-restraint, respectability, self-improvement— should be uncalculated in others through positive actions of the state and statesman [...] one sees the programmes for the reform of secular authority within the civil service, the apparatus of colonial rule and the organizations of industry and politics, in which the persona of the civil servant, the bureaucrat, the colonial governor will become the target of a whole new ethical regime disinterest, justice,

respect for rules, distinction between the performance of one's office and one's passion. (qtd. in Hall and duGay 140)

In those new forms of relation, they found meaning in altruism and philanthropic work as measures of one's good character, Christopher's mother being the embodiment of those qualities. The issue lies in the contradiction of her being supported by M&B, whose trade is maintaining poverty, addiction and economical dependence in China.

The British merchant companies in Shanghai, particularly those engaged and largely profiting from the opium trade, reduced the "bios" of the underclass to a pure "zoo", in Giorgio Agamben's words (21), that is, reduced their social identities, to an attribution of animal-like qualities. There is a dehumanized identity to the ones living outside the walls of Christopher's beautiful childhood home, a place which works as an alienating bubble from the real world. There is a distortion of reality, affecting both, the family's intimate life and the awareness of their social context in Shanghai.

This huge social and economic gap, between the privileged colonizer and the underprivileged colonized would be one of the dilemmas modern societies needed to address. While overcoming nationalist systems, and also guarantee minimal citizenship rights in the welfare states, governments would bear in mind what Bauman (qtd. in Hall and duGay 41-42) calls "the quandary of those thirty years of post war reconstruction", in other words, "how to achieve unity in (in spite of) difference and how to preserve difference in (in spite of) unity?" Homi Bhabha (qtd. in Hall and duGay 57) observes that the nation state had homogenized differences by mastering social time, through one measurement that reduced all temporalities into one time, producing a special binary between whole and partial societies, "one as the principle of the other's negation". Minorities are assumed to be a foreign body, an imposition from the outside, as well as a

disjunction inside the whole; hence the binary schisms imposed on colonies in the imperialist world.

Although Christopher lives at a time when identity is still very much determined by the productive role one performed in the social division of labour, his trajectory anticipates the posterior period when identities are not invested with that notion of nation-state anymore and they start the “floating and drifting in search of alternative havens” (*From Pilgrim to Tourist* 45).

In terms of novel genres, particularly in detective novels, this floating and drifting can be translated in the image of the city as a dangerous metropolitan labyrinth. For James Donald, the male character in this urban and metropolitan context usually cannot recognize himself in the image of the other he created for himself and has obsessively chased. He believes citizenship is a substancelessness, as he explains:

The citizen-subject has no identity [...] other than that produced by the law. [...] But it is the lack of primordial identity that produces the need for identification. [...] This fantasy structure of identification shows why citizenship inevitably becomes enmeshed with questions of national belonging and communal self-definition (qtd. in Hall and duGay 171, 176)

For instance, this substancelessness is portrayed in Christopher’s descriptions of Shanghai, while he anticipates the condition of “the exile of the thrust from the home where it dwelled for the most part of modern history” (*From Pilgrim to Tourist* 45). The more Christopher idealizes a home in a homeland, the more the reader is impacted by his social, familial and national displacements; they are constantly reinforced and escalate when his obsession with finding his parents ascends to the next schismatic level.

Banks is attempting to dominate his own history by means of dominating the history of the foreign land where his parents had lived. There is an implicit and explicit self-image of grandiosity in his actions, as he claims that, by solving the mystery of his origins, connected to his parents' disappearance in China, he will prevent the great evil, the unfolding of the great war. According to Said, that would be the kind of relationship the British empire had developed towards the colonies in the East, as he explains:

Knowledge means rising above immediacy, beyond self, into the foreign and distant. The object of such knowledge is inherently vulnerable to scrutiny; this object is a "fact" which, if it develops, changes, or otherwise transforms itself in the way that civilizations frequently do, nevertheless is fundamentally, even ontologically stable. To have such knowledge of such a thing is to dominate it, to have authority over it. And authority here means for "us" to deny autonomy to "it"—the Oriental country—since we know it and it exists, in a sense, as we know it. (Said 32)

From a colonial perspective, the colony is what the empire knows the colony to be; and what the colony knows is a fictitious autonomous and stable world. Banks follows the same logic: by tracking back to his past origins, he pursues a sort of re-colonization of his own history; through the acknowledgment of what happened in Shanghai concerning his parents he believes he will have all the pieces of the jigsaw, which should be enough to uncover the whole truth about his past. Concomitantly, he believes in the re-installment of a stable political and economic world as he heroically stops the war. The vectors of his logic move towards a dreamed stability through the re-enactment of the colonial stable ontology, the British occupation of a foreign territory. Meanwhile, there is also an aim at his dreamed internal domains which will be the result of his full mastering of his self-knowledge, what provokes an effect of strangeness in the reader, who can see the world

of the empires crumbling with wars, while Christopher clings to the positivist, cartesian belief. Said quotes a document by Lord Cromer, a representative of the British empire in the colonies in 1910, to illustrate the ideology that started to be perpetuated then:

The European is a close reasoner; his statements of fact are devoid of any ambiguity; he is a natural logician, albeit he may not have studied logic; he is by nature skeptical and requires proof before he can accept the truth of any proposition; his trained intelligence works like a piece of mechanism. The mind of the Oriental, on the other hand, like his picturesque streets, is eminently wanting in symmetry. His reasoning is of the most slipshod description [...] Orientals cannot walk on either a road or a pavement (their disordered minds fail to understand what the clever European grasps immediately, that roads and pavements are made for walking); Orientals are inveterate liars, they are "lethargic and suspicious," and in everything oppose the clarity, directness, and nobility of the Anglo-Saxon race. (qtd. in Said 38-39)

Once Banks is back in Shanghai as an adult he describes the city as an international area, where, irrespective of people's different backgrounds, they will behave similarly. Banks mentions a typical social practice of the city that irritates him: "the way people [...] seem determined at every opportunity to block one's view" (*When We Were Orphans* 63), assuming it is a custom that has grown up in Shanghai's International Settlement due to "all the national groups that make up the community here— English, Chinese, French, American, Japanese, Russian— (that) subscribe to this practice with equal zeal [...] cutting across all barriers of race and class" (163). He adds that such a custom was the cause of a "disorientation" which threatened him during his first days back in the city (164), and, although he believes that after a few days he will adapt to Shanghai's life, his story develops into actions and discoveries that are increasingly disorienting and his

narrative begins to gain a tone that increasingly depicts a mindset that seems on the edge of hallucination.

He narrates that, while crossing the city in search for his parents, in an unreal scenario of war, he met his childhood friend, Akira, now a soldier on duty, injured in the trenches. Soon, the gruesome scene escalates as he finds out that his father died of typhoid, while his mother was kidnapped by a warlord, Wang Ku, who had kept her as a sex slave for years, while being the true benefactor of Banks's own inheritance. His Uncle Philip, a close friend of his mother's, finally confesses that he helped Wang Ku take her since he lusted after her as vengeance for being rejected by her (316). Along with the surrealistic tone of plot depicting Banks's disorientation at this stage, on a political level the narrative also announces the subsequent increasing deregulation of the state government, portrayed in the story of this private detective dwelling in-between nation states, which are cohabitated by multiple nationalities, composing a picture of globalized territories, despite maintaining the roles of colonizer and colonized still alive. From another perspective, Christopher's orphanage seems to represent the disintegration of the family institution, which, according to Bauman (*Identity 2*), follows suit the nation-state decadence.

Although his childhood was spent in Shanghai, Banks is brought up in London. Oriental culture is equated with "the mysterious, profound and seminal" (Said 51), then Banks's origins are the translation of what the West interprets as Oriental. Said explains that,

this universal practice of designating in one's mind a familiar space which is "ours" and an unfamiliar space beyond "ours" which is "theirs" is a way of making geographical distinctions that can be entirely arbitrary. [...] The geographic boundaries accompany the social, ethnic, and cultural ones in expected ways. Yet

often the sense in which someone feels himself to be not-foreign is based on a very unrigorous idea of what is "out there," beyond one's own territory. All kinds of suppositions, associations, and fictions appear to crowd the un-familiar space outside one's own. (54)

Hence, Banks's family is the source of his most profound mystery, which he hopes to conquer by revealing the absolute, concrete and primary truth concerning his parents' disappearance. Ishiguro also approaches the issue of an imagined stable ontological origin of the individual in his novel *Never Let Me Go* (2005), in which he describes clones who believe they have their "originals" living out there in the world. Since they are not "created" from a parental couple, they assume there must be another source of an origin for them. The fantasy goes further, as they believe their originals will be found on the premise of some shared traits of personality. Similarly, Banks embarks on a journey to find his seminal origin, a place he reserves to his parents' mysterious disappearance located in Shanghai. Conversely, in certain passages he manifests a certain disagreement with the seminal ideal of Englishness by affecting an exaggerated politeness and usage of words that cause estrangement since they sound out of place, or time, generating an underlying foreigner's voice, like Ono's translationese discourse, displacing him out of such Englishness. After all, if his parents are Chinese how could he be an Englishman? Yet, the image of his parents, and, by extension, his origin becomes ever more phantasmagoric as he approaches the end of the story, an ideal never reached as he finishes his narrative with open conclusions upon his chasing the ghosts of his parents, leaving him with the feeling that what he pursued in his life was not real. This is one of the most painful ironies Christopher faces, which are enhanced by other double ironies, which are discussed below.

### 5.5 The Ironic Doubleness

According to Ringrose (qtd. in Groes and Lewis 171-172), Christopher's triumphs are haunted by disaster and humiliation, which requires an open reading as ironic contradictions maintain the uncertainties concerning the limits of knowledge in the modern world. The critics have found it difficult to analyse the contradictory elements, for instance, the disorienting combination of fame and failure when Banks claims that his "first public triumph was a heady one [...] invitations poured in from entirely new sources (*When We Were Orphans* 19), as opposed to when his Uncle Phillip dismisses his life endeavour by saying "A Detective! What good is that to anyone?" (*When We Were Orphans* 294). Moreover, what those triumphs refer to is never made explicit, And nor is the oddity of a solitary and isolated hero who claims that he and Sarah, the woman he cares for, "understand each other's concern instinctively (310). Ishiguro tests the reader's capacity for double reading, which recalls the work of Kierkegaard (326) who maintained that science without doubt is not possible. The difficulty is to understand if stability ever takes the place of ironies in this novel.

Like Ono's reminiscing, Christopher's memories cannot be fully apprehended, which causes the unreliability of his narrative, even more intense, due to his self-deluded perspective. Katherine Stanton (79) compares Banks to butler Stevens in *The Remains of the Day* (1989) as "yet another study of a painfully deluded character who allows his work (and his childhood traumas) to sabotage any chance he has for love and romance, and thus for a truly meaningful life". But, for her, the crucial encounter happens in Part Six when Banks meets Akira and is concerned with his childhood best friend's fate, since he has fallen to the hands of the Japanese soldiers and is regarded as a traitor. Banks asks if he can see him again, which Stanton (80) understands as "a brave extension of his

willingness to differently imagine his attachments” and a “counterpoint to the extremist nationalism of the Japanese officer”, who compares Japan’s imperial ambitions to those of England in the nineteenth century.

Brian Finney, like other commentators, observes that there is a parallel between Ishiguro’s strategy to break free from conventional realism and his representation of Shanghai as an imperial centre transformed into a battleground:

Banks’s journey through the inferno of the Japanese-Chinese warfront is both a personal rite of passage and a vivid confrontation with the death and destruction produced by the commercialism and imperialism of the industrial nations prior to the War, death that inevitably adds heavily to the number of children left orphaned. Just as Banks’s protected childhood was bought at the price of his mother’s servitude to a Chinese warlord, so the protected and privileged existence of the wealthy community living in the International Settlement was brought at the cost of widespread opium addiction and poverty among the Chinese population [...] Banks, like Ishiguro, is a transnational torn between two countries and cultures. (26-27)

Keeping in mind such extremely unstable grounds, Banks’s reflections towards the end of the narrative cannot be taken as stable either. Therefore, the openness that permeates his thoughts when he says, “our fate is to face the world as orphans, chasing through long years the shadows of vanished parents” (*When We Were Orphans* 303), cannot be read as the confirmation of a wasted life, the result of Bank’s (or the West’s) failure. Ringrose (qtd. in Groes and Lewis 173) considers the novel to be both under-determined and over-determined, and that, in order to have its ironies unveiled an analysis of genre and parody is appropriate. The origin of the detective novel in imperial Victorian Britain and its fragmentation in the postcolonial era, allows *Orphans* to reposition at the centre of its

plot the deconstruction of the myth of Englishness. From that perspective, Uncle Phillip's dismissal of the sacrifice of Christopher's mother functions as a marker of the end of the Colonial dream when he says: "Your mother, she wanted you to live in your enchanted world forever. But it's impossible. In the end it has to shatter. It's a miracle it survived so long" (*When We Were Orphans* 294). Nevertheless, the irony is that Christopher's world in England is far from being depicted as secure and settled, and the ironic doubleness lies in the way the novel demystifies the figure of the English detective and English crime fiction. Hence, any reference to the details about the cases is omitted and the reader is left without any evidence of what might have made Banks famous.

In the vivid nightmare Banks experiences as he journeys through the ruins of Shanghai battle zone, he holds up his magnifying glass to examine the exposed bone of a dead Chinese woman whose "stump looked peculiarly clean" (*When We Were Orphans* 272). Ishiguro explains that "he had this magnifying glass, and he would investigate high society crimes. By the end (he is) doing the same thing in war zones trying to find out who the murderer is" (qtd. in Holmes 24).

Repetition and irony reveal the author's world perspective, be it verbal, situational or dramatic, in order to make what remains in silence, as Claire Colebrook explains:

Dramatic, cosmic and tragic irony are ways of thinking about the relation between human intent and contrary outcomes. This sense of irony is related to verbal irony in that both share a notion of meaning or intent beyond what we manifestly say or intend. In dramatic and cosmic irony the other meaning is plot or destiny. In verbal irony the other meaning is either what the speaker intends or what the hearer understands; but how do we know what this other meaning is? (15)

Christopher is too concerned with convincing the reader of his harmonic social relations and of being at home. When the book opens with Christopher, newly graduated from

Cambridge, he invites James Osbourne to his recently acquired flat in Kensington, which is furnished with “an ageing sofa as well as two snug chairs, an antique sideboard and an oak bookcase filled with crumbling encyclopaedias— all of which I was convinced would win the approval of any visitor” (*When We Were Orphans* 4). Ringrose (qtd. in Groes and Lewis 175) keenly notes that the word “convinced” is not persuasive and that his tone is slightly stilted. For example, when Osbourne arrives, he remembers: “we spent a little time discussing the activities of the workers’ union, before embarking on a long and enjoyable debate on German philosophy, which enabled us to display to one another the intellectual prowess we each had gained at our respective universities” (*When We Were Orphans* 4). Not only does the description of a pleasurable intellectual conversation sounds over the top, but also the ambiguities of his relationship to Osbourne starts to surface. After his friend leaves, Banks mentions he is offended by Osbourne because of “his casual judgment that I had been ‘such an odd bird at school’” (7). He then presents a counterpoint to that view: “In fact, it has always been a puzzle to me that Osbourne should have said a thing of me that morning, since my own memory is that I blended perfectly into English school life” (7). As if his claims of a perfect place were not enough, he goes on to state that he did nothing to cause himself embarrassment, and endorses it by describing the way he noticed and copied a mannerism the boys had adopted, “tucking the right hand into a waist-coat pocket and moving the left shoulder up and down in a kind of shrug to underline certain of their remarks” (7). Stanton (80) claims that such a voice denounces the “orphaned”, displaced Christopher, as “a mimic man” who, despite his efforts, “has never really felt at home”. However, Ringrose points out that,

That may not be a bad thing. For (Ishiguro) ethical life is characterized by a contest between the desire to play out a role and the inability of roles to contain identity—hence the mixture of self-assertion and vulnerability that generates

verbal irony [...] the limitations of Banks's (and Ono's) self-perceptions [...] represent not resting points but starting points for further irony, some of which may undermine the reader's confidence in his or her original judgments (qtd. in Groes and Lewis 175)

A similar sense is conveyed in the way Ono expresses his relationship with his students. In one passage he describes his pre-war drinking gathering with his students at the Migi-Hidari Bar, which, "unlike any of its neighbours, was a large sprawling place with an upper floor and plenty of hostesses both in Western and traditional dress" (*An Artist of the Floating World* 24). Ringrose (qtd. in Groes and Lewis 174-175) observes that the nuances in this episode stem from Ono's concern for his status within the male group, which is revealed as he offers stock phrases to reassure and reaffirm their established meanings. This might indicate that he is aware of how the hearer might perceive something else, like a complacent and snobbish tone to his self-justification.

The shift in perspective that irony brings arises "from the insight that human existence is at once unbearably heavy and ultra-light; full of significance and yet pretty insignificant" (Carlisle 83). Beyond verbal irony, Ringrose explains that Christopher's journey is permeated with structural irony, demonstrated through,

the detective whom we never see solving a crime or puzzle (Banks); the lover who forgets his beloved and leaves her stranded when he should be running away with her (Banks and Sarah Hemmings); the man who seeks to rescue his parents, but who has already been rescued by his mother (Banks again); the Englishman who is never 'at home' in England (Banks); the ethically driven interventions in world history that peter out into insignificance (those of Sir Cecil Medhurst and Banks himself); the life-blighting mystery that is resolved in five minutes of relations (from 'Uncle Phillip'); the forgiveness for a crime that was never committed (Banks's mother Diana Banks); the celebrity who is both mocked and

admired (Banks); the disaster that becomes a (minor) triumph (the trip to Shanghai in 1937); and the self-esteem that is corroded by doubt. (qtd. in Groes and Lewis 176-177)

In Chapter 22, Uncle Phillip reveals the mysteries surrounding Christopher's life in stories that comprise violence and raw sexuality and desire that had been repressed throughout Christopher's narration. During the conversation, Christopher says he believes his father stood up to his employers concerning the profits from the opium trade (p.306), but Uncle Phillip reveals that his father ran off with his lover and died of typhoid in Singapore two years later. When Christopher enquires about his mother, Uncle Phillip wants to know if the detective has any information, to which he responds: "I was until recently under the impression both my parents were being held captive in Chapei. So you see, I have not been so clever" (*When We Were Orphans* 308). He learns that Wang Ku, "one of the most powerful of these bandit lords" (309), who had armies to see the opium shipments through, decides despite a deal "to seize the opium shipments himself" (310). His mother "struck him lightly" and "said everything she had to say to his face" (310). Because she had insulted Wang Ku, she was then made a slave to serve as a concubine in Hunan province, where she gets whipped in front of his guests since he enjoyed "taming the white woman" (311), concomitantly providing the money for Banks's education. Uncle Phillip colluded in his mother's abduction as he desired her but felt unable to propose after Banks's father's departure since Diana saw him as a decent man. Uncle Phillip shows a perverse nature and even declares that the idea of his mother being "conquered" excited him; it gave him pleasure to imagine "what was happening to her" (316). At that point, Bank's relation to his childhood figures is redefined radically.

Colonial and financial powers also prove to be behind Christopher's orphanage. The opium trade promoted by the British derived from the fact that they were interested

in driving the Chinese into chaos. The trade was controlled by warlords like Wang Ku and opposed by Diana Banks on ethical and political grounds. But it also provided funds for Christopher's upbringing while driving his father away from his mother. The control of the trade is a force that pushed Christopher to become an orphan. Cunningham (4-6) and Sim (224) have also demonstrated that the plot of the narrative replays the plot of Dickens's *Great Expectations* (1861), with Wang Ku playing the Magwitch role of hidden benefactor to Banks's Pip. But, Ringrose argues that Pip did not have to face the fact that his mother was being raped and was the object in a "bizarre and brutal version of the Oedipal triangle involving three father-competitors" (qtd. in Groes and Lewis 177).

Ishiguro depicts war and how it resides at the roots of civilization, human aggressiveness and perversion, which is also present at the core of Banks's mother's outcomes as she is sold, enslaved and raped because of the actions of uncle Phillip, who had lived near the Banks's house, but had not been able to gain Christopher's mother's attention, so that his frustrated sexual desires result in to the most violent actions. In terms of war Freud asserts that,

the element of truth behind all this, which people are so ready to disavow, is that men are not gentle creatures who want to be loved, and who at the most can defend themselves if they are attacked; they are, on the contrary, creatures among whose instinctual endowments is to be reckoned a powerful share of aggressiveness. As a result, their neighbour is for them not only a potential helper or sexual object, but also someone who tempts them to satisfy their aggressiveness, to exploit his capacity for work without compensation, to use him sexually without consent, to seize his possessions, to humiliate him, to cause him pain, to torture and to kill him. (*Civilization and Its Discontents* 61)

Uncle Phillip ultimately embodies all the untamed aggressiveness unleashed in the world of war: “It is clearly not easy for men to give up the satisfaction of this inclination to aggression. They do not feel comfortable without it. [...] It is always possible to bind together a considerable number of people in love, so long as there are other people left over to receive the manifestation of aggressiveness” (*Civilization and Its Discontents* 61). The extreme aggressiveness in the world outside is also present in the sadism Uncle Phillip and the warlord, Wang Ku show. Furthermore, Freud (*Civilization and Its Discontents* 68) observed that “It is in sadism, where the death instinct twists the erotic aim in its own sense and yet at the same time fully satisfy the erotic urge, that we succeeded in obtaining the clearest insight into its nature and its relation to Eros [...] with the narcissist wish of omnipotence”

What the Judaic-Christian world has denied throughout the development of civilization is the fact that, along with the drive to bond and love, mankind has always had to deal with an inborn drive towards destruction and self-destruction (*Civilization and Its Discontents* 89), ambiguous traits that Ishiguro depicts not only in the war contexts of both novels, but also in the inherent violence, aggressiveness and perversions of some of the characters.

When Banks comes face to face with the truth, it is too late to change anything or to save anyone. His journey has not ended yet, but it will be a very different one after the brutal revelations surrounding the betrayal of Uncle Phillip. He never marries, even though at the end of the book his adopted daughter, Jennifer, asks: “How about you getting married? [...] You’re always mentioning your lady friends” (*When We Were Orphans* 309), to which he replies: “Definitely, too late for that”. [...] There was someone once. Back then. But that went the way of everything else. [...] My great vocation got in the way of quite a lot, all in all” (*When We Were Orphans* 331).

Nevertheless, women play a significant role in his life, despite his ironic apologies to them all for letting them down. His mother is the object of his love as a child, then becomes the brave woman raising an only child, who will be turned into a sexual object in Uncle Phillip's narrative. In the end he finds her in a nursing home in Hong Kong, suffering from dementia, and when he first says: "Mother, [...] 'it's me. I've come from England. I'm really very sorry it's taken so long. I realize I've let you down badly. Very badly. I tried my utmost, but you see, in the end, it proved beyond me. I realize this is hopelessly late'" (327). As she seems not to recognize him, he attempts to trigger her memory by saying that he is Puffin, his childhood nickname, which she repeats while saying: "That boy. He's such a worry to me" (327).

The second apology is made to Jennifer: "I should have done more for you, Jenny. I'm sorry. [...] When you were growing up. I should have been there with you more. But I was too busy, trying to solve the world's problems. I should have done a lot more for you than I did. I'm sorry. There. Always meant to say it" (331). Lady Breton had introduced Jennifer to him in the hope that he would take in the poor orphaned girls who "so misses England" (129), to which his first reaction was to "recoil with a look of suspicion" (129). Later the adoption is settled willingly and so is his decision to leave her behind when he leaves for Shanghai.

Ringrose (qtd. in Groes and Lewis 178) observes that, when Christopher decides to leave Jennifer, there are three conversations that undermines Banks's self-esteem. The first is when the Somerset police inspector and Banks agree that the case of child murders is dreadful, but there is "even a more ghastly" truth that makes them feel like they are facing "the darkness" (*When We Were Orphans* 135). What they are investigating is not revealed, which might imply sexual abuse or that other children committed the murder, or that family members were involved. Banks quotes Akira on "holding strong" but finds

the tone of the policeman accusatory when he demands that Banks should use his status to go to “the heart of the serpent” and attack the evil (135). The second is during the turbulent encounter with Canon Moorly at the Royal Geographical Society when she says Christopher should be the first to understand that at the heart of the modern crisis of the 1930’s is Shanghai, spreading “its poison over the years further across the world, right through our civilization” (138). The poison may be symbolic of the various levels of confrontation between what they see as “we”, the Westerns and “the other”, the Chinese. For instance, more concretely opium addiction or else more connotatively, a corrupted culture might be the source of the poison. The third exchange occurs at the Draycoats’ wedding, when a red-faced man, brother to the groom, becomes scandalized at the treatment Banks is receiving from some of the guests as he says: “It’s barbaric behaviour. You’re a guest, just as they are, and if they can’t be civil, they’ll have to go (149). Although what offence has been perpetrated is not revealed, Christopher connects it with some uncomfortable feelings, that, “in departing to Shanghai and ‘the challenge of [his] responsibility’ (149), Banks will be abandoning and betraying young Jennifer” (qtd. in Groes and Lewis 179). The ironic doubleness lies in Banks assuming responsibility for his past as he decides to solve his family mystery and save the world from the “great evil”; while Jennifer is left orphaned in a bachelor establishment, which can be analyzed as both a selfish and humane act. He can never succeed as his attempts are surrounded by a sense of failure. However, when he meets his mother, she offers him some consolation despite her lapsed memory. Jennifer also says to him, “I owe you everything” (*When We Were Orphans* 308), when he is appointed to a special position of uncle to all her future children (309) due to her fragile condition. Ringrose detects a rich irony at the end, as he sees that they both become “two ruined people clinging together and lying to each other”, but “touched by tenderness” (qtd. in Groes and Lewis 179-180).

As in *The Remains*, when Stevens is obsessed but reticent about Miss Kenton, Banks's relationship to Sarah Hemmings, who asks him to run away with her, will not be resolved, giving the tone of sacrifice in relation to the third significant woman in his life. If at first, he feels inclined to accept her when she says, "We could go to South America, run away like thieves in the night. Wouldn't that be fun? (*When We Were Orphans* 212)", and he responds unenthusiastically "yes, I'll go with you. I'll go with you, we'll do as you say. Yes, you might be right (214)", her solution will be perceived as an offer of escape in the end. As he repeats his acceptance three times he also refers to the situation three times as he experiences some vertigo when he comes out into "the light and fresh air after being trapped in a dark chamber" (212); he says he could feel a "massive weight" lifting from him (214); and it was as if a "heavy burden" had been removed (215). Finally, the delusional escapade will be turned down, as he decides to go after his mother and then back to Jennifer. In the last lines of the novel, when he is back in London he says will give some thought to Jennifer's invitation for him to stay with her in the country, despite believing that London has become home (313). Ringrose asserts that he,

Seems aware that his contentment could be seen as smug, but in seeing either London or Jennifer's place in the country 'as home', he is surely deceiving himself: he is the perpetual exile and orphan who has no home except childhood memories [...] On a deeper level of irony, however, the ending remains characteristic of the gaps in the text that cannot be closed. Here they exist as the gap between affection and bonding with Jennifer, and the emotional needs that the relationship cannot quite fulfil; and the gap between resignation to living out one's life in certain places, and the need to be at home, fully and intuitively (qtd. in Groes and Lewis 182).

The end of the novel is open to ironical readings, which resides in the contradictions of a narrative concerned with historical forces, while Banks presents his fate as that of an orphan who has learned through hardship that his insights did not reveal things as they were.

The aim of the following section is to approach how these ironies function in the narrative from the angle of the blurred projections between children and adults, which present similar inversions to those present in *An Artist*.

### **5.5 Infantilization II: Children and Parents in *When We Were Orphans***

The children in Ishiguro's fiction can frequently take the place of the troubled projections of the traumatized adult characters. There is an inversion of roles: while his children often behave in an adult manner, his adults often behave like children when confronted with a traumatic experience. For example, when Banks uses his magnifying glasses to examine a Chinese woman's leg that has been blown off, he acts like his instrument has magical power. He seems to be regressing to childish behaviour triggered by the self-defence mechanisms human beings are equipped with, since looking at part of a destroyed limb can be easier than looking at the human being in front of him, despite the sheer distortion.

Banks is simultaneously a man and a child in the narrative. There is a shift between Part One where his narrative is more realistic and Part Two. Ishiguro describes his writing process:

What I was trying to do is to paint a picture of what the world might look like if it ran according to the less rational emotional logic that we often carry within us [...] when Christopher Banks goes around declaring his parents must be holed up

somewhere, even after all these years, and he must free them, and this is the most important crucial thing in stopping the war, people don't do a double take. Because he still lives in the childhood vision of the world that's frozen since the time that he lost his parents when he was a little boy, it's remained arrested at that point and now it's applied to the adult world that he encounters. (qtd. in *Kazuo Ishiguro* 89)

Freud argues that our judgment is always concerned with what can be affirmed and what can be disputed. Thus, the pleasure-ego tries to introject what is perceived as good and rejects the bad at first; nonetheless, as the reality-ego develops, the issues become something else:

the subject-matter of the repressed image or thought can make its way into consciousness on condition that it is denied. Negation is a way of taking account of what is repressed; indeed, it is actually a removal of the repression, though not, of course, an acceptance of what is repressed. [...] The result is a kind of intellectual acceptance of what is repressed, though in all essentials the repression persists. [...] whether something which is present in the ego as an image can also be rediscovered in perception (that is, in reality) [...] The reproduction of a perception as an image is not always a faithful one; it can be modified by omissions or by the fusion of a number of elements. The process for testing the thing's reality must then investigate the extent of these distortions. But it is evident that an essential pre-condition for the institution of the function for testing reality is that objects shall have been lost which have formerly afforded real satisfaction. (qtd. in *General Psychology Theory* 219-20)

Such distortions appear emphatically in Banks's narrative not only because of memory but also because he clings to an idealized life of childhood or as Ishiguro puts it, is arrested by it. Among other reasons, Freud also approaches denial and evasion as a

consequence of the nature of human life: “Life, as we find it, is too hard for us; it brings us too many pains, disappointments and impossible tasks. In order to bear it we cannot dispense with palliative measures” (*Civilization and Its Discontents* 22). One of these measures he examines is “powerful deflections” (22), through means that make it possible for the person to negotiate one’s survival in the face of impossible tasks. In Ono’s case, the irony lies in the fact that despite seeking a sense of belonging and placement in order to survive nationalism he is left a virtual orphan like Banks, in the wake of war: he loses both his wife and his son to the war as well as a sense of belonging to the nation. Readers have found in Ono’s silence regarding his losses proof of his manipulation of his narrative, an argument always linked to the prism of memory; thus, the fluidity of his narrative might include manipulation, though not consciously. The overbearing pain for the loss of both wife and son may be one of the reasons for Ono avoiding discussions beyond the brief mentioning of it. He uses evasion and denial as a mechanism of defence (a palliative mechanism) against his painful experiences. Banks uses his intellectual job as a detective to deflect his own disappointments and the painful losses he cannot deal with. The infantile belief in the power of detectives to solve the world’s problems and in his own power to rescue his parents functions as a “protective bubble”; Banks clings to that denial as he moves on throughout a period of turmoil only to find out the raw truth about his parents. After he meets his mother, for just a brief last second as she is only able to articulate “Puffin” before returning to her fragile mental state, Banks cannot delude himself about his great power to change what life is. However, both protagonists, in evading their sense of guilt, are also displaying “the ambivalence, of the eternal struggle between Eros and the instinct of destruction or death” once the sense of guilt is “the most important problem in the development of civilization and [...] the price we pay for our advance in civilization is a loss of happiness through the heightening of the sense of guilt”

(*Civilization and Its Discontents* 79-81). Ono and Banks go from a naïve state, believing they are amongst the good people of their societies, to ultimately questioning the ethical decisions they endorsed and while they are unable to burst their fantasy bubble, they remain infantilised.

According to Freud, the source of unhappiness, which is more common than happiness, threatens us from three directions: “from our own body, which is doomed to decay and dissolution and which cannot do without pain and anxiety as warning signals; from the external world, which may rage against us with overwhelming and merciless forces of destruction; and finally, from our relations to other men” (*Civilization and Its Discontents* 24). Both protagonists display their unhappiness in all three aspects: Christopher is reaching middle age while Ono is an ageing man; they have both experienced two of the most destructive wars and they both feel displaced, are odd birds, in many of their social and personal relations. Ono’s displacement is associated with his nationalist history at a social level and with his aging at a personal level; he feels that his Japanese identity make it impossible for him to connect with other younger Japanese after the war. Christopher feels awkward in England as he claims to be aware of a different manner in the way he communicates that attracts people’s attention; on a personal level, he has lost his parents at an early age, then he adopts Jennifer but does not stay around just as he does not continue relations with Sarah; and finally, he discovers the sadistic experiences that his mother was put through. At that point, when he says that we spend life chasing ghosts, he seems to understand that he has denied reality; he has spent his life believing he could,

recreate the world, to build up in its stead another world in which its most unbearable features are eliminated and replaced by others that are in conformity with one’s own wishes. [...] A special importance attaches to the case in which

this attempt to procure a certainty of happiness and a protection against suffering through a delusional remoulding of reality is made by a considerable number of people in common. The religions of mankind must be classed among the mass-delusions of this kind. No one, needless to say, who shares a delusion ever recognizes it as such. (*Civilization and Its Discontents* 28)

Religious behaviours are portrayed in both narrator's cases. While Banks finds meaning in searching clues that will in turn be responsible for unveiling a perfect post-war world of redemption, Ono attaches himself to the mass-religious behaviour of both the imperialist and fascist movements of his life time; somehow both men are ambiguously exposed to and protected from the war atrocities they experience— Banks is on the war front but protected in the International Settlement, while Ono finds protection in the very party that supports the war, which is the stage for great losses he cannot approach verbally, probably because he finds trouble in working through the mourning for his wife and son. Both protagonists find consolation in delusions that are, at least partially, endorsed by their own social contexts. Banks's compulsions are similar to Ono's: they both want to be freed from doubt and each one finds that through order, be it aesthetic or intellectual, which "is a kind of compulsion to repeat which, when a regulation has been laid down once and for all, decides when, where and how a thing shall be done, so that in every similar circumstance one is spared hesitation and indecision" (*Civilization and Its Discontents* 40).

The stressful double bind in which Banks's family were entangled while in Shanghai also triggers Banks's disturbed psychological state. Double bind is a term used in psychology, but which was coined by the anthropologist Gregory Bateson to describe "social interactions in which the individual is repeatedly exposed to conflicting injunctions, without having the opportunity to adequately respond to those injunctions, or

to ignore them” (Koopmans 1). The impact of how contradictory information is received by a person within a family is a double bind, but, in *Orphans*, the relationship between the imperialist company Morganbrook and Byatt and the local people of Shanghai is also a kind of double bind relationship.

Webley explains that Imperial capitalism explores contradictions on a psychological, economic, political, and cultural level, causing a schizophrenic effect upon private and public life. To relieve or resolve such pressures, Banks pursues a career that may be his redemption in the most important puzzle-solving he wishes to achieve in his life, and yet the detective masks the true nature of his problems. As he recalls his childhood he explains how he came to the decision of becoming a detective. His childhood memories are more extended and vivid if compared to other characters from Ishiguro’s novels (qtd. in Groes and Lewis 184).

The colonial house where Banks’s family lived is described as “a huge edifice with numerous wings and trellised balconies” (*When We Were Orphans* 51), where he played with his Japanese friend Akira in the perfect garden with elm trees. It is the picture of colonial abundance and of a childhood safe home detached from the external harsh reality of the city outside the International Settlement, where slums are crowded with Chinese factory workers.

Despite the first picture presented, Banks remembers that the house did not belong to them, as it “was the property of Morganbrook and Byatt, which meant that there were many ornaments and pictures around the place I was forbidden to touch” (p.51). His father is a professional servant who depends on the whims of the trading company. The invasion of corporate life into the values of their family discuss the issues concerning professional identity, a theme Ishiguro also explores in *An Artist* and *The Remains*. The cultural power

structure shapes Banks's development insofar as he maintains his world view informed by his childhood experiences.

Morganbrook and Byatt exploits the addiction of the local population through their legitimate opium trade from India, a product distributed with the aid of local warlords. The British have indeed a long history of "such exploitation stretching back to the so-called Opium Wars of 1839 and 1858. It is estimated that by 1890 a quarter of the entire Chinese population were addicts" (qtd. in Groes and Lewis 186).

The no-win situation that the company inflicts on the local population becomes evident when a "health inspector" calls on them with the duty of checking on also the state of the furniture and the house as well as on the family and domestic staff condition since they are property of Morganbrook and Byatt. He recommends to Christopher's mother that they should let the servants go, not only on account of their dubious hygiene and health practices but also because they might have become thieves due to their possible addiction to opium. The people from Shantung were addicted to the drug thanks to the company, an arm of British imperialism, who introduced the trade that forced many into cheap labour, and, since they were lacking money, some stole from their employers; once fired they went back to opium as an escape from the endless cycle.

Christopher's mother asserts that the company "not only liked the profits very much, they actually wanted the Chinese to be useless. They liked them to be in chaos, drug-addicted, unable to govern themselves properly. That way the country could be run virtually like a colony, but with none of the usual obligations" (*When We Were Orphans* 288). This double bind is the backdrop to Banks's childhood, who, even as a boy, is experiencing the consequences of such a political and social environment. The conflicting interests are expressed in a discourse of exploitation that "must not be seen as such. It

must be seen as benevolence. Persecution preferably should not need to be invalidated as the figment of a paranoid imagination, it should be experienced as kindness” (Laing 49).

The political situation drives Banks’s parents to the point where Banks is excluded and marginalized. As a result, his priorities in adult life revolve around the trauma of losing his central position as an only child in his family and as the son of a supposed colonizer in Shanghai. He is doomed to keep chasing his lost parents instead of developing new integrated bonds in adulthood.

Christopher’s mother is put in a difficult situation since she must choose between remaining loyal to her husband and betraying him in the name of her Christian values, which will drive her not only into protesting to the health inspector but also to start organizing luncheons for the wives of other employees to address the issue of Morganbrook and Byatt’s activities. The meetings defy Banks’s father’s position as an employee of the company. Christopher remembers their arguments in the dining room when his mother shames her husband: “How can your conscience rest while you owe your existence to such an ungodly wealth?” (*When We Were Orphans* 70). When she becomes ashamed of the origins of their income, her husband resigns as an employee. However, their issue does not concern the expansion of the British Empire, which both agree to be a decent activity, but their quarrels stem from the “sinful” trade and their “ungodly wealth”, and, whether she likes it or not, they are part of the machinery that seeks to spread European culture at the cost of subjugating natives and exploiting natural resources. Webley defines her double binding as very complex since her,

sensibilities are caught up in the process of subjugation. Her sense of religious mission supplements the establishment and preservation of colonial power. [She] is, therefore, caught in a situation every bit as binding (albeit, not crushing) as that of the opium-dependent Chinese. The religious stance she adopts to support

her resistance to the activities of Morganbrook and Byatt is the very same one that is habitually used as a cover for the establishment of the brutal economic forces that she is fighting. (qtd. in Groes and Lewis 189)

On the other hand, her husband sees no option since their moving back to England would mean their bankruptcy as he states: “Without the firm, we’re simply stranded” (*When We Were Orphans* 86). Christopher remembers his parents’ endless arguments but claims not to have been affected by them: “I was well used to such periods and never concerned myself unduly with them. In any case, it was only in the smallest ways that they ever impinged upon my life” (71). Typically, Banks is glossing over the issue, demonstrating his unreliability to the reader. He not only pursues the delusion of fixing his parents’ troubles, but he also concludes that his conflicts can be resolved if he develops a sense of Englishness, as he asks Uncle Phillip: “I was just wondering. How do you suppose one might become more English?” (76). On one occasion his parents make him choose between them when Uncle Phillip suggests that they should go to a racecourse for the afternoon. His father says that he has a lot of work to do, while his mother is desperate to go. He knows that, no matter what he chooses, one of them is going to get hurt, as he says: “Moreover, I knew—and I did so with a calm certainty—that at that moment my father was desperately wishing us not to go, that for us to do so would cause him huge pain” (84). But ultimately, the choice to go to the racetracks is taken out of his hands when his mother tells him to go and get ready and he obeys instantly (84). His preoccupation to acquire Englishness and his over-inflated sense of responsibility as a detective who is going to save the world and find redemption are both ways of dealing with his childhood traumas

The identification with the detective figure originates in the episode of his father’s disappearance. After playing in the garden with Akira he finds his mother talking to Mr.

Simpson, from Morganbrook and Byatt, and to two policemen about his father's whereabouts since he has not been seen since when he left home in the morning. His mother reassures him: "what we have to appreciate [...] is that the city's very best detectives have been assigned to the case. [...] We have to be hopeful. We have to trust the detectives" (108). As the day passes he wonders why they have not found his father and thinks that they might be too busy to find him. If they are too busy, as a child he thinks it would be better to take on the job himself, which is what he does in his make-believe missions when playing with Akira, when he takes up the role of the detectives and of his father. The roleplay follows the same plot as he recalls: "My father was held captive in a house somewhere beyond the Settlement boundaries. His captors were a gang intent on extorting a huge ransom" (110). He decides to watch out for new captors and protect his mother, but she goes missing when Uncle Phillip takes him into the small alleys of Shanghai supposedly to buy a piano accordion and abandons him there. Aunt Sophie takes him in and sends him to boarding school (111). Webley explains that when he finds out that he is going to be sent to England he resists, saying he would rather stay in Shanghai where the best detectives are looking for his parents. While in England, as,

a young child transplanted to a country that was both familiar and alien to him, Banks is acutely aware of his 'otherness'. [...] The writings of Conan Doyle about the formidable Sherlock Holmes assume a particular importance in helping to fuse together the discourse of the detective and the discourse of Englishness in Banks's mind. These literary references underline the imaginative process by which Banks constructs his identity. He models himself on the fictional detective, just as he observes and copies carefully the manner of his school friends in order to fit in with new norms and protect his fragile sense of self. (qtd. in Groes and Lewis 193) ‘

His identification with the detective's role surfaces in trivial occurrences at school, for instance when his school friends give him a magnifying glass on his fourteenth birthday, which he will use as a professional detective to investigate the Manning Case and the Trevor Richardson affair, and when his friend Roger Benthurst calls him Sherlock (9-10). As Barry Lewis (7) observes, Banks's "childhood obsession in solving the mystery of his parents' disappearance drives his adult enquires and brings him to the point of madness". Once Uncle Phillip reveals the truth, he becomes aware of the impossibility of his unattainable project that has led him down a path bordering the delusional.

Banks retains his infantile behaviour in the way he sees the world through his detective magnifying glass, attributing almost magical powers to the tool that will help him see into the real world. Although he relies on his magnifying glass, his profession ironically points to an anti-magical nature. Freud argues in *Totem and Taboo* (44) that behind the idea of evil, animist magic thought discloses the idea of death, as he explains that "according to Schopenhauer the problem of death stands at the beginning of every philosophy; we have heard that the formation of the soul conception and of the belief in demons which characterize animism, are also traced back to the impression which death makes upon man" (qtd. in *Totem and Taboo* 44). Moreover, Freud identifies some similar traits between the modern man and animist primitive man as both project into the exterior something present in one's consciousness and senses, something that is next to something else latent and which coexists in one's perception and memory, or else, in one's unconscious life (*Totem and Taboo* 47). Such a process may seem confusing and incoherent like a dream, since dislocations, condensations and replacement of the latent content may distort the real idea. Inasmuch as a dream's manifest content can be misleading about the dream thought, so is the incoherence of Banks's reminiscing while at the war stage; yet, it is replaced with a new coherence Banks tries to create, such as the

saving of a Japanese combatant who is transformed into his old Japanese childhood friend. Ishiguro uses a narrative technique that translates this condensation of events in Christopher's mind, reflecting a state of mind that attempts to find coherence and comprehend what is being perceived but cannot be grasped.

But what is the real motivation behind Christopher getting caught in the war in Shanghai? The probable hallucination with a childhood friend while he compulsively searches for his parents acquires a tone of the belief in a magic deed of "recovering" his lost childhood. Contrastingly, Christopher's identity is also furnished with tensions deriving from the colonial positivist inheritance as he irrevocably reaches the conclusion that nothing seems to be what he thought it was. Bauman (qtd. in Hall and duGay 49) asserts that "the solving of puzzles follows the logic of *instrumental* rationality (selecting the correct means to a given end)" and the problem is that such a rationality will not bear identity constructions since it "is guided by the logic of *goal* rationality (finding out how attractive the ends are that can be achieved with the given means)".

The detective at the end of the book is resigned to what he calls his mission and says that "there is nothing for it but to try and see through our missions to the end, as best we can, for until we do so, we will be permitted no calm" (*When We Were Orphans* 335), which shows that he maintains a certain degree of defence in relation to his past. In Bauman's words (qtd. in Hall and duGay 53), the "strategy of *carpe diem* is a response to a world emptied of values pretending to be lasting". At the same time, Banks acknowledges that "there are those times when a sort of emptiness fills my hours" (*When We Were Orphans* 335), pointing to a moment of change in his world, a time when he starts to allow old feelings to emerge instead of defensively rationalizing the world. There is not only an absence of epiphany, but Banks ends his narrative aware of a different word than that he had chased all along.

If in the previous novel, *The Unconsoled* (1995), it was the tear in the carpet at the beginning of the novel that suggests Ryder's manipulation of contradictory reality (p. 16-7), in *Orphans* it is the magnifying glass for which "a second magnifying glass is needed to read the inscription saying it was made in Zurich in 1887" (*When We Were Orphans* 9). The magnifying glass does not appear again until the end of the novel, when it demonstrates the "surreal mismatch between society's sleuth's myopic mind and the oceanic misery around him— 'using a magnifying glass to look at corpses in a war-zone', as (Ishiguro) explains" (qtd. in Barrow 44). According to Tonkin this myopia, "effectively stops the hero from achieving much of an adult inner life until the book's final pages" (*When We Were Orphans* 9). Reich observes the absurdity of Banks using his magnifying glass to look at the wounds of the little Chinese girl's dead mother due to the limitation of details making "the unbearable, at least for a moment, bearable. For the reader, viewing the accretion of detail that constitutes and transcends memory through the prism of Ishiguro's ordered larger vision reveals the truth" (*When We Were Orphans* 43). The earlier appearance of the magnifying glass which needs another instrument to detect its information provides a model for reading Banks's narrative, his need to be detected by another. Harding-Hussel (100) argue that this model aids in understanding the final meeting with his mother: "From her brief dislocated words, Banks discovers that his mother never expected him to rescue her, and that her love for him remains unconditional", as she sees the image of "Puffin" in her magnified memories. According to Beedham (136), "the novel's power lies in our recognition of and response to its meditations on identity, loss, and childhood". And insofar as he does so, Ishiguro's stories will continue to explore human beings depicting denial mechanisms to uncover desires and traumas.

Such universal themes reflected in both *An Artist* and *Orphans* are a constant source of exploration in Ishiguro's other novels and short-fiction. The timeless question of memory as fundamental to our identities and the quest for the meaning in ordinary life, although explored from other angles in the other books, reflects Ishiguro's profound capacity to investigate the reign of emotional forces which constitute our humanity.

## CONCLUSION

Kazuo Ishiguro's concern with his English and Japanese cultural inheritance is manifest in his two early novels explored here. Although the depiction of the emotional world of the characters lies at the core of the novels, the historical background of the two World Wars is also key to understanding the internal conflicts and transformations of Ono's and Banks's understanding of their world. Ishiguro began his Nobel acceptance speech, given in Stockholm on 7 December 2017, by referring to his cross-cultural upbringing, stressing how difficult it is to be precise about where he comes from. He recalled how the hippie influence of the early 1970s was apparent in his long hair and drooping moustache, which, added to his middle-class Surrey accent and his Japanese features left people confused as to his identity. He remembered his interest in discussing football and Bob Dylan, as well as the time he spent working with homeless people in London. However, he confessed that, if approached on any topic regarding Japan in his early twenties, he would feel uncomfortable as he had never returned to Japan since he was five. Interestingly, both Ono and Banks also display an intense feeling of social displacement. Ono is an odd bird in the new democratic backdrop of Japanese politics after the Second World War, whereas Banks, who is obsessed with his childhood in Shanghai, feels he cannot live up to the ideal of Englishness he phonily mimics.

In September 1975, Ishiguro headed to the village of Buxton in Norfolk, carrying no more than a rucksack, a typewriter and his old guitar, to start his postgraduate Creative Writing course at the University of East Anglia. He ended up renting a room from a landlord who refused any kind social interaction, a situation that left him to his own devices with plenty of quiet and solitude in which to write. There was nothing romantically ideal about his tiny room, whose 'furnishings' consisted of a piece of

industrial foam for a bed and a small desk and lamp; but it was there that he wrote *A Pale View of Hills* (1982) and *An Artist of the Floating World* (1986), unsure whether he should submit them for the appreciation of his classmates or not; his literary ambitions were a very recent discovery, superseding his previous dream of becoming a rock star by the age of twenty. While agonising over his first themes, writing what he describes as short stories “delivered in a panic” after his acceptance at the Creative Writing course, he was overcome by an urgent desire to write about Japan, about Nagasaki during the last days of the Second World War. Although Ishiguro does not depict the War from the perspective of historical realism, Ono’s relationships encapsulate many of the controversies that existed in Japanese society in the wake of the War. Similarly, Banks’s trajectory is defined not only by the class tensions generated in Chinese society in the Opium War that followed the First World War, but also by the destruction of Shanghai following the fascist Japanese invasion of China. A reader of the two novels is thus able to see how the Japanese faction with which Ono identified had behaved on the Chinese mainland. It is unlikely that Ishiguro would have used such a historical backdrop if he had spent his entire life in Japan, since the topic of two World Wars is still subject to an intense taboo. Foreigners visiting Japan are still advised that discussion of the two Wars is considered most impolite in Japanese society.

Nevertheless, it was not easy to find a publisher for the two novels in England either. In his Nobel acceptance speech Ishiguro points out that, although the success of Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* in 1981 opened new doors for authors of mixed cultural influences to explore their roots, the climate was very different when Ishiguro was developing his early work since writers like Gabriel Garcia Marques, Milan Kundera and Borges were restricted to a rather select readership. Ishiguro acknowledges his debt to the encouragement he received from his tutors, Malcom Bradbury and Angela Carter,

as he set out to write about Japan in seclusion, in what he now understands to have been the emergence of an act of preservation.

The theme of identity permeates Ishiguro's work to this day, a fact that has been widely explored by academic commentators. In his Nobel address Ishiguro explained how his experience growing up in England might have contributed to that, as by the age of eleven, well trained in the manners expected from a middle-class boy, he attended church and sang in the choir. However, everywhere he went, he felt as if people knew him even before he could introduce himself as a sort of local fame followed him. At a time when the experience of fighting against the Japanese in the Second World War was very vivid in the British mind, he was still able to experience the openness, curiosity and generosity of the community in Guildford. During their first five years living in the town his family always assumed they would eventually return to Japan, which led him to consume a vast supply of magazines, books and information about the country. The place he constructed in his mind and called Japan was the place from whence he drew his sense of identity; hence his need for preservation, even if that place did not perfectly correspond to contemporary reality. Thus, his first novels were created out of memory, imagination and speculation. The driving force behind his writing in that small room in Norfolk was the need to recreate his own Japan, whose colours were fading as he grew older.

The interplay between memory and Ishiguro's mixed cultural background was the starting point for the present thesis. The act of reminiscing triggers elements involved in reciprocity and receptiveness as much as in difference and individuality in the relationship of the characters, and I have argued that it is imbricated in questions concerning the notion of identity in these novels.

Ishiguro believes that a quintessential moment for him was his discovery in Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* (1913-27) of the mechanisms involved in telling

a story without any particular chronological order, a feature which mimics the way memory works, and with which Ishiguro continues experimenting to the present day. After giving substance to his own Japan, Ishiguro turned his attention to England for the setting of his third novel, *The Remains of the Day* (1989). Nonetheless, the author kept feeling that there was something missing in that novel. His inspiration for the novel came when he was listening to Tom Waits's 'Ruby's Arms', whose lyrics portray a man deeply uncomfortable with expressing his feelings. Thus it was that butler Stevens was created, a character who hides his feelings from the reader until the very end of the story. The present thesis has discussed Ono's and Banks's emotional ordeals as bearing similar aspects to Stevens's, as denial, desire and defence mechanisms become paramount in the complex portrait of emotions of all three characters, each of whom blindly walks down memory lane, unaware why they feel such a need to investigate their own past. As they place themselves at the centre of their reminiscing the reader becomes aware of their effort to conceal parts of their stories and to make them sound more grandiose than reality.

Ishiguro states that, before he began writing *Never Let Me Go* (2005), a novel depicting a love triangle, he had an insight that he should focus more on the characters' relationships rather than their individual trajectories *per se*, in order to emphasise their private relationships and feelings, which is an important feature of the theoretical discussions concerning identity in the present thesis.

When Ishiguro was forty-four, he visited Nazi concentration camps and became aware of the relevance of remembering and forgetting at the national level, which led him to reflect about how he could apply those mechanisms to his next work. His novels had hitherto approached individuals, struggling between remembering and forgetting, during darker experiences through moments of political and social upheaval. He felt that the time had now come for him to approach, not how individuals remember and forget, but how

nations remember and forget, as well as the impact of the past on different generations and on the life of a stable modern free society. Although it was only with *The Buried Giant* (2015) that he would devote a novel to this theme, this thesis has sought to demonstrate that, in both *A Pale View of Hills* and *An Artist of the Floating World*, Ishiguro has always been concerned with the question of how individuals grasp their national identities as the result of the construct they build between what and how they remember and forget.

Finally, in his Nobel acceptance speech, Ishiguro also states that he is aware that his narratives might appear to be the construction of distant worlds, invented at a time of positive humanism before the fall of the Berlin Wall. He explains that such an ideology may seem unfamiliar to societies today, as he highlights our present historical period embedded as it is in the return of far-right ideologies, tribal nationalisms and the rise of new kinds of racism as powerplay mechanisms used by nations endlessly competing for resources ever more fiercely. In 2017, the Nobel Literature Committee evidently understood the relevance of Ishiguro's novels as profound examinations of human feelings and relationships, and also their increasing significance in times of resurgent extremist ideologies, both of which perceptions have underpinned the present thesis.

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