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## A Complex interaction between the past and present in Ishiguro's *A Pale View of Hills*

<sup>1</sup>Mrs. K. Anusuya, <sup>2</sup>Dr. C. Chithra

<sup>1</sup> Part-Time Research Scholar, (Reg.No: MKU22PFOL10501), Department of English and Comparative Literature, Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai – 625021 / Assistant Professor of English, G.T.N. Arts College, Dindigul – 624005

Email: anukaams@gmail.com

<sup>2</sup>Associate Professor of English, NMSSVN College, Madurai – 625019

Email: cchithrasvnc1966@gmail.com

### Abstract

Japanese literature has its roots in oral traditions that were transcribed in the early eighth century. It coincided with the adoption of a Chinese writing system. Memory, time and lying that never ends are some of the main themes of Kazuo Ishiguro's works. His upbringing in a Japanese family in Great Britain has shaped the way he thinks and sees things. His first two novels take place in Japan. In his later writings, Ishiguro has written in genres including science fiction and fantasy. He doesn't use a lot of verbiage, even while he talks about dramatic events.

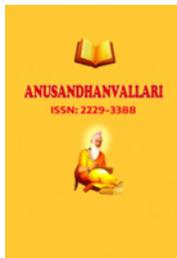
**Keywords:** Memory, present, past, displacement, ambiguity, distortion, twisted relationship

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### Introduction

Ishiguro's family migrated to Great Britain in 1960. He went to Kent Universities and got his B.A. in 1978 and his M.A. in 1980. He began writing in his spare time after he graduated, while working for a charity that helped homeless people. He became well-known in the literary world when he added three short stories to the collection. The first novel by Kazuo Ishiguro is called *A Pale View of Hills* (1982). Ishiguro was born in Nagasaki in 1954 and migrated to the UK with his family when he was five. Kazuo Ishiguro often says that even though his family is Japanese, he doesn't know much about Japanese culture because he has lived in England his whole adult life. But Ishiguro's upbringing in a Japanese home has offered him a different frame of view than his English aristocrats. M.P.Ganesan and R.Chitra point out: "Human beings are passive creatures and do whatever their culture tells them to do"(49).

Ishiguro has written eight books, including *The Remains of the Day* (1989), which won the Booker Prize and *Never Let Me Go* (2005), which was named as one of the best English-language novels since 1923 by Time magazine. Ishiguro won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2017 and was made a knight in 2018 for his work in literature. The novel's main character is Ishiguro's voice because the author uses the first-person narrative style. He also brings the reader to Japan after World War II to emphasize how much he loves his home country. Ishiguro observes: "I wanted to recreate this Japan by combining all of my recollections and make-believe thoughts I had about this place I named Japan. I wanted to secure it and capture it in a book before it fully left my consciousness" (23).



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## Discussion

The present article offers a comprehensive analysis of Ishiguro's work *A Pale View of Hills*, emphasizing the contentious aspects of memory narrative while also critiquing trauma theorists that prioritize communal or collective memory above individual traumatic experiences. In Ishiguro's novel, the reader needs to know why the main character tries to put terrible occurrences in a bigger social perspective. Laplanche and Pontalis points out: "... and memory-traces may be revised at a later date to fit in with fresh circumstances or to fit in with a new stage of development. In that event be endowed not only with the new meaning but also with psychical effectiveness... It is not a lived experience in general which undergoes a deferred revision but, specifically, whatever it has been impossible in the first instance to incorporate fully into a meaningful context. The traumatic event is the epitome of all such unassimilated experience" (111-12).

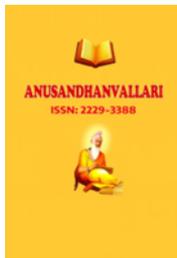
Ishiguro puts it further on memory thus: "I'm interested in memory because it's a filter through which we see our lives, and because it's foggy and obscure, the opportunities for self-deception are there. In the end, as a writer, I'm more interested in what people tell themselves happened rather than what actually happened" (Dunn)

Etsuko is a Japanese woman who has a daughter named Niki with her first husband, tells the story. After her first husband death, she married a British man. Niki now visits her mother in the British countryside after her older sister Keiko kills herself. The story goes back and forth between the present and the past as Etsuko remembers her time in Japan with her father-in-law, Jiro, while she was pregnant with Keiko.

Niki chooses to travel back to London because she has been apart from her mother. Before they say farewell, she asks Etsuko for a postcard of Nagasaki so she can give it to a friend who has written a poem about Etsuko. Etsuko gives her an old calendar instead of a postcard. It used to be a postcard with a photograph for each month, but at the last, it has been torn away. She knows it's one of the city's harbors since the photo reminds her of a day trip. Herself and Keiko have been taken to Nagasaki and it is the most important part of that trip "Those hills overlooking the harbor are lovely". The most important aspect of that trip, in Ishiguro's opinion, is the fact that "Keiko was happy that day" (182). She hasn't yet remembered this day's outing. Instead of going to the waterfront with Keiko that summer, Etsuko went with Sachiko and Mariko. Barry Lewis says that Etsuko's act of remembering causes "cannot be easily recovered to make the text stable" (36).

It is important to note that the previously hidden calendar photo brings back memories of the past. The artwork shows specific events from Nagasaki's past. Etsuko's reluctance to explain why she still possesses the old photo of Nagasaki is a sign that she hasn't dealt with her past, which is directly tied to the Sachiko-Mariko incident. By making the coastline the main part of the picture, it does a good job of showing what Nagasaki was like after World War II. Keene states: "... back and forth constantly between the two worlds of East and West. It is true that he never manifested the unconditional admiration of the West found in some of Tanizaki's writings, but he never rejected the West either. [...] Kawabata's development was by no means a linear "return to the East" after an initial fascination with Western Modernism" (810).

Etsuko and Ishiguro, two characters in the novel *A Pale View of Hills*, are like Benjaminian diggers because they slowly reveal Etsuko's secret past, just like one digs up layers of soil. It is comforting for Etsuko to look back on her history and the visual memories she discovers there are those priceless pieces and unfinished forms. They are significant sources of inspiration for their future discoveries. Etsuko will likely be able to come to terms with her prior self and bring back memories that she has buried before through the process of digging. Ultimately, the novelist skillfully uses the individuals' search for their memories as a strong force within them, allowing them to break free by skillfully transitioning between the past and present to show their own experiences. The author also uses the journey of memory to change the mood of the work and keep readers interested. But the



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author successfully fills in the gaps between the past and present by making the main character remember her events in a very specific, chronological and strategic way.

Etsuko remembers meeting Sachiko, who has a small daughter named Mariko. She thinks the most of her time with Sachiko. Sachiko has seen an American man who has promised to take her to America many times, but he has never done. Etsuko remembers that Mariko is a strange girl who doesn't like Frank and doesn't say much. Also, Mariko talks about a woman who continues trying to kidnap her. Sachiko tells Etsuko that the bombing of Nagasaki killed a woman they knew. Etsuko also remembers her husband, who is harsh and frigid and her father-in-law, whom she loved.

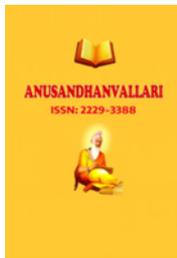
Keiko remembers that she has always stayed in her room and barely speaks to anyone, even though Etsuko and her new husband want her to be happy in England. At the end of the novel, Etsuko sees Niki leave her house and head to London. The novel is really about two moms, Etsuko and Sachiko, who find themselves in the same place. Sachiko is depicted as a mother who continually neglects her daughter to enhance her own life. Etsuko makes a similar choice, even if her daughter is unhappy about it. She seems to be unsure if she is a good mother to Keiko, although she remembers Sachiko telling her that she would be a good mother.

Ishiguro parallels the two parents and the characters of Mariko and Keiko, even though Keiko only shows up in the book through memory or word of mouth. Both kids have lost their biological fathers. People say that Keiko does not get along with her new father-in-law and that Mariko doesn't like Frank. It looks like Mariko is happier in Japan than she will be when she gets to America, even if she and her mother don't seem to be very close. Keiko and Etsuko feel the same way. After leaving Japan, Etsuko reveals that her daughter was happier before and in England, she becomes alienated from her family, which leads her to kill herself. This means that Mariko probably feels just as alone and cuts off from her family and community in America as Keiko did in England.

The novel has a scary mood and although it doesn't say it directly, it hints at a ghostly presence. The main theme is familial bonding, with a focus on the relationship between mothers and daughters. Etsuko's unreliable narration, which is heavily influenced and distorted by memory, illustrates Ishiguro's notion of authenticity. Her genuine motivation for telling the narrative was suggested throughout the text instead of being directly stated. She has done this by using literary techniques including imagery, displacement and words like "premonition" and "misgiving." These narrative techniques keep reminding the reader of the present moment, especially the remorse she feels about Keiko's death.

Etsuko's story has made her identity unstable and her "morbid" sense of humiliation has turned into memories that still bother her. But it does help her to keep her identity stable. She tries to embrace her failure or develop an intimacy with the most disturbing of things that she can't face directly by telling the story of Sachiko and Mariko. As she uses the displacement gadget to think about what she has done with her child, she keeps her presence in mind. Ishiguro actually shows how complicated Etsuko's mind is by skillfully combining the stabilizing and destabilizing roles of story. As mentioned earlier, traditional first-person recall fictions, sometimes include the term "history" in their titles, seek to confer legitimacy to their narratives by linking the past with actual events. The unreliable narrative in modern first-person fictions of remembrance, on the other hand, intentionally destroys this sense of authenticity. The present either misrepresents the past or sieves it through the present, as shown by Etsuko's unreliable narration in *A Pale View of Hills*. Ishiguro's portrayal of the complex interaction between the past and present is authentic.

Kazuo Ishiguro's *A Pale View of Hills* shows how memory and trauma affect the delicate, interdependent, and often twisted relationship between the past and the present. The story switches between Etsuko's idyllic life



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in England in the late 1970s and her creepy recollections of Nagasaki after World War II in the early 1950s. It uses flashbacks to look at guilt, bereavement, and how people make their own identities. Not only does she remember the past, she also recreates it to suit her daughter's psychological needs after Keiko's recent suicide. This serves as a "safe haven" or a way for her to cope.

Memory as a way to rebuild emotions with her current guilt about her daughter Keiko's death, Etsuko relies on her memories of Nagasaki after the war. The story shows a doubling effect, where Etsuko's past relationships with Sachiko and her daughter Mariko mirror her own, allowing her to see her past choices from a less painful, outside perspective. Etsuko's desire to avoid confronting her own suffering directly significantly distorts the past. She says that her memory is "hazy," which makes it hard for her to tell the difference between her life and Sachiko's life. The literature depicts Sachiko as neglecting her daughter, and it is possible that Etsuko has projected her own maternal shortcomings onto Sachiko. Niki leaves at the end of the book, and her mother Etsuko "smiled" and "waved" goodbye. Etsuko knows how lonely and guilty she was about Keiko's suicide, so she decides to sell the house and move into a smaller one. That house held a lot of horrible memories, especially the death of Keiko. Etsuko knows that she has left her daughter Keiko alone in the same way that Niki has left her mother alone because she wants to live her own life.

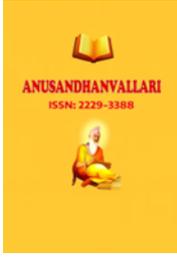
### Conclusion

The main characters in Ishiguro's novels don't rewrite history in the usual way by just repeating what happened in the past. Instead, the narrators think about where they fit into the new environment and what part they have played in the historical and personal events. So, Ishiguro's main characters tell stories about the past to establish and prove their own lives. They want to change who they are by telling their narrative and making their account, but the painful past can't be changed. In Ishiguro's novels, memory is both a tool for making identities and stories and a representation of memory itself, which is known for being unreliable. Ishiguro's *A Pale View of Hills* illustrate that identity is founded on memories, regardless of their fragility, and that dignity arises from self-acceptance. Ishiguro's view of the world is really sad since they can see what's coming and their status is hopeless. Through his literary approach to memory, he has gained and improved knowledge of how the human mind works and how memory is still important for developing one's identity.

The reader needs to remember that there are memory-blind patches, which are at times when the reader can't put unfavorable recollections in context. Consequently, the work compels the reader to recognize that conventional narrative structures in storytelling are influenced by certain social contexts, presenting a complex ethical dilemma. Nevertheless, the traumatized memory does not operate within the same social context. It is marked by ambiguity and comes from things like displacements, hallucinations, distortions and other things that aren't expected after hearing the story.

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