

Imaginary Japan as Nowhere in the World:  
Ishiguro's Narrative Techniques to Connect Past Memories  
with the Present in *A Pale View of Hills*

どこにもない場所としての想像の日本:  
『遠い山なみの光』における過去の記憶と現在とを  
結び付けるイシグロの語りの技法

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Abstract

When Kazuo Ishiguro published his first novel, *A Pale View of Hills* (1982), partially set in Nagasaki, his birthplace, the novel was considered to be based on his historically and culturally precise observation of Japan and praised for his poised prose style and Japanese motifs, seemingly influenced by Japanese language and culture. In short, his novel has been accepted as a kind of “Japanese” novel written by a cultural translator. Such interpretations of his earliest novel relate to the critical tendency at the time to regard novels by minority writers as historically and culturally authentic representations of their places of origin. Influenced by the critical climate of the time, previous studies have focused on the Japaneseness of Ishiguro's novel and overlooked its intrinsic connection to his country of residence. This study explores Ishiguro's narrative techniques in *A Pale View of Hills* to demonstrate how he tries to prevent readers from interpreting the novel as historically grounded realism and respond to his contemporary Britain and its social problems by portraying a Japanese setting as an imaginary topos, which exists nowhere in the world and partly reflects historical facts of postwar Japan, his memories of the country in the late 1950s, and Britain in the 1970s.

Keywords/キーワード Kazuo Ishiguro, *A Pale View of Hills*, Japan, silence, narrative techniques, カズオ・イシグロ、『遠い山なみの光』、日本、沈黙、語りの技法

## 1. Introduction

When Kazuo Ishiguro published his first novel, *A Pale View of Hills* (1982), which is partially set in Nagasaki, his birthplace, the novel was regarded as being based on his historically and culturally precise observation of Japan and praised for his stiff prose style and Japanese motifs derived from his “Eastern sensibility” (Behr, 1987, p. 53). In other words, his novel has been accepted as a “Japanese” novel written by a cultural translator who could introduce Japanese history and culture to British and international readers.

These interpretations of *A Pale View of Hills* are closely related to the British literary climate of the 1980s. At that time, the younger generation of writers with unique ethnic and cultural backgrounds, different from those of white British writers, started their literary careers. Therefore, the multicultural trend in British literature, especially in British novels, has formed gradually. This new literary trend has led to a critical tendency to regard novels by minority writers as historically and culturally authentic representations of their places of origin. Influenced by the literary and critical trends at that time, much of the earlier research on Ishiguro’s first novel, although purporting to emphasize his hybrid identity, focused only on the Japaneseness, such as his representations of Japan, Japanese motifs, autobiographical elements, and his calm, understated narrative style seemingly influenced by Japanese language and culture.<sup>1</sup> However, the Britishness of his “Japanese” novel and the inextricable relationship between it and his country of residence have been ignored.

On a superficial level, Ishiguro appears to capitalize on his Japanese background in *A Pale View of Hills* to attract British and international readers, using the Japanese setting and characters. However, his earliest novel is actually crafted to withstand the critical trend of the time, which values the linguistic, cultural, and historical uniqueness of novels by minority writers. Moreover, when writing this “Japanese” novel, he was aware of the social climate of Britain in the 1970s, especially “debates . . . about feminism” (Groes, 2011, p. 251).

This study primarily aims to discuss the narrative techniques Ishiguro employs in *A Pale View of Hills*, taking into account not only the sociocultural contexts in which his first novel was produced but also its initial reception. By doing so, this study explores how he tries to respond critically to his country of residence at that time by addressing a social issue encountered not only in Japan but also in Britain—the postwar feminist movement. To dramatize this theme, he employs the Japanese setting as an imaginary topos that exists nowhere in the world and partly reflects postwar Japan, his memories of the country in the late 1950s, and his contemporary Britain. By writing his “Japanese” novel in a quite different manner from many other minority writers, whose novels are often presented as fictional autobiographies, he betrays readers’ expectations for his role as a native informant and encourages them to interpret it metaphorically, rather than literally.

## 2. The Literary Climate of Britain in the 1980s and the Early Reception of *A Pale View of Hills*

The 1980s is now considered “a period of renaissance” in British literature, or more precisely, in English literature (Head, 2002/2004, p. 45). Before the 1980s, people believed that after the end of modernism, British “literature in the fifties and sixties [was] both backward- and inward-looking, with rather little to say that can be instantly translated into universal statements about the human condition” (Bergonzi, 1970/1972, p. 67). In the decades, Britain was “not a very important part of the world” “in literary terms, as in political ones,” as compared with America, the new global superpower (Bergonzi, 1970/1972, p. 68).

Then, in 1981, a monumental event occurred. Salman Rushdie, an Indian-born British novelist, won the Booker Prize for his second novel, *Midnight's Children* (1981), suddenly becoming fashionable. In this novel, he mingles the most important historical events in India, such as its independence from Britain in 1947, using narrative techniques influenced by “Hindu myth, Islamic lore, Bombay cinema, cartoon strips and Third World magic realism” (Kemp, 1992, p. 216). As compared with novels by the older generation of British writers, Rushdie’s novel is “ambitious in scope,” “linguistically inventive,” and “international in its subject matter,” successfully attracting British and international readers (Finney, 2014, p. 179).

After this “big milestone” in the history of British literature, people began to search “for other Rushdies”—writers who had unique ethnic and cultural backgrounds that “were not the typical white Anglo-Saxon” (Vorda & Herzinger, 1993, p. 8). For instance, the literary magazine *Granta* selected the twenty “Best of Young British Novelists” in 1983, including several ethnic minority writers, such as Rushdie, Ishiguro, Buchi Emecheta (a Nigerian-born novelist), and Shiva Naipaul (a Trinidad-born writer) (Buford, 1983). This list appears to reflect the fact that since the end of World War II, Britain had increasingly become multi-ethnic and multicultural due to the influx of immigrants, particularly those from its former colonies, such as India, Nigeria, and Trinidad and Tobago.

It is important to note that not only British ethnic minority writers, such as Rushdie and Ishiguro, but also writers outside Britain contributed to the “pluralist trend” in British literature (Todd, 1996, p. 80). In the 1980s, “[w]hat [had been] at one time on the margins of canonical literature—the English language but non-British (or ‘Commonwealth’) novel” became “its center” (Shaffer, 2006, p. 15). “[T]he English-language novel” came to be considered “a genuinely international affair, with postcolonial Anglophone and ‘black British’ works as widely read and critically esteemed as ‘British’ ones” (Shaffer, 2006, p. 15). As a result, many critics and scholars came to prefer the terms “English literature” and “English novels,” rather than “British literature” and “British novels,” to include English-language literature and novels written by Commonwealth as well as British writers.

The Booker Prize is the most famous award that succeeded in encompassing “English language but non-British (or ‘Commonwealth’)” literature to emphasize various themes and techniques of English literature. From 1980 to 1989, four out of ten Booker Prize winners—Thomas Keneally (Australia), J. M. Coetzee (South Africa and Australia), Keri Hulme (New Zealand), and Peter Carey (Australia)—were not British subjects, while two—Rushdie and Ishiguro—were British ethnic minority writers. Given the fact that from 1970 to 1979, only three out of thirteen Booker Prize winners—V. S. Naipaul (a Trinidad-born novelist), Nadine Gordimer (a South African writer), and Ruth Praver Jhabvala (a German-born Jewish author)—were non-British-born writers, the prize became rapidly internationalized after 1980. However, it would be unwise to conclude that this occurred spontaneously as Britain became increasingly internationalized with immigrants (mainly from its former colonies). As publishers can submit several titles that they want the Booker Prize judges to read, the multiculturalism in 1980s British literature, which is reflected in the winner list, was promoted by people who wanted to advertise literature “by ‘outsiders’ to Britain” to revive British literature under the new label “English literature” (Phillips, 1997/1999, p. xiii). Thanks to the linguistic, cultural, and thematic uniqueness of their literary works, publishers and the Booker Prize judges succeeded in impressing people with the international importance of English literature.

As English-language novels “by ‘outsiders’ to Britain” moved from the periphery of the British literary world to its center in the 1980s, a new critical tendency was generated to focus on their novels’ linguistic, cultural, and historical backgrounds. By emphasizing these elements, critics and scholars have addressed issues of race and ethnicity, largely provoked by the reactionary racism of Thatcherite policies. However, some of them stumbled into the pitfall of essentialism, labeling their novels as “‘ethnic’ realism” (Kaplan, 1996, p. 95). By distinguishing their novels from “English literature ‘proper’” (Rushdie, 1983/1991, p. 66), these critics and scholars paradoxically “[reinscribed] those categories [of difference] in the form of fixed identities” (Chow, 1993, p. 107). This critical trend was partly influenced by the fact that novels by peripheral writers are often presented as fictional autobiographies (Guptara, 1986; Trinh, 2011). Accordingly, their novels were regarded as being based on historically and culturally precise observations of their places of origin. The interpretive frameworks to discuss their novels were more restricted than those to interpret “English literature ‘proper.’” As Rushdie (1983/1991) points out, their novels were

almost always praised for using motifs and symbols out of the author’s own national tradition, or when their form echoes some traditional form, obviously pre-English, and when the influences at work upon the writer can be seen to be wholly internal to the culture from which he “springs.” Books which mix traditions, or which seek consciously to break with tradition, [were] often treated as highly suspect. (p. 66)

Novels by marginalized writers were eagerly received by critics and scholars when they could “speak as a representative—of a culture, a people, a country, an ethnicity or a gender considered to be” theirs (Trinh, 2011, p. 13). Otherwise, their novels were doomed to remain unnoticed.

Ishiguro’s early career as a novelist coincided with the revival of English literature and the rise of British minority writers, such as Rushdie, and Commonwealth writers, such as Michael Ondaatje, in the 1980s. Therefore, he has been classified into the same category as these novelists. For instance, Bruce King (1991) incorporates Ishiguro into the group of new international novelists, including Shiva Naipaul, Rushdie, Emecheta, and Timothy Mo (an Anglo-Chinese novelist) (pp. 193–194). In contrast, Pico Iyer (1993) labels him, along with Vikram Seth (an Indian writer), Ondaatje (a Sri Lankan-born Canadian author), and Ben Okri (a Nigerian writer), as “new transcultural writers” (p. 52). In *Black British Literature: An Annotated Bibliography*, Prahbu Guptara (1986) mentions Ishiguro and *A Pale View of Hills* only because he is a novelist of “non-European origin” (p. 14).

The labels “international novelists,” “transcultural writers,” or “black British authors” can be used to highlight Ishiguro’s biculturalism found in *A Pale View of Hills*. However, much of the earlier research on Ishiguro’s first novel has addressed only the Japaneseness. For example, Jonathan Spence (1982) claims that “[t]he cadences of Ishiguro in the 1980s recall [Higuchi] Ichiyo’s of a century before” (p. 266), while Anthony Thwaite (1982) notes that the “blend of plain circumstantial realism and mysterious resonance” in the novel “reminded [him] of several earlier twentieth-century Japanese writers—Soseki a great deal, Tanizaki and Kawabata rather less so” (p. 33). According to Gabriele Annan (1989), “[t]he elegant bareness” of his “Japanese” novel “inevitably reminds one of Japanese painting” (p. 3). Not only these reviewers but also some literary scholars casually claim that *A Pale View of Hills* is influenced by Japanese tradition, without offering detailed analyses. For instance, Barry Lewis (2000) and Valerie Purton (1993) compare Ishiguro’s calm, understated style with haiku, an unrhymed poem that consists of 17 syllables arranged in three lines of 5, 7, and 5 syllables, respectively (Lewis, p. 36; Purton, pp. 177–178). According to King (1991), his “nuanced,” “understated” style is “similar to the deft brushwork of Japanese paintings” (p. 207). However, it appears that these reviewers and scholars only impose their own ideas and images of Japan on *A Pale View of Hills*.<sup>2</sup> As was the case for novels by marginalized writers, Ishiguro’s “Japanese” novel has been regarded as written by a native informant on Japanese matters and accepted as a reflection of Japanese literature and culture rather than of British literature and culture.

### 3. Ishiguro’s Imaginary Japan as Nowhere in the World

Despite readers’ expectations, Ishiguro denies his role as a cultural translator because he has

lived in Britain after he left Japan at the age of five. In an interview conducted in 1989, he identified himself as a “homeless writer”: “My very lack of authority and lack of knowledge about Japan, I think, forced me into a position of using my imagination, and also of thinking of myself as a kind of homeless writer. I had no obvious social role, because I wasn’t a very English Englishman, and I wasn’t a very Japanese Japanese either” (Ishiguro & Ōe, 1991, p. 115). According to Ishiguro, in *A Pale View of Hills*, he creates his Japan “out of little scraps, out of memories, out of speculation, out of imagination” (Mason, 1989b, p. 341). By doing this, he resists the critical tendency to regard novels by peripheral writers as “‘ethnic’ realism.” His emphasis on the imaginative nature of the Japanese setting in the novel serves to encourage readers not to regard his descriptions of Japan as historically and culturally authentic, indicating that it is fiction which has the ability to address universal themes beyond a particular time and place.

Although *A Pale View of Hills* is partly set in Japan in the early 1950s, Ishiguro’s descriptions of it are undermined by anachronistic references. For instance, he depicts two landmarks in Nagasaki, the Peace Statue in the Nagasaki Peace Park and the Nagasaki Ropeway, which contradicts the historical backdrop indicated by his references to social circumstances, such as the “fighting in Korea” and newspapers that “were full of talk about the occupation coming to an end” (pp. 11, 99).<sup>3</sup> The Peace Statue was completed in 1955, ten years after the atomic bombing, and the Nagasaki Ropeway was opened in 1959. However, the Korean War lasted from 1950 to 1953, and the American occupation ended in 1952. That is, the landmarks of Nagasaki are related to the period following the novel’s setting. These anachronistic descriptions in *A Pale View of Hills* reflect Ishiguro’s experiences in Nagasaki before moving to Britain in 1960. This patchwork of Japan in the immediate postwar years and the country in the late 1950s suggests that he creates his Japanese setting by piecing together a hodgepodge of his memories, his imagination, and historical facts and writing his “Japanese” novel was his imaginary homecoming.

In addition to the anachronistic descriptions, *A Pale View of Hills* includes stereotypical images of Japan. However, Ishiguro does not intend to cater to the expectations of readers, especially Anglophone readers. Instead, he tries to criticize ethnic stereotyping and encourage them to read his novel without prejudice to the country. For example, he refers to “[t]he popular conviction” prevailing in Western countries “that suicide is something of a national hobby in Japan” (Littlewood, 1996, p. 39). Aware of this generalization, the narrator-protagonist Etsuko Sheringham, a Japanese widow living in Britain around 1980, expresses her frustration with English newspapers that reported her elder daughter’s suicide in a stereotypical manner: “Keiko, unlike Niki, was pure Japanese, and more than one newspaper was quick to pick up on this fact. The English are fond of their idea that our race has an instinct for suicide, as if further explanations are unnecessary; for that was all they

reported, that she was Japanese and that she had hung herself in her room” (p. 10). According to Etsuko, the English newspapers attribute Keiko’s suicide entirely to her Japanese identity and ignore differences among Japanese people. Moreover, she negates her English husband’s prejudiced view that “Keiko was a difficult person by nature” and “had inherited her personality from her father,” Jiro Ogata (p. 94). Although Sheringham, Etsuko’s second husband, put “the blame on Nature, or else on Jiro,” she explains “how similar the two girls,” Keiko and Niki, her younger daughter from her second marriage, “were during their respective early stages,” suggesting that her death is not related to her “race” or “Nature” (p. 94). At the beginning of the novel, Ishiguro mentions the Western myth that suicide is a Japanese specialty to show its invalidity. In doing this, he tries to prevent readers from interpreting Etsuko’s or Keiko’s psychological predicaments within race-based or ethnicity-based frameworks.

Ishiguro’s conscious evocation of stereotypes in *A Pale View of Hills* can be regarded as an example of what Graham Huggan (2001) calls “strategic exoticism” (p. xi). According to Huggan, this is “designed as much to challenge as to profit from consumer needs” (p. xi). Some minority writers engage in “strategic exoticism” to deal with

a coercive mimeticism—a process . . . in which those who are marginal to mainstream Western culture are expected . . . to resemble and replicate the very banal preconceptions that have been appended to them, a process in which they are expected to objectify themselves in accordance with the already seen and thus to authenticate the familiar imagings of them as ethnics. (Chow, 2002, p. 107)

In *A Pale View of Hills*, Ishiguro employs “strategic exoticism” not only to capitalize on but also to debunk “banal” stereotypes “appended to” Japan and Japanese people.

However, this has been overlooked by most reviewers and scholars who praised superficial images of Japan in *A Pale View of Hills* as quintessentially Japanese. According to Japanese scholars such as Yoshifumi Saitō (2003) and Akinori Sakaguchi (2004), in Ishiguro’s first novel, Japanese characters “bow” very frequently, but they do so usually at the wrong time (Saitō, pp. 176–177; Sakaguchi, pp. 186–187). For instance, when Sachiko said, “may I ask a favour of you?,” Etsuko “bowed” and said, “I have some savings of my own” and “I’d be pleased to be of some assistance” (p. 20). Ishiguro uses the word “bow” to mean “nod.” According to Ruth Benedict (1946/2005), an American anthropologist who analyzed Japanese culture, “bows range all the way from kneeling with forehead lowered to the hands placed flat upon the floor, to the mere inclination of head and shoulders” (p. 48). She had never visited Japan and therefore relied on Japanese literature, films, and input from Japanese Americans. As a result, her study has created or reinforced cultural stereotypes about the country. Ishiguro’s excessive description of “bows” in the “Japanese” novel is

another example of his conscious evocation of stereotypical Western images of Japan, which have been reinforced by Benedict's well-known study. However, Barbara Korte (1993/1997), who appears unfamiliar with Japanese culture, argues that this functions as "a Japanese emblem of politeness and honour" and helps to "establish a cultural setting foreign to the European reader" (p. 142). The close examination of the initial reception of Ishiguro's "Japanese" novel makes clear that although many prior studies have emphasized the authenticity of his descriptions of Japan, "[a]uthenticity" is the respectable child of old-fashioned exoticism" (Rushdie, 1983/1991, p. 67). "[B]ehind many Westerners' well-intended attempts to promote better understanding of cultural difference," "the urge to orientalize the Oriental" lurks (Trinh, 2011, p. 13).

Ishiguro, who is aware of the "lack of authority and lack of knowledge about Japan," imaginatively writes *A Pale View of Hills*, consciously incorporating anachronistic and stereotypical descriptions. Therefore, Japanese scholars criticize the novel for inaccurate representations of the country (Minami, 1988; Saitō, 2003; Sakaguchi, 2004). However, his novel is never designed to depict the country accurately. Instead, he employs the Japanese setting as an imaginative and symbolic topos to dramatize the novel's themes and enable readers to read the "Japanese" novel metaphorically. His Japan depicted in the novel exists nowhere in the world, partly reflecting his memories of Japan in the late 1950s, Britain around 1980, and historical facts of postwar Japan. Although the important relationship between his imaginary Japan and Britain in the 1970s and the 1980s has been largely overlooked in prior studies, the following sections in this study explore how Ishiguro responds to his contemporary Britain by addressing its social issues while employing the Japanese setting as a metaphorical place not found in the actual world.

#### 4. Ishiguro's Strategy of Leaving a Wide Gap in Etsuko's Narrative

In *A Pale View of Hills*, Etsuko Sheringham, a late-middle-aged Japanese widow living in the English countryside, recounts her memories of April of "this year," when her younger daughter, Niki, came home from London shortly after she had received the shocking news that her elder daughter, Keiko, had committed suicide (p. 9). As the novel progresses, Etsuko's previous life gradually becomes vaguely visible. She moved to Britain with Keiko and her second husband, Sheringham, after her divorce from Jiro Ogata. However, Keiko failed to acclimate herself to her new surroundings and her new family. According to Etsuko, Keiko "had no friends" in Britain, and the rest of her family "were forbidden entry into her room" (p. 53). Niki says, "She was never a part of our lives—not mine or Dad's anyway" (p. 52). Because of the rift in her family, Keiko left home almost six years ago, but "after becoming increasingly miserable," she eventually "took her own life" in her room in Manchester (p. 94). Since Etsuko's decision to leave Japan and her Japanese husband



ultimately resulted in Keiko's "miserable" life in Britain and her lonely death in Manchester, she must feel tormented by guilt.

Despite readers' initial expectations, however, Etsuko neither recalls her memories of Keiko nor explains the reasons for her divorce, remarriage, and immigration, or her new life in Britain, which must be related to her daughter's suicide. At the beginning of the novel, she stresses that she "[has] no great wish to dwell on Keiko now" (p. 11). Instead, she recalls and recounts her memories of Niki's six-day, five-night stay at her "country house" (p. 9). During this period, she recollected a summer in Nagasaki around 1950, when she had been pregnant with Keiko, by focusing on Sachiko, a middle-aged Japanese war widow, and her disturbed daughter, Mariko. At first, many readers would wonder if the memories of her old friends are related to her present psychological predicament caused by Keiko's death. However, it gradually becomes apparent that Etsuko makes a circuitous journey into her past, narrating the account of others and obliquely referring to her previous life. While continually moving back and forth between her memories of postwar Japan and those of Britain around 1980, the narrator gradually approaches the core of her current problems—her parental responsibility and guilt for Keiko's suicide.

Although *A Pale View of Hills* is partially set in Nagasaki, Ishiguro's birthplace, he avoids writing his autobiographical story. Instead, he employs the late-middle-aged Japanese widow as an autodiegetic narrator. On a superficial level, Etsuko does not resemble him, except for her experience of moving from Japan to Britain. Moreover, Ishiguro refuses to present Etsuko's narrative as her straightforward autobiography. As Paul Bailey (1982) notes, "[a]lmost nothing is said . . . about Etsuko's second husband, who would appear to have been a man of some intelligence" and "Keiko's withdrawal from him, and consequently from her mother, is only hinted at" (p. 179). Ishiguro emphasizes a wide gap between the narrated Etsuko living in postwar Japan and the narrating Etsuko living in Britain around 1980. His way of writing the "Japanese" novel is considerably different from those of other marginalized writers whose novels are often presented as fictional autobiographies. As a result, James Campbell (1982) laments that "the incidental detail is not sufficiently filled in," criticizing this as "a fault" of the novel (p. 25). However, it is Ishiguro's conscious "strategy" to leave "a big gap" in Etsuko's narrative and create ambiguity over her past (Mason, 1989b, p. 337).

Previous studies have examined Etsuko's enigmatic silence from various perspectives. For instance, Lewis (2000) attributes it to Japanese culture, such as "*haiku* poetry" or Japanese "indirect" modes of communication (pp. 36–37). From a psychological perspective, Ken Eckert (2012) claims that Etsuko's guilt over Keiko represses negative memories of past events and creates a narrative gap. Focusing on the novel's historical setting, Cynthia F. Wong (1995) interprets this silence as a

testament not only to the profound impacts of the war and the atomic bomb but also to their aftermath upon ordinary people and their unspeakable suffering.

While building on the interpretation offered by Eckert (2012), this study explores how the narrative void in *A Pale View of Hills* serves as Ishiguro's "strategy" for challenging the critical trend at that time. Unlike many other minority writers, Ishiguro intentionally avoids writing an autobiographical novel and resists the critical tendency to read their novels as historically and culturally accurate representations of their places of origin. This narrative void, like his anachronistic and stereotypical descriptions of Japan, serves to frustrate readers' desires to obtain accurate information about the country from his novel and prevent them from regarding Etsuko's account as "'ethnic' realism." Employing this strategy, Ishiguro encourages readers to observe Etsuko's psyche more carefully and guess the second half of her life, which she never recounts.

#### 4.1 Etsuko's Roundabout Way of Reflecting on Her Past through the Story of Others

Although Etsuko narrates the distant past when she still lived in Nagasaki with her ex-husband, especially her memories of Sachiko, she notes in Chapter 1 that she "never knew Sachiko well" and their "friendship was no more than a matter of some several weeks one summer many years ago" (p. 11). This would make many readers wonder why Etsuko now recounts the memories of her old friend.

To encourage readers to wonder about the narrator's motives for recalling her old memories, Ishiguro describes Sachiko as the antipodes of Etsuko, or more precisely, as the antipodes of the narrated Etsuko living in Japan. He portrays Sachiko as a neglectful mother, blinded by her love and her own ambition. To go on a date with "her 'American friend,'" Frank, she left her elementary-age daughter alone at home and never returned until late in the evening (p. 13). Consequently, Mariko complained to her mother and called Frank "a bad man" (p. 81). However, Sachiko, who was determined to move to America, ignored Mariko's desire to remain in Japan and explained to Etsuko the benefits of migration: "She [Mariko] could become a business girl, a film actress even. America's like that, Etsuko, so many things are possible. Frank says I could become a business woman too" (p. 46). Sachiko suddenly changed her focus from Mariko to herself, which indicates that her plan to leave Japan was primarily motivated by her personal ambition, not by her daughter's desires. This interpretation is also supported by the fact that Sachiko imposed on Mariko her childhood dream of "[going] to America one day" and "[becoming] a film actress" (p. 109).

In contrast to Sachiko, a self-centered mother, Ishiguro portrays the younger Etsuko as a modest, judicious woman. Her subservient attitude toward Jiro would evoke in readers the familiar image of a "traditional Japanese housewife" (Milton, 1982, p. 13). Therefore, many readers would initially regard her decision to abandon her Japanese husband and country as out of character for her. Indeed, the narrated Etsuko living in Nagasaki repeatedly insisted that she was happy with herself

(pp. 24, 34, 77). Even when Sachiko revealed her future plan to immigrate to America, Etsuko said that she was “very happy with [her] life where [she was]”: “As for myself, I couldn’t be happier with things as they are. Jiro’s work is going so well, and now the child arriving just when we wanted it” (p. 46). In addition, Etsuko cast a more considerate eye on Mariko and expressed concerns about hardships that the girl would face in America: “But it would still be an enormous change for her. Is she ready for such a thing?” (p. 44). Because of Etsuko’s modest and thoughtful personality, other people around her predicted that she would become “a splendid mother,” which encourages Ishiguro’s readers to presume that she made decisions based on careful considerations of Keiko’s welfare (pp. 14–15, 77). Although she eventually moved to the West with her daughter and lover, which is the most obvious similarity between her and Sachiko, most readers might not recognize at first that like her old friend, she disregarded her child’s interests and decided to start her new life in the West to fulfill her own desires.

Although the difference between Etsuko’s personality and that of Sachiko appears significant at first, it is gradually revealed that they are not antithetical. To imply the parallel relationships between Etsuko-Keiko-Sheringham and Sachiko-Mariko-Frank, Ishiguro recounts two different, yet somewhat analogous episodes. In Chapter 6, Etsuko examines her own attitude toward Keiko after narrating an episode that demonstrates Sachiko’s neglectful attitude toward Mariko:

“Should we go and look for her [Mariko] now?” I said.

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

I feel only regret now for those attitudes I displayed towards Keiko. In this country, after all, it is not unexpected that a young woman of that age should wish to leave home. All I succeeded in doing, it would seem, was to ensure that when she finally left—now almost six years ago—she did so severing all her ties with me. But then I never imagined she could so quickly vanish beyond my reach. . . . (pp. 87–88)

Before Mariko “went out into the darkness,” she and Sachiko quarreled because she described Frank as “a pig in a sewer” and complained to her mother that she “always [went] away with Frank-San” (p. 85). Although Etsuko suggested to Sachiko go out and find Mariko, she refused to do so. Immediately after recounting this episode, the narrator expresses regret for “those attitudes . . . towards Keiko.” However, she has not previously explained the details of “those attitudes,” creating a gap in her narrative. However, by the sequence of these two episodes, Ishiguro indicates that the story of Sachiko and Mariko inspires the narrator to reflect on her earlier life, especially her hardened attitude toward Keiko. Therefore, readers can infer that Etsuko stonily treated Keiko and let her

leave home in the same manner as Sachiko. As the novel progresses, it is gradually revealed that Etsuko uses her old memories to indirectly reflect on the possible causes for Keiko's suicide, such as her decision to divorce Jiro and leave Japan and the difficult relationships among her new family members.

Although Ishiguro emphasizes the contrast between Etsuko and Sachiko at the beginning of the novel, he gradually reveals that the latter mirrors some aspects of the former, which the narrator never acknowledges straightforwardly. By doing so, he encourages readers to doubt Etsuko's self-created image as a chaste woman. The similarities between Etsuko and Sachiko are suggested not only by their romantic relationships with their Western lovers and their desires to migrate to the West, but also by their words intended to justify their decisions to leave Japan. In Chapter 6, the narrator says, "My motives for leaving Japan were justifiable, and I know I always kept Keiko's interests very much at heart" (p. 91). However, most readers would not believe this because the selfish mother Sachiko used similar words, such as "My daughter's welfare is of the utmost importance to me" or "I'm a mother, and my daughter's interests come first" (pp. 44, 86). When Sachiko said the former, she planned to leave Nagasaki. At this stage, she believed that Mariko would "have far more opportunities" in America (p. 46). However, by the time she uttered the latter, the situation had changed. Because Frank had "disappeared and spent all [their] money" drinking "in a bar with his worthless saloon girl," Sachiko had to change her plans (p. 87). This time, she denied her previous statement: "I'm rather glad things have turned out like this. Imagine how unsettling it would have been for my daughter, finding herself in a land full of foreigners, a land full of Ame-kos. And suddenly having an Ame-ko for a father, imagine how confusing that would be for her" (p. 86). However, after the reconciliation between Sachiko and Frank, she began to prepare to leave Nagasaki. Moreover, she drowned one of Mariko's favorite kittens in the river, thinking that they could not take them to America. According to Brian W. Shaffer (1998/2008), this scene describes "Sachiko's figurative murder of her daughter" (p. 33). After killing the kitten, Sachiko finally stopped pretending to prioritize Mariko's wishes and welfare and displayed her selfishness, saying, "Do you think I imagine for one moment that I'm a good mother to her?" (p. 171). Etsuko's words intended to justify her choice to leave Japan, which are similar to those used by Sachiko, insinuate the possibility that Keiko was victimized by her selfish desire to start her new life in Britain.

In Chapter 11, the last chapter, Ishiguro confirms this hypothesis. After narrating Sachiko's admission of selfishness in Chapter 10, Etsuko recalls her conversation with Niki, in which she finally admitted that she had disregarded Keiko's wishes and welfare: "I knew all along she wouldn't be happy over here. But I decided to bring her just the same" (p. 176). Moreover, Etsuko confessed to Niki that she had longed for English rural life just as Sachiko "used to dream [she would] go to

America” (p. 109): “When your father first brought me down here, Niki, I remember thinking how so truly like England everything looked. All these fields, and the house too. It was just the way I always imagined England would be and I was so pleased” (p. 182). The narrator suggests that she harbored romantic notions of the English countryside while residing in Japan, which is omitted from her reminiscences about her previous life in Nagasaki. Although in the middle of the novel, she justifies her decision to leave Japan, in the final chapter, she reverses herself and hints that she placed her romantic desire to live in the English countryside above Keiko’s interests. Using the story of others, she tries to come to terms with the fact that her past choices led to Keiko’s lonely life in Britain and ultimately to her suicide.

This fact is too poignant for Etsuko to confront without detours. Therefore, she appropriates the story of Sachiko and Mariko, or the story of others, to talk about her own story while avoiding confronting her trauma and responsibility. Her memories of the mother and daughter “function as a screen memory (*Deckerinnerung*) in the Freudian sense” and serve to “[cover] up a traumatic event . . . that cannot be approached directly” by substituting, displacing, and falsifying it (Hansen, 1996, p. 311). Her memories use events from the past as a distraction from more unacceptable and painful emotions, such as her guilt over Keiko’s suicide, which are pushed out of her mind by the mechanism of psychological repression.

In the penultimate chapter, Ishiguro prepares readers for Etsuko’s final revelation by confirming the parallel relationships between Etsuko-Keiko-Sheringham and Sachiko-Mariko-Frank. In the following scene, which purports to describe a moment when Etsuko persuaded Mariko to leave Japan, she addressed herself to the child as if she was her own daughter:

“I don’t want to go away. I don’t want to go away tomorrow.”

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

“I don’t want to go away. And I don’t like him. He’s like a pig.”

“You’re not to speak like that,” I said, *angrily* [emphasis added]. . . .

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

The child said nothing. I sighed again.

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

This time she looked up at me questioningly.

“Yes, I promise,” I said. “If you don’t like it over there, we’ll come straight back. But we have to try it and see if we like it there. I’m sure we will.” (pp. 172–173)

Although the older Etsuko living in Britain, who sometimes “snapped a little” or “said, coldly” to

Niki, straightforwardly showed her negative feelings, the younger Etsuko living in Nagasaki was modest and never reacted hysterically (pp. 52–53). The quotation above refers to the only scene in which the younger Etsuko expressed anger. However, if “[t]he child” was Mariko, it is strange that Etsuko became irritated at Sachiko’s daughter, especially because when the girl called Frank “a bad man” in Chapter 5, she never showed her anger, just saying, “that’s not a nice thing to say” (p. 81). Although the words “you,” “he,” and “there” in the above scene apparently refer to Mariko, Frank, and America, it cannot be denied that they actually signify Keiko, Sheringham, and Britain, respectively. This hypothesis provides a more convincing explanation of Etsuko’s anger—she became upset because Keiko cursed about Sheringham. This interpretation is also supported by the fact that when Etsuko made a promise to “[t]he child,” she used the word “we,” including herself, instead of the word “you.” In this climactic scene, the narrator drops the pretense of being a third-person observer and confuses Keiko with Mariko, which reveals that she is now talking about “we,” herself and her own daughter.

#### 4.2 The Unresolvable Ambiguity in Etsuko’s Memoir

At the end of *A Pale View of Hills*, Ishiguro reveals the “displacement of the relation between Etsuko and Keiko on to that of Sachiko and Mariko” (Lewis, 2000, p. 34), so that he not only undermines the narrator’s self-created image as a gentle and considerate woman but also raises the fundamental question of whether her old friends really existed. Since Ishiguro leaves the story of Sachiko and Mariko unfinished and refuses to reveal whether they immigrated to America, several scholars note the possibility that they are imaginary figures of Etsuko’s fantasies (D’hoker, 2008; Lewis, 2000). However, as Rebecca Karni (2011) indicates, “Sachiko and Mariko’s story . . . exists partly in its own right” (p. 119). Ishiguro never provides enough evidence for readers to conclude that Etsuko creates imaginary characters, driven by “her feelings of guilt” or by her desires to show that she was “far more caring and responsible than Sachiko” (D’hoker, 2008, p. 157). Consequently, the only thing readers know for certain is that the narrator exploits others to review her past life, regardless of their existence.

This central ambiguity in *A Pale View of Hills* has attracted many scholars’ attention. For example, Wong (2019) speculates that Ishiguro “expects the reader to be confused” (p. 32). Although many readers might be “confused” by the lack of concrete evidence, Ishiguro’s purpose in creating a gap in Etsuko’s memoir lies elsewhere. By creating unresolved ambiguities about the existence of Sachiko and Mariko as well as Etsuko’s previous life, he impresses upon readers that the novel’s focus is not on “solid facts” but on the psychological dimension of the narrator (Mason, 1989b, p. 338).

To imply that Ishiguro’s interest lies entirely in Etsuko’s elusive psyche, rather than in realistic

depictions of Japan, he uses the memoir form. Moreover, he inserts her comments about the ambiguous and unreliable nature of memory. In Chapter 3, the narrator says, “It is possible that my memory of these events will have grown hazy with time, that things did not happen in quite the way they come back to me today” (p. 41). Then, in Chapter 9, she notes, “Memory . . . can be an unreliable thing; often it is heavily coloured by the circumstances in which one remembers, and no doubt this applies to certain of the recollections I have gathered here” (p. 156). Etsuko’s comments about her slippery memories call readers’ attention to an important point of the novel—her memories might have been affected by her current psychological needs or emotional state, and therefore they might have been somewhat modified. Like Ishiguro’s use of the enigmatic characters Sachiko and Mariko, his focus on Etsuko’s ambiguous memories emphasizes the uncertainty about the “solid facts” of her past and forces readers to look more closely at her inner world. In short, *A Pale View of Hills* is Etsuko’s subjective, emotional explanation of why she decided to move to Britain, and therefore her attention is not centered on the questions of “what really happened in Nagasaki” and “what extent [she] really neglected her daughter” (D’hoker, 2008, p. 158).

#### 4.3 Etsuko’s Repressed Guilt Implied in Her Memories, Daydreams, and Dreams

Ishiguro centers *A Pale View of Hills* on Etsuko’s innermost feelings, especially her profound sense of guilt, which are concealed behind the seemingly “self-possessed and calm” tone of her narrative (Wong, 2019, p. 28). She superficially pretends that she does not want to consider the possible reasons for Keiko’s suicide, saying, “such things are in the past now, and there is little to be gained in going over them here” (p. 94). However, Ishiguro carefully implies that her real feelings are the opposite, by symbolically using a rope motif. In the climactic scene where Etsuko persuaded the child to immigrate to the West, she had something resembling a rope. Therefore, the girl looked at her as if she intended “to hurt [her]”: “‘Why are you [Etsuko] holding *it* [emphasis added]?’ / ‘I told you. *It* [emphasis added] caught around my foot. What’s wrong with you?’ I gave a short laugh. ‘Why are you looking at me like *that* [emphasis added]? I’m not going to hurt you’” (p. 173). Using the pronouns “it” and “that,” Ishiguro never clearly explains the child’s expression or the object in Etsuko’s hand.

In Chapter 6, Ishiguro offers a clue to understanding this oblique scene in Chapter 10. When Mariko saw Etsuko holding “an old piece of rope,” which “had tangled itself around [her] ankle,” she showed “[s]igns of fear” and repeatedly asked, “Why have you got the rope?” (pp. 83–84). This situation is very similar to the one narrated in Chapter 10, from which readers can infer that in the later scene, Keiko became frightened at seeing her mother with the rope.

However, some readers would consider this repetition of the rope motif unnatural. It is possible to think that these unrealistic scenes are faithful records of past events, whereas it is also

possible to interpret the repetitive appearance of ropes as the material embodiment of Etsuko's repressed guilt. The latter interpretation is more convincing, especially because Ishiguro warns readers that Etsuko's recollection "is heavily coloured by the circumstances in which" she remembers (p. 156). In other words, it is highly possible that her present mental condition, or her deep repentance for the past, has altered her memories and forces her to imagine the scenes that symbolically foreshadow Keiko's death by hanging. On a subconscious level, she knows that she indirectly killed her daughter, although for the most part of the novel, she superficially pretends that she is not responsible for her tragic fate.

To enable readers to understand that the recurring rope motif symbolizes Etsuko's deep remorse for her past deeds, which is concealed behind the calm detachment of her narrative, Ishiguro refers to her daydreams and nightmares. Some scholars claim that *A Pale View of Hills* has a double structure—the inner story, set in postwar Nagasaki, describes events happening during Etsuko's pregnancy, while the outer story, set in the English countryside around 1980, focuses on Niki's six-day stay at her house (Hirai, 2005; Lewis, 2000). However, they overlook the fact that the diegetic present is set some months after Niki's visit "in April," during which Etsuko remembered her old days in Nagasaki (p. 9). In short, this novel has a three-layer structure. Although Ishiguro never provides enough information on the narrator's current situation, including whether she has really sold her country house, he hints that she is now tormented by disturbing images in her daydreams and dreams. For example, in Chapter 3, the narrator confesses that during the daytime, she often finds herself captivated by appalling mental images: "I have found myself continually bringing to mind that picture—of my daughter hanging in her room for days on end. The horror of that image has never diminished, but it has long ceased to be a morbid matter; as with a wound on one's own body, it is possible to develop an intimacy with the most disturbing of things" (p. 54). Her words "I have found myself" indicate that imagining the "disturbing" scene is not her voluntary act but a subconscious one.

In addition, the narrator explains that "over the past few months," she has dreamed the same thing "several times" (p. 47). When she first had this dream during Niki's visit, she believed that it was about a little girl she had seen "playing on the swing" in a park (p. 95). However, the second time, she realized that the girl was "a little girl [she] knew once" "[a] long time ago" and she "[wasn't] on a swing at all" (pp. 95–96). Although Etsuko never explains clearly, she hints that her dream was about "the little girl," perhaps Mariko, who hung herself to death (p. 96). As in her memories, displacement occurs in her dreams. According to Sigmund Freud (1899/2008), "dream-displacement comes about through the influence of that censorship, the censorship of endopsychic defence" to push aside uncomfortable thoughts and feelings (p. 235). Etsuko has dreamed about "the



little girl” rather than Keiko because her subconscious or unconscious has modified her dream to repress the painful reality. However, this implies that she is still distressed by Keiko’s suicide even after she admitted to Niki her negligent attitude toward her elder daughter (“I knew all along she [Keiko] wouldn’t be happy over here”). Awake or asleep, she cannot escape the unsettling images, or an “uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena,” such as flashbacks and nightmares, which means that she has been emotionally traumatized (Caruth, 1996, p. 11).

#### 4.4 Etsuko’s Wavering Attitudes toward Her Past

Although the horrible images in Etsuko’s dreams and daydreams persistently infiltrate her present life, Yu-Cheng Lee (2008) argues that “[h]er psychological journey into the past . . . finally reaches a moment of great relief and reconciliation” (p. 24). He cites evidence for his claim from the last scene, where Niki reassured Etsuko that “[she] did everything [she] could for” Keiko (p. 176). However, he overlooks the novel’s triple structure and Etsuko’s current state of mind traumatized by Keiko’s death. Shaffer (1998/2008) also insists that Niki “functions chiefly as Etsuko’s rationalizing voice” (p. 25). Both Lee and Shaffer ignore the fact that Etsuko never agreed with Niki’s opinion and forcibly changed the subject, saying, “let’s not discuss it any further” (p. 176).

Given the novel’s three-layered structure and Etsuko’s daydreams and nightmares, it is evident that her psyche is more complex and confused than some scholars have claimed. After defending herself (“My motives for leaving Japan were justifiable”) in Chapter 6, Etsuko appears to concede at the end of the novel that her decision to leave Japan was selfish (“I knew all along she [Keiko] wouldn’t be happy over here”). However, the actual temporal sequence of these events does not correspond to the order of their appearance. Although Etsuko admitted her fault in April, when Niki visited her house, the narrator now claims that she “[knows she] always kept Keiko’s interests very much at heart.” The narrator’s words of self-justification suggest that even in the diegetic present, she cannot fully accept her parental responsibility for Keiko’s death. In short, Ishiguro presents Etsuko as a character who vacillates between her self-protective impulse to deny responsibility for Keiko’s suicide and her conscientious sense of duty to take the blame for the tragic outcome of her decisions.

Etsuko’s desire to defend herself is evident in how she recounts the past. She never narrates her last years in Japan or her new life in Britain, thus obscuring the factors leading to Keiko’s suicide. Instead, she relates her earlier life in postwar Nagasaki. In doing so, she tries to ascribe her decision to divorce Jiro, remarry Sheringham, and migrate to Britain, which must be related to Keiko’s death, to events happening in Nagasaki. After Etsuko lost her family and lover during the Second World

War, she married the son of Seiji Ogata, her lifesaver, who kindly adopted her into his family. However, she confessed to Mrs. Fujiwara, her mother's old friend, that she "still [thought] about Nakamura-San sometimes" (p. 76). Moreover, she secretly stored "several letters" and "two or three small photographs" in "the bottom of" "the lowest drawer," which were "unknown to [her] husband" (pp. 70–71). Although the narrator never clearly explains who the "letters" were from or who appeared in these "photographs," her hiding them from Jiro indicates the possibility that they were related to Nakamura, her lover who had died during the war. The cache of the "letters" and "small photographs"—reminders of Etsuko's dead lover—symbolically suggests that she tried to submerge her grief and sorrow to recover from her "very heartbroken" condition and "start a family of [her] own" (pp. 76, 111). However, the narrated Etsuko living in postwar Nagasaki does not appear happy. For example, Mrs. Fujiwara said that Etsuko looked "miserable" and "unhappy" (pp. 24, 77). This is also indicated by the narrator's accounts that "Jiro was often tired after a day's work and not in the mood for conversation" and they did not hold hands "in public" (pp. 36, 120). From these descriptions, Ruth Forsythe (2005) presumes that Jiro "[treated] her like a recalcitrant maid" (p. 104). The narrator, while hinting that her painful experiences of the war led to her "miserable" marital life and subsequent divorce, characterizes the younger self as one of the "victims of post-war trauma" (Bennett, 2011, p. 84). Thus, she tries to ascribe the disastrous outcome of her choices, namely Keiko's suicide, to larger societal factors beyond her control, associating her recent trauma caused by the loss of her daughter with her old war trauma.

Some scholars who regard Etsuko as one of the "victims of post-war trauma" claim that her silence about the past, including her last years in Japan, is a sign of her subconscious repression of "the unspeakable," confusing her old trauma caused by the war and the atomic bombing with her recent loss of Keiko (Wood, 1998, pp. 177–178). However, Shaffer (1998/2008) observes that "Etsuko deliberately [avoided] mentioning Keiko's suicide to an acquaintance, Mrs. Waters, who [inquired] after Etsuko's elder daughter" (p. 16). In other words, she has an "ability to repress the 'real' tale within her ostensible one" (Shaffer, 1998/2008, p. 16). By including this scene, Ishiguro suggests that the narrator consciously employs the strategies of remaining silent on the details of her past and "[arranging] her memories in a way that allows her to salvage some dignity" (Mason, 1989b, p. 338). However, she cannot completely dispel her sense of regret and guilt for Keiko's death, as indicated by the disturbing images of a rope and a girl found hanging, which have penetrated her memories, daydreams, and nightmares.

Etsuko's conscientious sense of duty is suggested by the fact that she never accepted Niki's comforting words. According to the narrator, "in recent years," Niki "has taken it upon herself to admire certain aspects of [Etsuko's] past" and now believes that her mother "should have no regrets

for those choices [she] once made” (pp. 10–11). From Niki’s perspective, Etsuko is a liberated woman who “[plucked] up the courage” to pursue her own dreams while many other “miserable” women, who “get stuck with kids and lousy husbands,” “waste away their lives” (pp. 89–90). In her view, Sheringham is a hero who rescued her mother from her “miserable” life in Japan. Accordingly, her friend, who learned from her about Etsuko and Sheringham and “how [they had] left Japan,” was “impressed” and decided to write “a poem” about her (p. 89).

However, Etsuko dismisses Niki’s friend’s attempt to write “a poem” about her as “absurd” (p. 89). Furthermore, she reveals Niki’s ignorance of her past life in Japan and Sheringham’s misguided view of Jiro, denying her daughter’s glorification of her past decisions:

Besides, she has little idea of what actually occurred during those last days in Nagasaki. One supposes she has built up some sort of picture from what her father has told her. Such a picture, inevitably, would have its inaccuracies. For, in truth, despite all the impressive articles he wrote about Japan, my husband never understood the ways of our culture, even less a man like Jiro. I do not claim to recall Jiro with affection, but then he was never the oafish man my husband considered him to be. Jiro worked hard to do his part for the family and he expected me to do mine; in his own terms, he was a dutiful husband. And indeed, for the seven years he knew his daughter, he was a good father to her. Whatever else I convinced myself of during those final days, I never pretended Keiko would not miss him. (p. 90)

Like Niki, some reviewers and scholars regard Etsuko as a liberated woman. For instance, Edith Milton (1982) claims that “she has turned away from the strangling role of traditional Japanese housewife toward the West, where she has discovered freedom of a sort” (p. 13). Hélène Fau (2009) also asserts that the older Etsuko living in Britain around 1980 “acts as a metonymy and stands for emancipated women,” while the narrated Etsuko living in postwar Japan “acts as a metonymy and stands for all Japanese women who were sentenced to silence by the male rules of religion, tradition and, of course, war” (pp. 148–149). They presuppose a dichotomy between Japan as an uncultivated country and Britain as a sophisticated society. However, Ishiguro denies such an oversimplification and abstraction by inserting Etsuko’s above-mentioned remark. To undermine Niki’s opinion that Etsuko “ought to be proud of what [she] did with [her] life,” the narrator implies that Jiro behaved in a much more nurturing way toward Keiko than Sheringham (p. 90). In contrast to Jiro, Sheringham “ignored her [Keiko] most of the time,” although he had persuaded Etsuko that they “could give her a happy life” in Britain (pp. 175–176). Because Etsuko feels that her self-centered decisions triggered Keiko’s suicide, she dismantles Niki’s idealization of her previous life.

However, Etsuko never explains to Niki “what actually occurred during those last days in Nagasaki,” or the contexts of her divorce and immigration, letting her believe in Sheringham’s

glamorized view of their pasts. It is partly because she thinks that outsiders, even her family members, cannot understand her Japanese life. This is implied by her statement that “[her] husband never understood the ways of [her] culture.” Etsuko’s enigmatic silence about her “last days in Nagasaki” would frustrate many readers who expect her to fulfill her role as a native informant and explain the details of them. However, Ishiguro refuses to offer a straightforward account of her previous life in Japan. He foregrounds a wide gap between the narrated Etsuko living in postwar Japan and the narrating Etsuko living in Britain around 1980. Thus, he demonstrates that Etsuko is neither a stereotypical repressed Japanese housewife nor a westernized, or “emancipated” woman, which serves to prevent readers from interpreting the novel according to their images of and expectations toward Japan and Japanese people.

### 5. Ishiguro’s Postwar Japan as a Metaphorical Topos Reflecting Britain in the 1970s

Although some readers might think that *A Pale View of Hills* offers “a realistic study of the Japanese society in the wake of its crushing military defeat” (Lewis, 2000, p. 22), Ishiguro reveals that the novel is inspired by “debates that were going on about feminism” in 1970s Britain (Groes, 2011, p. 251). As Sonya Andermahr (2014/2017) points out, the decade of the 1970s, when Ishiguro prepared for his first novel, “coincides with the flowering of British second-wave feminism, which represented a thoroughgoing challenge to the widespread discrimination faced by women in employment, tax and social security laws, in family law, and in social convention and expectation” (p. 70). In 1970, Eva Figes (1970/1981), a German-born British feminist writer, published *Patriarchal Attitudes: Women in Society* to offer her detailed analysis of different socio-historical institutions that have consolidated patriarchal values in Western society and relegated women to a secondary position. Although some reviewers and scholars, such as Milton (1982) and Fau (2009), regard Etsuko as a heroine who escaped patriarchal Japanese society and “discovered freedom” in the West, patriarchy has been problematized not only in Japan but also in Britain.

Aware of this social climate at that time, Ishiguro addresses in *A Pale View of Hills* some of “[t]he major themes treated in 1970s [British] feminist fiction,” such as “women’s unequal position within patriarchy,” “female selfhood and identity,” “reproduction and motherhood,” “women’s community,” “mother-daughter relations,” and “women’s work” (Andermahr, 2014/2017, p. 80). For example, although the narrated Etsuko living in Nagasaki repeatedly insisted on her happiness and excitement about her coming child, saying, “Thinking about the child cheers me up,” the narrator now confesses that at that time, “small things were capable of arousing in [her] every kind of misgiving about motherhood” (pp. 24, 17). As Justine Baillie and Sean Matthews (2009) observe, “her narrative is remarkable for its inability directly to acknowledge negative feelings about

pregnancy and motherhood” (p. 49). In addition, Ishiguro portrays Niki as a young woman who reflects the social climate of 1970s Britain. She doubts the conventional life-cycle model, wherein young women are expected to marry and bear children. For instance, she demonstrates her belief that “[s]o many women just get brainwashed” and “think all there is to life is getting married and having a load of kids” (p. 180). In contrast to Etsuko, a woman of the older generation, who believes that “in the end, . . . there isn’t very much else” to do, Niki insists that “there’s plenty of things [she] could do” and she “[doesn’t] want to just get stuck away somewhere with a husband and a load of screaming kids” (p. 180). By describing Niki as a character influenced by the second-wave feminism of the 1970s, Ishiguro not only emphasizes the tensions in “mother-daughter relations” but also unsettles the myths of maternal instinct and biological motherhood.

Not only at the thematic level, but also at the stylistic and formal levels, Ishiguro’s novel shares certain characteristics with contemporary women’s writings. In contrast to rational, consistent, and linear novels of the patriarchal literary tradition, Etsuko’s narrative is characterized by open, fluid, non-linear, fragmentary, and unfinished forms, which are considered to be stylistic and formal tendencies of what came to be termed *écriture féminine*, or “feminine . . . writing” (Cixous, 1975/1976, p. 883).

According to Ishiguro, he initially planned to set *A Pale View of Hills* in contemporary Cornwall and describe a young woman of his generation: “I had it in my mind that this woman would alternate between saying, I’m going to devote myself to the child, and, I’ve fallen in love with this man and this child is a nuisance. I’d met many people like this when I was working with the homeless” (Hunnewell, 2008, p. 26). However, he later decided to use a postwar Japanese setting and Japanese characters to present his themes, such as “women’s unequal position within patriarchy,” more effectively.

Ishiguro uses the Japanese setting symbolically, rather than literally, so that he not only dramatizes the themes of the novel but also parallels the societal conditions of postwar Nagasaki with Etsuko’s psychological condition. According to the narrator, “[t]he worst days were over by then” (p. 11). Nagasaki had recovered enough that it was no longer obvious that “anything had ever happened” there (p. 110). When Etsuko went to the top of Mount Inasa by cable car with Sachiko and Mariko, she was impressed by a “view below [them]”: “[A] long way down below us, we could see the harbour looking like a dense piece of machinery left in the water. . . . The land at the foot of the hills was busy with houses and buildings. . . . ‘Everything looks so full of life. But all that area down there’—I waved my hand at the view below us—‘all that area was so badly hit when the bomb fell’” (pp. 110–111). Like the city, neighboring women who lived in newly built apartments and were “busily involved with their husbands and their children” did not seem to suffer from “the tragedies

and nightmares of wartime” (p. 13). In Nagasaki, however, there was a lasting trace of the war and the atomic bomb—“an expanse of wasteground, several acres of dried mud and ditches” between their apartment blocks and the river (p. 11). According to Etsuko, “[m]any complained it was a health hazard, and indeed the drainage was appalling”: “All year round there were craters filled with stagnant water, and in the summer months the mosquitoes became intolerable” (p. 11). Eckert (2012) interprets this space as a symbol of “a past that is pushed down but continues to bubble up” (p. 81). In *A Pale View of Hills*, Ishiguro describes both the rebuilding of Nagasaki and the “wasteground” to present the city around 1950 as a place undergoing transition, where signs of recovery coexisted with traces of non-healing wounds.

As postwar Nagasaki underwent the process of recovery, the narrated Etsuko living in the city still struggled to overcome “a deep sense of loss” (p. 23). After she lost her family and lover during the Second World War, she married Jiro to start over in life. However, her grief and sorrow did not heal easily. Her “miserable” marital life is indicated by Ishiguro’s description that she would gaze “emptily” outside the window:

I spent many moments—as I was to do throughout succeeding years—gazing emptily at the view from my apartment window. On clearer days, I could see far beyond the trees on the opposite bank of the river, a pale outline of hills visible against the clouds. It was not an unpleasant view, and on occasions it brought me a rare sense of relief from the emptiness of those long afternoons I spent in that apartment. (p. 99)

The narrator hints that her divorce and immigration are related to “the emptiness” of her life in Japan. Ishiguro parallels her mental status at that time with the social situation of postwar Nagasaki, where the “wasteground” continued to exert a harmful influence on neighbors. To effectively describe Etsuko’s psyche, traumatized by the war and the atomic bomb, Ishiguro carefully selects this Japanese setting, believing that “with a setting come all kinds of emotional and historical reverberations” (Hunnewell, 2008, p. 42).

Due to superficial Japanese imageries and motifs, some reviewers and scholars have claimed that *A Pale View of Hills* provides realistic and authentic depictions of Japan. However, Ishiguro uses the Japanese setting and characters to effectively present issues concerning women and gender roles that were passionately discussed in the 1970s. When he finally decided to change the setting of the novel from Cornwall in the 1970s to postwar Nagasaki, he also changed his plan to write “an autobiographical novel” (Biggsby, 2000, p. 198). Because Etsuko is his sexual/gender other, he restrained himself from impersonating a Japanese woman of his parents’ generation, especially because there was a critical tendency to read novels by minority writers as authentic accounts of their places of origin.

## 6. Conclusion

To prevent readers from interpreting *A Pale View of Hills* as “‘ethnic’ realism,” Ishiguro strategically employs the narrative techniques of describing mysterious characters, Sachiko and Mariko, and creating ambiguity over Etsuko’s previous life. By highlighting the unresolvable uncertainty in her memoir, he frustrates readers’ desires to understand the “solid facts” of her earlier life in Japan. Instead, he stresses her enigmatic silence about her past and refusal to narrate her straightforward autobiography. In doing so, he resists the critical tendency to consider novels by minority writers to be authentic representations of their places of origin. Moreover, he encourages readers to observe more carefully her confused psyche, especially the lurking sense of guilt over Keiko’s suicide, which is submerged under the superficially restrained tone of her narrative, and read this “Japanese” novel as a metaphorical narrative, partly reflecting his contemporary Britain.

## Notes

1. For studies discussing the novel’s historical setting, see Mehta (2017); Spark (2010). Purton (1993) examines the influence of Japanese culture on the novel, whereas Lewis (2000) focuses on “two specific Japanese motifs,” “ghosts and suicide,” to scrutinize “various aspects of the Japaneseness of Ishiguro’s *A Pale View of Hills*” (p. 20). For studies addressing autobiographical elements in Ishiguro’s novel, see Hirai (2005); Shōnaka (2011).
2. Ishiguro notes the possibility that his novel is influenced by Japanese domestic films, such as those of Yasujirō Ozu and Mikio Naruse (Mason, 1989b, p. 336). For studies on their relationship, see Mason (1989a); Sakaguchi (2004); Taketomi (2013).
3. In this paper, citations of *A Pale View of Hills* will hereafter be marked only by page numbers in parentheses.

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