BEYOND THE DIVISION OF EAST AND WEST
—KAZUO ISHIGURO’S A PALE VIEW OF HILLS—

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A Pale View of Hills,¹ the first full-length novel of Kazuo Ishiguro, was published in 1982 and received favorably in the English speaking world. It won the year’s Royal Society of Literature Award in England but still remains little known in this country. Ishiguro, with another work, An Artist of the Floating World (1986),² to his credit, is currently reputed to be one of the most promising writers of the English language in our generation. The following pages will be spent for discussion of the work with which this young British author of Japanese ancestry³ made a notable if not spectacular debut as a novelist.

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¹ The novel was first published by Faber and Faber in London, and reprinted by Penguin Books Ltd. (Harmondworth, England) in 1983. The King Penguin edition is adopted for reference and quotation in this study. The novelty of the material constantly troubled me with a hopeless dearth of critical studies. Most of the information that I gathered about the work and its author was kindly provided by Prof. Takeshi Onodera of Yokohama City University, who translated the novel into Japanese in 1984. Special acknowledgement must be expressed for his generosity.

² This novel was published by G. P. Putnam’s Sons in New York.

³ Kazuo Ishiguro was born in Nagasaki in 1954 and brought up there until he was six. Then he went over to England in 1960 with his family when his father, an oceanographer, was granted a one-year research fund by the British government. The visit was planned as temporary, but Ishiguro, like the other members of his family, has never been back to Japan since then.

Although entirely Japanese by blood, Ishiguro received a thoroughly British upbringing and education. In the interviews with some prominent newspapers and magazines, he frankly confesses that he is almost ‘illiterate’ in his native tongue (The Fiction Magazine, Vol. 1, No. 1, Spring 1982) and that he has no idea what it feels like to be Japanese (The Guardian, Monday, February 22, 1982). He attended a grammar school in Woking and proceeded to the University of Kent at Canterbury, where he read English and philosophy. After graduation, he joined the Cyrenians, an independent welfare organization, and has since been working for the homeless and unemployed. He was once stationed in Glasgow but now lives in London. In the intervening years, he returned to college for one year and obtained an M. A. degree in Creative Writing from the University of East Anglia.

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A Pale View of Hills may, upon first reading, baffle the reader with its stunning simplicity both in style and in storyline. It may then baffle him further by stubbornly, almost arrogantly, defying any easy, cursory attempt of criticism and interpretation. For its simplicity is quite deceptive, disguising rare sensitivity, artistic sobriety and well-governed craft. The whole story deals, in short, with “no more than a matter of several weeks one summer many years ago.” (p. 11) It is based upon the heroine’s recollection of two of various things that happened to her in Nagasaki soon after the war. One is her brief friendship with a mother and her daughter who wandered into the city all the way from Tokyo. The other is her father-in-law’s prolonged sojourn with her and her husband. Both episodes may sound very ordinary and banal in every respect, but the truth is that real chills and shudders normally lurk in the obscure corners of our everyday life and elude observation until a searching light is cast. The first episode, seen from the point of view of a mother-to-be, lays open the conflict which faces most women at the crossroads between being a woman and being a mother. The second episode directs attention toward the delicate issue of estrangement between a step-father and an adopted daughter. The underlying design of the novel will emerge where these two streams of the plot meet, probably in the trickiness and transiency of human bonds.

Compared with its style and storyline, the plot of the novel is encompassed by a little more elaborate settings of social and historical scope, which comprise World War II, the atomic bomb, the Korean War and the strenuous efforts of reconstruction in postwar Japan. Scattered among them are some less grandiose yet equally destructive cases of interracial marriage, family break-up and infanticide, both actual and imaginary. In the aftermath of the global war ensue bitter battles of personal causes. No essential distinction can be drawn between an instant execution of carnage and a day-by-day wrecking of one innocent soul. Emphasis is continuously placed on the days after, not the days of, the atomic holocaust. Accordingly, the focus of depiction is fixed on people and not on the horrendous incidents; on the devastated minds and lives of the survivors and not on the colossal devastation of the war and the atomic bomb.
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The heroine is Etsuko, a middle-aged Japanese woman, who is living alone in the quiet countryside some way from London. She married twice and had a daughter in each marriage; she divorced her first husband, Jiro, who was a reticent, rather callous Japanese businessman and lost her second, an English journalist and Japanologist named Sheringham. Mr Sheringham’s role in the plot is kept to a minimum. The story opens in April when the heroine is visited by Niki, her younger daughter. The name ‘Niki’ is explicated at the outset as the product of a compromise, or a collision, between her own and her second husband’s (in other words, an Oriental and an Occidental) lifestyle, culture and ego. Niki’s stay does not last longer than five days, during which their casual conversation from time to time drifts away, against their will and caution, to the ‘taboo’ topic of the family, the death of Keiko:

... although we never dwelt long on the subject of Keiko’s death, it was never far away, hovering over us whenever we talked. (p. 10)

It is just curtly mentioned that Keiko, the elder daughter of the heroine, “severing all her ties” (p. 88) with her mother, left home suddenly six years ago after a lengthy period of heavy depression and morbid seclusion: she recently hung herself in a rented flat in Manchester. Little more is told about her death due to the heroine’s profound sense of guilt and failure as a mother. Niki, in her turn, takes it on herself to comfort her mother and assure her that she was not responsible, that nothing could be done to prevent the tragic outcome. An air of eeriness enters the story when both mother and daughter begin to notice some strange spell lingering in Keiko’s room, “a spell that [has] grown all the stronger now that Keiko [is] dead.” (p. 53) Etsuko feels and even behaves as if Keiko were still an indispensable part of her family life. One day, while enjoying a stroll in the vicinity with Niki, she runs into Mrs Waters, a neighbour, who kindly inquires after Keiko. Later in the day, the following dialogue takes place between mother and daughter:

“it was odd just now, with Mrs Waters. It was almost like you enjoyed it.”
“Enjoyed what?”
“Pretending Keiko was alive.” (p. 52)
Truly, the dead never pass away into total oblivion as long as they are remembered and missed. Under certain extreme circumstances, death might be conceived as an unseen companion of daily domesticity, as an intangible extension of life itself. Keiko continues to claim her presence tacitly but forcibly, not in the mother's private region alone but also in her social life.

The accidental allusion to the forbidden topic recoils immediately on the heroine. Unwilling and unprepared, as she always is, to confront the harsh realities, Etsuko chooses, in retrospect, to make a 'sentimental journey' back to the bygone days and let another woman re-live her turbulent experiences to which she herself was an eyewitness. When one scar is too fresh and too rugged to be examined scrutinizingly, its pain and heat could be conveyed by detailing another scar of the past, even though it belongs to someone else. Etsuko murmurs to herself:

As with a wound on one's own body, it is possible to develop an intimacy with the most disturbing of things. (p. 54)

Indeed, we can come to terms with almost anything, with irredeemable damages and losses, and even with death itself. The best soothingunction is always administered by time, as the old familiar adage preaches.¹ Some reconciliation is being built between the heroine and Keiko's death; she obviously needs more time and, perhaps, an occasion to see what has lately fallen on her in an objective, impersonal perspective.

The scene is abruptly changed, and the serenity of the English countryside is shattered by vigorous clamours of rehabilitation in Nagasaki. But inward recoveries do not invariably keep pace with outward ones. The season also advances from drizzling spring to sweltering summer. Unchanged is the heroine's habitual posture in looking emptily out of the window on distant views, as if watching eternity or chasing fleeting time with her eyes:

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,

¹ The maxim goes, "Time is the best healer."
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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)

It should be borne in mind that 'emptiness' strikes the undertone of the early part of Etsuko's married life. With the introduction into the story of her old friend, Sachiko, and her daughter, Mariko, the heroine recedes to the backseat as a narrator and observer.

II

The novel has a double structure of time and place. It moves back and forth, through the surrealistic channels of reminiscence, daydream and fantasy, between the present and past and also between England and Nagasaki. The shuttling is conducted so frequently and so subtly that the sense of distance, along with that of reality, in due course dissolves into a unique narrative of timelessness. This peculiar structure, for one thing, serves to adumbrate the process of the heroine's personal growth as a woman, reflecting her wavering and hesitations directly and indirectly. For example, when the scene, after repeated shiftings, finally comes back to a sunny spring day in England, Etsuko has managed to weather the stormy autumn and winter of her life, the blank section of her autobiography: the hot, uneasy summer of her early motherhood and second marriage has already been experienced vicariously by Sachiko. Another thing that should be stated about the dual structure is its close correspondence with characterization. It contributes to blur the boundaries of personal miseries and abate their acuteness. The main characters, mostly women, as the story develops, start to overlap each other, curiously, while retaining their personal distinctness and become indistinguishable like mirror images toward the end: Sachiko and Mariko gradually take the shape of a future image, or an altered ego, of the heroine and Keiko respectively. Finally, it may be contended that these smooth changes of scenes, minds and images are rendered feasible through a shrewd application of some fundamental cinematic techniques such as cutback, flashback, dissolve, fadeout and overlap.¹

¹ In the interview with The Fiction Magazine (op. cit.), Ishiguro reveals his penchant for the cinematic works by Yasujiro Ozu. For the definitions of the cinematic terms, I consulted Cut! Print! by Tony Miller and Patricia George Miller (Los Angeles: Ohara Publications, 1972).
Sachiko is a single mother in her thirties with a daughter, Mariko, aged around ten. She has recently moved to a derelict shack near Etsuko’s apartment. Her new place, “standing alone at the end of that expanse of wasteground” (p. 12), is a telling symbol of her present situation and frame of mind. Depending solely on her prestigious lineage and high education, Sachiko remains proud, a little too proud, and aloof, though she is now reduced to a vagrant squatter mired in poverty and misery. Her garish courtship with Frank, a flippant, heavy-drinking American, is becoming the talk of the town and setting afloat wild rumours among the housewives in the neighbourhood. But she coolly ignores their suspicious glances and whispers.

Nevertheless, Sachiko is in some respect not unlike other women around her in Nagasaki, “those who suffered, those with sad and terrible memories” (p. 13): she was stripped of everything she had but Mariko during the war in the capital. War is in a sense a grand leveller: it distributes sorrows and nightmares all equally. Difference becomes discernible only after the survivors resume their daily activities and settle down to their routine. Mrs Fujiwara, who comes to employ Sachiko as a helping hand at her noodle shop, is another victim of the war. She lost all her family except her eldest son and had to endure difficulties of every possible kind in the postwar confusion in order to raise him. The heroine is no exception: she became an orphan in the war but fortunately found shelter in the philanthropic care of Ogata-San. It must be a woman’s instinct in Etsuko that brings her in contact with Sachiko, as she herself perceives:

I felt a kind of sympathy for Sachiko then, and felt I understood something of that aloofness that I had noticed about her when I had watched her from afar. (p. 13)

Intuition sniffs attentively and detects a fateful encounter which determines a future path.

What makes Sachiko so different and so aggressive now in Nagasaki emanates from a realization, or rather a determination, which she has reached after a series of misfortunes. She recalls that no love, no mutual understanding, was involved in her marriage, and goes on to describe her deceased husband as

Very strict and very patriotic. He was never the most considerate of men.
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But he came from a highly distinguished family and my parents considered it a good match. I didn’t protest when he forbade me to study English. (p. 110)

There is little doubt that the delusion of a married life helped to vitalize Sachiko’s dormant femininity. The heroine’s marriage bears a singular resemblance to Sachiko’s in an alarming disconnection of both verbal and spiritual communication. Here is one of the very few sketches of her life with Jiro:

For one thing, my husband would have considered it not business of mine to comment on such a matter. Furthermore, at that time of night, Jiro was invariably tired and any attempts to converse would only make him impatient. And in any case, it was never in the nature of our relationship to discuss such things openly. (p. 127)

Having fled war-charred Tokyo, Sachiko first moved in with an uncle of her husband. He lived in Nagasaki with Yasuko, his unmarried daughter. His advanced age kept him frail and bedridden but his affluence and generosity allowed him to take in his distant relatives. But Sachiko left his place suddenly after a year. In a succinct portrayal of her life there, she expounds the reason to Etsuko:

Yasuko and I, we tried to occupy ourselves one way or another, but there was little to do other than sit and talk all day. All those months we sat there in that house together, we hardly saw an outsider the whole time. (p. 102)

And again,

There’s nothing for me at my uncle’s house, just a few empty rooms, that’s all. I could sit there in a room and grow old. Other than that there’ll be nothing. Just empty rooms, that’s all. (p. 171)

A house of death, a living death, isolated from the rest of the world and haunted only by waning memories of the past—so Sachiko considers the uncle’s huge house which had a pond in the garden (just like Etsuko’s country house in England!). The empty rooms, which can be associated with Keiko’s dreary room in Manchester, seem to embody the macabre void of life cuddled by aching silence and loneliness. When Yasuko drops in at Sachiko’s dilapidated cottage without notice, she quite appropriately cuts a figure as a messenger of death:
she is on her way back from a funeral which she attended in her father’s place and is dressed in mourning.

Sachiko is now conscious that she ought to live a life of her own at any cost, even at the cost of Mariko’s welfare and education. For Sachiko, the past is something to dump into oblivion; and the present is nothing to take pride in: instead, she vehemently desires to brush it aside. She only looks forward to the time to come. But, pitifully, her future does not appear any more luminous and stable, particularly when it hinges on a fickle, foreign drunkard. Beyond Sachiko’s desperate and egotistical struggles as a woman—not as a mother—looms Mariko’s queerly expressionless gaze.

III

Mariko is a lonely girl, left alone to herself all the time as a result of Sachiko’s frequent outing with Frank. She has no regular schooling and no friends at all in Nagasaki. Her mother’s notoriety and her own isolation cause her to be a vulnerable target of abuse and teasing for children in the neighbourhood. Her only playmates are a few stray cats which she picked up on a nearby riverbank. She lavishly gives them what she is deprived of, namely, motherly care and love. Her excessive affection for what her mother calls “dirty little creatures” (p. 165) seems to be rooted in her subliminal aversion to any change and adjustment which threaten to take place in her life at any time, for the pets provide a psychological hideout where she can feel secure and comfortable. Her occasional peevishness and outbursts of tempers are outcries of her ravaged soul, which Sachiko fatally overlooks, or deliberately—of course with some sense of guilt—turns a deaf ear to:

“Why do you always go away with Frank-San?”
“Are you going to say you’re sorry?”
“Frank-San pisses like a pig. He’s a pig in a sewer.”
Sachiko stared at her child, her hand still poised in the air.
“He drinks his own piss.”
“Silence.”
“He drinks his own piss and he shits in his bed.”

The heroine, already a few months pregnant with Keiko, harbours ominous misgivings about Mariko. In fact, her awakening mother-
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hood plays a key role in her acquaintanceship with Sachiko. Etsuko’s misgivings are not totally groundless: they forebode a tragic consequence which is to be actualized many years later by, of all people, her own daughter. Mariko’s self-destructive behaviour, as is demonstrated in her show of swallowing a live spider in Etsuko’s presence, sets a prenatal precedence for Keiko. Moreover, Mariko’s violent acts belie her true intention: they derive from her constantly endangered sense of self-preservation, just as Keiko’s self-imposed seclusion manifests the only expression of protest and hatred available to her under Mr Sheringham’s roof. Mariko makes an impulsive response to any possible threat to her life. For example, she turns frozen and motionless at the sight of a rope which Etsuko disentangles from her ankle as she comes to seek her at the river—a rope associated easily with hanging. Under the existing conditions, hypersensitivity affords the sole means of self-protection to this poor little girl.

The gradual demolition of Mariko’s innocence is played out against the backdrop of freakish cases of criminal infanticide. The whole city of Nagasaki is alerted by a series of child murders, the last of which has just recently left a little girl hanging dead from a tree. The frightening sight is linked, in the chronological confusion of Etsuko’s reveries, with her indelible vision of Keiko suspended in the air for days on end in a desolate room. But the network of the pictures of horror which habitually revisit Etsuko does not end there. It is not surprising that imaginary visions abound and thrive in such a fiction of subtlety and resonance. There are two dominant trains of death-imagery which thread through the story: one envisages a girl hanging in the air, while the other is related with a river.

Sachiko and Mariko, on one occasion, take a day-trip with the heroine to a nearby mountain. That is the only occasion where the mother and daughter look as they should: Sachiko behaves elegantly as a well-educated lady and Mariko plays around in high spirits like an ordinary cheerful girl. Yet their moments of peace and happiness are short-lived. They happen to get acquainted with a mother and a chubby boy on the mountain. In no time develops a rivalry between the two children. Mariko, driven to shame and silence over the matter of a father’s profession, runs away and starts to climb a tree. The boy follows her up the tree, but his rotundity presents a great disadvantage to him:
Although only a few centimetres off the ground, he seemed in a state of high tension. It was hard to say if she did so deliberately, but as she lowered herself, the little girl trod firmly on the boy’s fingers. The boy gave a shriek, falling clumsily. (p. 119)

The boy comes sobbing back to his mother and complains, “She kicked me off the tree. She tried to kill me.” (ibid.) Mariko’s hurt self-esteem is not recuperated thoroughly, but she has at least revenged the boy. Her solitary figure up on the tree epitomizes her forlorn girlhood. Mariko’s inner desolation is further underlined when she is placed side by side, in the subconscious stream of the heroine’s recollection, with a small girl playing jovially on a swing, whom Etsuko sees during a walk with Niki. The sight of the ‘happy girl swinging in the air’ is firmly imprinted in her as a paradigm of what a little girl should be like and afterwards haunts her dreams and daydreams.

Mariko is possessed with one fixed idea, which seizes her every time she feels ill at ease or insecure. Sachiko explains the origin of her daughter’s obsession with “the other woman from across the river” (p. 18); the woman, a young mother, whom Sachiko and Mariko accidentally saw back in Tokyo, was mentally distracted and committed suicide after drowning her newly born baby in a river:

At first I thought the woman was blind, she had that kind of look, her eyes didn’t seem to actually see anything. Well, she brought her arms out of the canal and showed us what she’d been holding under the water. It was a baby. I took hold of Mariko then and we came out of the alley. (p. 74)

Obsessions and nightmares recur and often come true in this novel. The scene of drowning a baby is enacted again at the end of the heroine’s narration. Sachiko, after violent oscillations and changes of mind between “What is of utmost importance to me is my daughter’s welfare” (p. 86) and “What do I have to lose?” (p. 170), finally decides to make a voyage to America after Frank. Pressed for preparations and exasperated with Mariko’s incooperative attitude, Sachiko, upon the spur of the moment, puts all of her daughter’s cats into a wooden box and takes it to a river. When she spurns Mariko’s plea and submerges the box in the water, all the emotional ties connecting the mother and daughter are snapped and lost forever. Sachiko, desperate for a new start in America, has annihilated Mariko’s already lacerated
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humanity as well as her cherished animals.

IV

Around the same time, Ogata-San comes to see Etsuko and Jiro. Retired from an active career in education, this former schoolmaster resides comfortably in Fukuoka. The heroine scarcely delineates her married life with Jiro, but how it goes can be conjectured to a considerable extent through fragmentary sketches of her father-in-law’s stay. Ogata-San’s visit, which turns out to be much longer than he originally contemplated, sets up another scene in which the fragility of spurious dutifulness and decorum is mercilessly exposed to view. What should be a heartwarming reunion for a war-torn family ends up in dissolution of human bonds which are, once lost, unlikely to be regained.

Ogata-San talks and walks around like a spectre of the past. Entirely blind to the social and spiritual changes after the war, he presents himself as an embarrassing incarnation of anachronism. His patriarchal bearing and manners of thinking not only irritate others but also hinder him from understanding them adequately. The recognition that his days are all over, that he is left far behind the times, dawns on him a little too late to spare him some bitter experiences. His good-naturedness and sincerity punctuates his helplessness. It is toward the end of his stay that Ogata-San discovers a complete stranger in his son. Or, the truth may be just contrary: his discovery drives him dismayed and dejected back to Fukuoka. In either case, blood does not necessarily guarantee steadfast and permanent relationships. The shadow of alienation and disregard, as time passes and environments shift, creeps stealthily on and darkens what are supposed to be close, presumably the closest, human connections such as those between father and son, mother and daughter, man and wife, and sisters. It might be recalled here that Niki, who did not attend Keiko’s funeral, expresses her candid feelings about her sister at the beginning of the story:

I don’t even remember what she looked like now. . . . I just remember her as someone who used to make me miserable. That’s what I remember about her. (p. 10)

During his stay in Nagasaki, Ogata-San by sheer accident finds a
magazine article which relentlessly criticizes what he did in office. The article is contributed by Shigeo Matsuda, one of his former pupils and Jiro’s classmates. Ogata-San mildly but persistently asks his son to write to Shigeo about the matter, which, according to Jiro, stains the family name as well as his personal integrity. But Jiro tactfully dodges his request, as he always does—so Etsuko judges in hindsight—when thrown into a position to handle “any potentially awkward confrontation” (p. 126): actually, he resorts to the same strategy several years later when their marriage collapses. Self-centred by nature and now deeply absorbed in a company project with brilliant prospect of promotion, Jiro tries to ward off involvement in his father’s personal affairs. One evening, they sit down for a chess match, their settled pastime since Ogata-San’s arrival: in no other way can the father and son entertain each other. Suddenly, with his tight schedule for the following day as his excuse, Jiro interrupts the game before it is decided. And then,

Jiro wished his father a good night’s sleep and left the room. For a few seconds, Ogata-San gazed at the door through which Jiro had disappeared as if he expected his son to return at any moment. (p. 67)

Next evening, they resume the chess match, but before long Jiro bursts into rage at Ogata-San’s remarks on the shortcomings of his personality:

Quite suddenly, my husband flung down his newspaper and made a movement towards his father. Clearly, what he had intended was to knock the chess-board across the floor and all the pieces with it. But he moved clumsily and before he could strike the board, his foot had upset the teapot beside him. The pot rolled on to its side, the lid fell open with a rattle, and the tea ran swiftly across the surface of the tatami. Jiro, not sure what had occurred, turned and stared at the spilt tea. Then he turned back and glared at the chess-board. The sight of the chessmen, still upright on their squares, seemed to anger him all the more, and for a moment I thought he would make another attempt to upset them. As it was, he got to his feet, snatched up his newspaper, and left the room without a word. (p. 131)

This deals an emotionally decisive blow to the old man, who this time and at long last succeeds in reading the message of impatience and irritation in his son’s mood and deed. The little boy whom Ogata-San
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raised, educated and adored is now gone beyond his reach.

The nighttime skirmish is taken over by a diurnal, all-out clash. Next morning, Ogata-San makes up his mind to pay a visit to Shigeo in person and sort the matter out. The heroine accompanies him on the excursion. They find Shigeo’s house just in time to catch him on his way back to work after lunch. His apparent failure to recognize his former mentor and their subsequent halting conversation denote how far their hearts have drifted apart over the years. The uneasy meeting forms a striking contrast with Mrs Fujiwara’s cordiality and amiableness in welcoming Ogata-San and Etsuko: this old lady recognizes them immediately upon their entrance into her shop. The argument between Ogata-San and his disciple-turned-accuser, as is expected, goes nowhere, merely bringing them farther apart. Riding high on the new waves of ideological movements after the war, Shigeo Matsuda has little to share with an old soldier.

The pathetic rites of passage are now over for both the outgoing and the up-and-coming generations. Amidst such dissonant music of human relationships flows a harmonious tune played by Ogata-San and Etsuko. More affectionate than a real father and daughter, they are the fountain of peace and amity in the story. They never exchange words without arousing an ambience of mutual respect and consideration. However, even between them, a sign of change can be observed, a sign which warns of an imminent transfiguration in their unity: their roles are being reversed. The heroine’s growing awareness of maternity accelerates Ogata-San’s retrogression into infantile dependence: the father jokes, “I feel like a small child waiting for his father” (p. 56), and the daughter agrees, “Father’s like a child these days.” (p. 57) Another thing peculiar about them is that Etsuko “never got used to calling him father” (p. 28): unable to outgrow her old style, she continues to address her father by his (and now her own) family name. The heroine’s strange habit symbolizes the perpetual absence of fathers in the novel: real fathers are rarely seen or in most cases replaced by fatherly figures or step-fathers. This constitutes the situational matrix of tragedy which affects most of the women, both mothers and daughters, in the story. They are, in other words, bound together by the same chain of plight. The mothers first suffer: Sachiko “never saw a great deal of [her] father, [who] was abroad much of the time, in Europe and America” (p. 109); and Etsuko became fatherless when
the ‘bomb’ exploded over Nagasaki. Then, their second ordeal, loss of a husband, brings about to their daughters the same tragedy as they had to endure as a small girl: the victims of fatherlessness now turn themselves into perpetrators, and thereby the plight of a broken family is recycled from mother to daughter, from one generation to another. Mariko lost her father in the war; and Keiko is forcibly separated from Jiro as a small girl:

And indeed, for the seven years he knew his daughter, he was a good father to her. Whatever else I convinced myself of during these final days, I never pretended Keiko would not miss him. (p. 90)

Even Niki cannot be immune from the mishap: Mr Sheringham has long been dead. While the mothers’ is an unhappiness which ends there in itself, violent separation from a father on the part of their daughters marks only the inauspicious beginning of their tormented puberty and adolescence. It is needless to say that the daughters’ agony and distress will multiply and grow unbearable when a total stranger makes an unwelcome intrusion into their life under the name of “a new father.” (p. 172) The mothers moan in a quandary between pursuit of happiness and qualms of conscience, but their daughters give an unheard shriek under the burden of their selfishness and irresponsibility.

V

Back to England and back to the reality, the heroine concludes her tales of the past. Her thoughts inevitably return to Keiko, and she finds chagrins and regrets still nibbling away at her mind. A spiritual rapport between her and her dead daughter is not yet in sight. Succumbing to inner temptations of self-reproach, Etsuko confides to Niki:

But you see, Niki, I knew all along. I knew all along she wouldn’t be happy over here. But I decided to bring her just the same. (p. 176)

Niki again voices her staunch support and sympathy for the choice and decisions that her mother has so far made: she even admires her bravery and strength which have guided her through the thorny path of life up to now. Niki, “a happy, confident young woman” (p. 94)
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in the heroine's phrase, represents a new breed of women who are self-oriented and equipped with their own system of value. Probably, she is far ahead of Sachiko and Etsuko in awareness and maturity as a woman and, more significantly, as a human. Seeing her as an independent adult and unconsciously in comparison with Keiko, the heroine cannot resist feeling that their mother-daughter relationship is entering a new phase. She jokingly points out that their roles are changing hands:

You see how our roles are reversing, Niki. I'm sure you're very good for me. You must stop me wasting my time away like that. (p. 49)

Indeterminate as their roles stand at the moment, an anticipation mounts that their independence from each other and their reciprocal acceptance of each other as an individual will spawn a new mode of family love, which might be founded upon such a balanced, discreet attitude as finds expression in the heroine's "It is very important you lead your own life now." (p. 177)

The novel, which started with Niki's visit, appropriately ends with her departure. Her stay, though short and laced with sporadic arguments, may have occasioned, as Ogata-San's once did, the heroine to retrospect what has happened and reorganize the present state of affairs which is growing stagnant. Life may be shocked and halted temporarily by various things, but it should not be deterred forever: it ought to be carried on. A feeling once familiar to Etsuko, a feeling that everything in this world is on the move, now comes back to her:

And yet I remember an unmistakable air of transience there, as if we were all of us waiting for the day we could move to something better. (p. 12)

The heroine, in a relaxed, unaffected manner, hints to her daughter that she may sell her country house inherited from Mr Sheringham and move to a smaller place. Seeing Niki off to London and off to the unlimited future, Etsuko is seeing her own self off to the days to come:

She was dressed in the same tight-fitting clothes she had arrived in, and her suitcase made her drag her step a little. When she reached the gate, Niki glanced back and seemed surprised to find me still standing at the
door. I smiled and waved to her. (p. 183)

Received December 15, 1986