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'Caressing This Wound': Authorial Projection and Filial Reconciliation in Ishiguro's *When We Were Orphans*

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Kazuo Ishiguro's *When We Were Orphans* deserves to be illuminated from a decidedly different angle to any other of his fictions. Of course, as with his other five novels published so far, Ishiguro's *Orphans* has brought about a variety of pieces of analysis and interpretation properly formed from, among others, historical as well as cultural perspectives.[1] These two frames of reference are perhaps the most expedient, given that the crucial part of the narrative is set in the Shanghai International Settlement, one of the politically and culturally tensest areas of the period running through the first half of the twentieth century. There is, however, another entirely proper perspective added to the research on *Orphans* which is scarcely observable in studies of the rest of his novels (but for those of his first two): namely, a biographical one.

Cognisant of Ishiguro's dual cultural background, not a few critics and scholars, who include those adopting the first two approaches above, touch upon the apparent projection of his childhood self either upon the English protagonist, Christopher Banks, or his old Japanese friend, Akira Yamashita, or both of them.[2] Their stress on the authorial projections in terms of biographical correlation will be as much in

[1] For studies from cultural perspectives, see, for instance, Barrow 44-45; Hartigan 637; Hooper 1974; Hwang 72, 77, 79; Iyer 6; and Tamazaki 93-95. Among studies from historical (or rather postcolonial) viewpoints, the following are particularly recommended: Acocella 95-96; Charles 15; Finney pars. 3, 15; Matsuoka 'Shanghai' 102-3, 108; Postlethwaite 166; and Sim 206-16. Note that the analytical sweep of most of them embraces the two approaches and that they are not necessarily their primary concerns.

[2] For example, Hideo Furukawa sees Christopher as Ishiguro's *doppelganger* (533-34), while Naomi Matsuoka finds in Akira Kazuo's 'alter ego' ('Shanghai' 104). On the other hand, many consider them both the authorial projections (Hirai 'Sokou' 82, '*Watashitachi*' 29; Jaggi 8; Jones 14). The comparatively larger number of Japanese scholars concerned with this projection motif in *Orphans* may be partly accounted for by the possibility that they take a stronger interest in Ishiguro's Japanese background and hence biographical aspects of the novel—notably so with Hirai, who has a direct knowledge of the novelist's hometown in Japan. Anyhow, the somewhat lopsided domination of Japanese academics over their non-Japanese counterparts in this field of biographical studies of *Orphans*, it should be noted, has conditioned the present article's more frequent and more detailed references to the former than to the latter, exclusive of interviewers.

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place in this case as that on those other perspectives. For it is in what they consider their own homelands that both Ishiguro and the two characters passed their idyllic early childhood, for one thing;[3] and for another, as the two boys were supposed to return to their respective real fatherlands, so was the young Kazuo while in England, the duration of his expectation prolonged till the age of fifteen. Nevertheless, even all of these critics with this biographical scope only cover the range of how his cultural background overlaps that of Akira or Christopher—'a hybrid of East and West' (Jones 14), for instance—stopping short of establishing a concrete, subtler interrelation between them, apparently except the Japanese scholar Kyoko (Nori) Hirai.

In fact, Hirai duly scrutinises the delicate superimposition of Ishiguro's obsessive preoccupation with his memories of Nagasaki upon Banks's of Shanghai (*'Watashitachi'* 27). She also makes a remarkably astute observation that *Orphans* constitutes a homage to his paternal grandfather, Masaaki—who was engaged in business in Shanghai in the 1920s—in the shape of what Ishiguro himself dubs an 'emotional autobiography', into which his Edenic years spent with the grandfather are incorporated ('Sokou' 81). Hirai's studies, in short, show that Ishiguro's personal history pertaining to Nagasaki is integrated into *Orphans*, producing Banks's obsession with his Shanghai childhood.[4]

And yet, as I believe, the very parallelism of their childhood obsessions seems to carry an otherwise more poignant implication in the novel in question than Hirai, not to mention the culture-oriented critics, presumes. That implication no doubt emanates from a far more personal, ulterior, perhaps even subconscious motive on the novelist's part: that is to say, to have his childhood wound caressed, if not exactly healed, by a reconciliation. A brief personal history may as well be sketched out here. In his Nagasaki years with his paternal grandparents living with his parents, sister, and him, Kazuo was very much attached to the grandparents, especially Masaaki, so much so that many of his nostalgic memories of Nagasaki have been condensed into those about them (Interview, Rothenberg). This prelapsarian period was abruptly discontinued, however, before he turned six, by the family's move to England, followed by his permanent loss of Masaaki, and then of his grandmother, Kayo, on account of their deaths. And the fact that not once while they were alive did he return home, along with the fact that he became an Englishman, instead of a Japanese man he was

[3] Incidentally, Kazuo's father, Shizuo, was also brought up in Shanghai from the 1920s to the early 30s.

[4] Hirai also makes visible biographical correlations between Ishiguro's childhood and his first two novels, *A Pale View of Hills* and *An Artist of the Floating World* (*'Tooi'*; 'Meiro'). For a similar discussion, see also Matsuoka 'nihon'.

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supposed to become, resulted in his entertaining an obsessive notion that he might have disappointed them, to whom additionally he had made a parting promise that he would return soon with a gift (Interview, Wachtel 23-24). Thus a very acute sense of guilt remained (and still partially remains) unassuaged in him. Both to assuage this personal guilt of Ishiguro's and to reconcile him with the deceased grandparents, Banks and his mother, Diana, in my view, play intermediary roles in the narrative. Banks mediates between Ishiguro's childhood and adulthood so as to fulfil, through the very apology the protagonist makes to his mother in their culminating reunion, the novelist's long-cherished wish to apologise to the grandparents. Diana's baffled response to Banks's apology, on the other hand, superficially implicating her motherly love, genuinely represents the possible pardon which Ishiguro's grandparents, had they been alive when he eventually returned home to Nagasaki, might have granted to their grandson.

Yet Banks is not the only among his protagonists who atones. If anything, almost every one of his principal characters has made amends for his or her past misdeeds, fallacious assumptions, or the irretrievable loss of the past, though to no avail. Barbara Ohno notices Ishiguro remarking on several occasions to the effect 'that people are going to have to atone for past wrongs', despite his statement that 'he is not religious' (142). Ohno's puzzlement as to by whom and in what way 'he thinks' one's misdeeds could be 'corrected' makes sense and has a direct bearing on our reading of *Orphans*. For the very first task of what Ishiguro apparently regards as his own atonement has been committed to Banks: among his protagonists it is he alone who does atone *for* the author's own past. Thus the theological implication of his mission as well as Diana's is this: none of the *confessional* stalls available in which to own up to his sin of the non-fulfilment of his obligations to the grandparents, all that is to Ishiguro is a *fictional* stall where, by way of one character's Christ-like sacrifice (though not of his life itself but of much of his lifetime) and the other's priest-like forgiveness, they make it possible for the writer to manage in fiction to do what he is in reality incapable of.[5] Accordingly, in this essay, Banks's apologising and Diana's pardoning are for their vaguely theological connotations termed as 'atonement' and 'absolution' respectively (both of which, however, should be regarded strictly as limited to interpretive use). And the main argument of this paper is that these religious flavoured missions of theirs, feasible with fiction in virtue of its availability of authorial projection, have

[5] This tactful manoeuvre of his reminds us of that of Briony, the embedded author of Ian McEwan's *Atonement*, by means of which she, as an act of atonement for having utterly ruined Robbie's life, rewrites his unalterable past in her own fiction, aside from verbally apologising to him.

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been accomplished to bring about a filial—filial enough—reconciliation between Kazuo and his grandparents, and that, equally important, their successes have enabled Ishiguro to unshackle himself somewhat from the guilty conscience to which he was chained for so many years.

I

In common with a majority of other novelists, Ishiguro looks askance at atavistic urges on critics' part to forage for autobiographical elements in any work of fiction (Interview, Chapel). His disapproval of it, best expressed by this comment—'none of the things I describe happened directly to me' (Interview, Feeney)—becomes more specific when he says that, though the little Christopher 'moves from the East to the West' as he once did, the protagonist is 'not really me' (Feeney). His wariness of being arbitrarily linked to his *dramatis personae* is quite rational: as he hints at his misgivings upon it (Feeney), the reading exclusively pinpointing authorial projections is likely to make readers' first-hand contact with books rather superfluous, encouraging them instead to head straight for interview columns.

But even so, a certain kind of fiction demands that way of reading, especially one on which an author projects himself, like some of Ishiguro's novels to varying degrees. In the same Feeney interview he concedes that if he had to define his fiction in terms of autobiography it would be as 'a kind of emotional autobiography'—obviously in that the emotional spectrum of one's past is shifted into one's fiction. Thus, while cynically saying that it is 'a little too neat' for a critic to argue that his nostalgic obsession with his memories of Japan prompted him to incorporate them into *Orphans*, he nonetheless admits that that kind of argument is 'not entirely untrue either . . . because in my own experience these things have been crystallized very sharply' (Interview, Chapel). These statements of compromise prepare the way for speculation that the psychological dimension of those memories has been partially projected onto his fifth novel.

What then is the point of all this, however, if a novelist just cuts his or her childhood memories in amongst works of imagination? Why is it that the form of autobiography has not been chosen for that? What is it about such an authorial projection that makes it so congenial to the form of fiction? For these questions to be answered, to review the argument exhibited by the late novelist L. P. Hartley in his *The Novelist's Responsibility* will be of great use. There Hartley proclaims that though '[not] all novelists project themselves into their novels . . . the majority do, either from the wishful or fearful-thinking' (28), and that a writer's 'wish-fulfilment'

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tends to be more satisfactorily represented in fiction than in 'pure autobiography' (3). Hartley's latter claim concerning the great advantage of fiction over autobiography as a medium for an authorial wish-fulfilment is fairly self-explanatory. For fiction in general, except a proper autobiographical novel, provides the illusion of its being an invention behind the veneer of which writers will be able with more ease and with less restriction to become self-revealing than otherwise possible. His former view will also be generally applicable of the wishful or fearful thinking being what is truly projected upon fiction, as long as a novel has any authorial projection at all. And such is the sort of novel *Orphans* is that Hartley's creative principles perfectly apply to it. Actually it contains at once fearful and wishful thinkings of the author's own that arose from the deaths of his grandparents: by reneging on his parting promise he must have disappointed them; if really so, he could only have atoned for it.

II

Evidently, so much of such wish-fulfilment has to do with a writer's childhood wound. Ishiguro affirms that behind writers' obsession with the energy-consuming activity of writing commonly lurks some emotional wound that has its possible root in their childhood but which it is often too late to heal; all they can do is console themselves by 'build[ing] [their] own world' within their own fiction (Interview, Swaim 107-8). Hence 'a lot of this activity', he sums it up in another interview, 'is about caressing this wound' (Wachtel 33).

A psychological wound is, indeed, not uncommon in his novels. His first novel, *A Pale View of Hills*, is a story of a mother tormented by the suicide of one of her daughters. Keiko was the one whom the narrator, Etsuko, brought from Nagasaki to England against the daughter's longing to remain with her father, whom Etsuko divorced. Keiko's death therefore carries two implications: first, it was attributable to the psychological wound inflicted on Keiko by her very separation from her father; secondly, it makes her mother's guilt-ridden wound doubly painful, since not merely did she ignore the daughter's tender will in the past, but that decision of hers caused her suicide. Etsuko's feelings of remorse for her lack of foresight regarding the outcome of Keiko leaving home, articulated thus, 'But then I never imagined she could so quickly vanish beyond my reach' (*Pale* 88), constantly bring her imagination back to the dreadful picture of her daughter 'hanging in her room for days on end' which fills her with 'horror' (54). However, as time goes by, the gruesome image transforms into something intimate like 'a wound on one's own body' (54). These few confessional parts of Etsuko's narrative illustrate the way in which an emotional

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wound metamorphoses into a familiar scab one obsessively scratches at.

The Unconsoled, on the other hand, marries a mental with a physical wound. Leo Brodsky, once a renowned orchestra conductor, has taken to drink for years to mitigate the pain from wearing the prosthetic leg he has worn since childhood. When in the prime of his profession, in spite of its pain, Brodsky used to revel in masochistically 'pressing' it, for doing so always 'fascinated' him (*Unconsoled* 313); the wound was thus gradually turned into something 'like an old friend' (313, 464). Now deprived of his vocation and his wife for his drinking habit, he determines to regain both of them. As it is, Miss Collins denounces her ex-husband for his never-ending obsession with his 'silly little wound': 'That's your real love . . . it's nothing special, nothing special at all. . . . Always tending your wound' (498-99). Her comparison of his wound to a lover speaks of her contemptuous envy of it, and she is enraged because despite the wound not being of any exceptional kind (no wound of one's own looks so to others) he has sacrificed his life—and consequently hers, too—to soothing it. Why Brodsky's wound obsession outlived long into their matrimony is utterly incomprehensible to her as well as to readers. Her remark that Brodsky's music is all about his wound is mutatis mutandis applicable to Banks's career.

Since his parents' mysterious disappearances Banks has been beset with the fantasy of rescuing them, who he believes were kidnapped for ransom or something of that sort. The critic James Wood adequately verbalises his perennial obsession: 'It is he who has really been kidnapped, kidnapped by his memories' (48). His father actually abandoned him, whereas Diana was abducted for other reason than mere ransom. But his childhood version of those incidents has always been 'alive in the present' (Sutcliffe 49) in the form of memory and fantasy. His eventual return to Shanghai as a professional detective in search of them indicates his preoccupation with the 'wounds of his childhood' (Hartigan 637) the deepest among which is about the loss of his mother. It created the megalomaniac delusion that his absence caused it: had he not gone out with Uncle Philip, his mother would now remain safe with him. So profound is his regret that he feels that even taking London buses would make him go through that vulnerable experience of losing his mother (*Orphans* 66). Pico Iyer analyses his paranoia into 'the response . . . of dislocation, of losing time, of being swept up in something outside one's control' (4). Probably, 'separated too early in the life of a child', as Cynthia F. Wong argues, 'a parent's absence can never be compensated' (96). In novel after novel Ishiguro thus describes a psychological wound from childhood the unabatable pain of which continues to torture the wounded far into adulthood.

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III

Pale and *Unconsoled* share another prominent motif, a projection of personality. In her reminiscences about Sachiko and her little daughter, with whom she formed friendships in postwar Nagasaki, Etsuko the narrator projects onto her memories of them the very past of herself and Keiko. A case in point is the oft-quoted riverside scene where, while at first Etsuko seems to be trying to reassure Sachiko's sulky daughter about her future life abroad with her mother, yet her sudden change of pronouns from 'you' to 'we' in her discourse hints subtly that there she is actually reconstructing a conversation she later had with Keiko (*Pale* 172-73). This modus operandi enables the narrator to disclose her past in an indirect yet implicative enough way, and is utilised on a much larger scale in *Unconsoled* with a multitude of characters as the 'doubles' (Adelman 167), or the more properly labelled 'extensions or projections' (Flor 159), of the protagonist.[6] Each represents every critical stage of his life, past or to come.

This projection motif marks *Orphans* too. Plainly, Banks's adopted daughter, Jennifer, performs his exact parallel as a deceived child, as seen by their mutual plight of being betrayed by their 'uncles' in their formative ages. His erstwhile friend, Akira, meanwhile, falls into this parallel category as a 'cultural orphan' severed, like Banks, from 'his mother country' (Matsuoka, 'Shanghai' 104)—and so does Ishiguro. Indeed, what sets *Orphans* apart from his other novels is that, as we have seen some critics mention (see my note 2), several characters most clearly converge not simply on the protagonist but on the author as well, especially with Akira and Christopher as Kazuo's childhood selves.

The young Kazuo was of a peculiar disposition with an enormous sense of responsibility. He recalls his own childhood: 'I could speak English better than [the rest of his family] . . . I took responsibility for *keeping the family together*, [thereby developing] a wildly exaggerated sense of responsibility. I became their guide' (Interview, Mackenzie, 'Real' 12, my italics). Elsewhere he also remarks that in a Japanese family 'moral obligations to parents' tend to be inculcated into children at their very early ages, and that he used to feel a 'terrible guilt' when he felt he let his parents down (Interview, Bigsby 17). This premature sense of filial obligation, combined with that of responsibility, must have provoked colossal disgrace when he was faced with a situation where he failed to meet their expectations. His immense

[6] Ishiguro calls this strategy 'appropriation': '[Ryder] appropriates people, the people he runs into stand for various parts of his life' (Interview, Smith 17).

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effort not to disappoint them is evidently transferred into *Orphans* as, to use John Carey's phrase, 'the burden of expectation' (45). When Christopher takes counsel with his friend about the parental discord,[7] Akira offers such a paranoiac piece of advice to him: 'Christopher. You not enough Englishman . . . . It same for me . . . Mother and Father, they stop talk. Because I not enough Japanese' (*Orphans* 72-73). His point is rendered clearer by the narrator: parents are 'deeply unhappy' when their child fails to behave 'sufficiently like' those in their homelands; thus, domestic harmony pivots upon a child, who holds his family all together 'like the twine that ke[eps] the slats of sun-blinds together' (73).

A classic case of symmetry between Banks and Ishiguro, as Hirai notes ('*Watashitachi*' 27), is their sheer obsession with their boyhood memories. Under their obsession there is an anxiety that these memories might eventually be unavailable (*Orphans* 67; Interview, Swaim 96). But some remain vivid in their minds nonetheless. Among Banks's many delightful remembrances of Diana, one of his fondest must be of his mother sitting on a swing singing 'at the top of her voice' (*Orphans* 62), for it leaps to his mind both immediately and vividly when he is reunited with her in Hong Kong (304).[8] With Ishiguro such a memory will be that of his 'standing on the pavement with my grandfather looking at a film poster' (Interview, Wachtel 20), an image referred to elsewhere ('I Became' 9). Notwithstanding their anxiety these clearly-cut mnemonic images lend a hand to their engraving these cherished memories deep into their minds.

IV

Much of Kazuo's attachment to Masaaki is ascribed to the circumstances in which Shizuo was rarely at home, 'travelling a lot in America and in Britain as a scientist' (Interview, Wachtel 24). A few years after his son was born, Shizuo won a UNESCO fellowship to pursue his research in oceanography in England and was abroad unaccompanied for the subsequent two and a half years (Hirai, '*Watashitachi*' 28).[9] Kazuo, meanwhile, built a 'strong emotional' relationship with

[7] The marital tension certainly issues from Diana's opposition to the opium trade from which her husband's company gains vast profits. Ron Charles surmises that Banks's failure to figure it out strengthens his sense of guilt (15).

[8] For detailed examinations of Banks's memory, see Mimura 139-142 and Reich 43.

[9] According to a UNESCO activity report of the Marine Sciences Programme, as well as a Programme Newsletter for the same period (1956-57), Shizuo studied from January in 1957 till December of the same year at the National Institute of Oceanography, in Surrey.

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Masaaki (Interview, Jaggi 116). Indeed, the grandfather did become his 'father figure' (Interview, Wachtel 24), remaining so until Shizuo was invited to the National Institute of Oceanography 'to design an "Electronic Model" for tides and surges in the North Sea' (Cartwright 183) and then left for England again in April 1960, but this time with his wife and family including Kazuo when the grandfather-grandson 'bond' was 'suddenly severed' (Interview, Jaggi 116). This severance must be responsible for Ishiguro's strong fixation with his own age when he left Nagasaki: to Don Swaim's confirmatory question, 'You were about six [when you arrived in England]?' he replies by making a fastidious correction of it: 'I was five and a half' (92).[10] As a matter of fact, he states that his 'creative process' has much to do with 'regret or melancholy' on his part born of the very sunderance of his 'bond' with the 'grandfather' (Interview, Jaggi 116). This initial separation unequivocally formed the deepest layer of his wound.

Ishiguro has often claimed that the family were to stay in England only a year or two (see, for instance, Interview, Swaim 92). That was presumably the case to them all except to his father, who looked back on the period from a different perspective. In an interview Shizuo reminisced about the time before he and his family had left for England: 'It was the second time for me to go to England, and yet, at that time, I resigned from the Nagasaki Marine Observatory, quite determined to work until retirement age [at the Institute in Surrey] . . .' ('Wakaki tensaitachi' 34, my translation). Indeed, a decade later, when offered an academic post in Japan, he turned it down at the last minute (Interview, 'Part'), continuing to be employed for over another decade and a half (Cartwright 183). Of course it was the British government that decided to keep his research going there. But all the same his aforementioned recollection makes us suspect that he brought his family to England with no immediate intention of returning (just as Etsuko in *Pale* brought Keiko to England in that way); or, in other words, that his son was somehow deceived into believing that the separation from his grandparents would be temporary. Whether or not Kazuo learned the case had conceivably been otherwise from his father, who though passed on in 2007 (Hirai, '*Watashitachi*' 31), is unknown. Either way, the fact remains that, even though he knew nothing whatsoever about its fatal consequences, he let his father separate him from his grandparents. Kazuo's inevitable lack of clairvoyance, as with his Keiko's in regard to her eternal separation from her Japanese

[10] His obsession with that age of vulnerability is apparently projected onto the battlefield scene in which Akira, or the man Christopher believes to be him, tells of the pathetic naivety of a 5-year-old son he left behind in Nagasaki (*Orphans* 262).

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father, was essentially equivalent to Christopher's failure to anticipate the outcome of leaving his mother behind in their Shanghai house. As to Christopher, ironically, just as he 'lowered [his] guard that day and followed' Uncle Philip (*Orphans* 118), so later on, despite having his newly adopted Jennifer 'let [her] guard down' (132), he in turn deserts her, albeit temporarily, to accomplish his mission of finding his own parents. This vicious cycle of orphanhood has perhaps been created out of the novelist's possible suspicion that his own father might have determined to pursue his research only at the expense of the perfect happiness his son could have continued to enjoy with his old man,[11] although it will be fairer to the late Shizuo to say that, initially, he must have been as unsure as his son what denouement his own decision would entail.

At all events, the family's sojourn was extended each year for as long as a decade. Meantime Kazuo found himself accustomed to his English life and came to hold ambivalent feelings about his expected return: 'at some level I wasn't looking forward to going back'; 'at some deeper level' he was no less eager to return (Wachtel 22).[12] These mutually exclusive emotions nevertheless seem to have been all but settled when Masaaki died in 1970 or thereabouts—none of his son's family members had seen him ever since their departure (Interview, Mackenzie, 'Two' 10)—and irrevocably when Kayo died in 1983 (Sinclair 36), ending in the indefinite postponement of their return. However hard it was for a 15-year-old boy to grasp the significance of his grandfather's death (Mackenzie, 'Two' 10), his grandmother's later, far less frequently mentioned death must have appalled him;[13] for he was permanently bereft of an opportunity for making amends for these things below.

> When you're that age, you don't think about the *responsibility* of things like saying goodbye. But at some deeper level it did leave me with a sense of having *let* my grandparents *down*, perhaps some sort of *odd guilt*. . . . I remember . . . promising that

[11] In Takayuki Shonaka's view, this suspicion may have partially exerted a Freudian Oedipus complex effect on the relationship between Banks and his parents (84).

[12] He recollects his suspended situation of those years as follows: 'Until I was 15 I lived in a kind of limbo, waiting to go back. This has a very profound effect on a child' (Interview, Mackenzie, 'Real' 12).

[13] Apart from his cultural orphanhood (Luo 69-70; Matsuoka, 'Shanghai' 108), the '*Orphans*' of the novel's title may allude to his autobiographical twofold loss of his grandparents: first by his move to England and then by their deaths. Ben Howard proposes a resonant connection between the title of *Orphans* and that of Louis MacNeice's poem, 'When We Were Children', indicating their parallel times (411). This proposition would have carried more weight had it been further coupled with the fact that MacNeice's mother was confined, like Banks's mother, in a nursing home for her mental depression where she expired. Ishiguro himself defines the '*Orphans*' in a more general sense: as 'a metaphor for that condition of coming out of that [childhood] bubble in an unprotected way' (Shaffer, 'Interview' 168).

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> I'd bring a present back, as you do when you go on a little trip. . . . I never went back and *fulfilled* this promise, that I never took back a present from England, and I never came home.
>
> . . . I didn't go back and become the kind of person *I was expected* to become. I sometimes think that by leaving Japan, leaving my grandparents, and turning into this odd sort of semi-Englishman, I've somehow *let* them *down*, and if they'd known, they might have been *disappointed*. (Interview, Wachtel 23-24, my italics)

This confession, sounding on first perusal of maudlin sentimentality, reveals itself, as is visible in those italicised words and phrases, to be another example of Ishiguro's fear of failure, which we observed in connection with the symmetry between him and Akira, to meet filial obligations—filial enough considering Masaaki *was* a de facto father to him. His persistent use of such phrases as 'never went back' and 'never took back' is itself evidence that a constant feeling of guilt has gnawed him. Furthermore, although he retained his full Japanese citizenship until 1983 (Interview, Wroe)—the very same year Kayo died—both of his grandparents passed away without seeing him become naturalised in Britain.[14] This gave rise to another feeling of guilt for having betrayed them, a guilty conscience neatly epitomised in the last subjunctive clause of the quoted passage above: 'if they'd known, they might have been disappointed'. His scruples have been exacerbated by the fact that every month Masaaki had sent him 'a parcel' containing things children in Japan were absorbed in then (like 'the comic strip about Oba-q') in order that he 'wouldn't feel lost among his friends when eventually he returned' (Mackenzie, 'Two' 10). It is only natural, therefore, that all these guilty feelings lingered on for years and were eventually fossilised into a stiffened wound (Interview, Wachtel 35).

V

For one's wound to be caressed in psychological terms, it has perforce to be transferred to another. Ishiguro's remorse of conscience for having made a perfunctory parting gesture towards his grandparents discernibly re-emerges in Banks's rueful reminiscence about the separation in which he 'waved casually' to

[14] He explains the reasons for having abandoned the citizenship: 'I couldn't speak Japanese very well, passport regulations were changing, I felt British and my future was in Britain. And it would also make me eligible for literary awards' (Interview, Wroe). There is no mention of Kayo's death of the same year—predictable in view of his guilt—and it is not difficult to imagine that it could have been as decisive a factor in his renunciation of the original nationality as the other more practical ones.

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Diana—'Uncle Philip grasped me by the shoulder, saying: "Look! Wave to your mother!" despite my already having done so. But I thought nothing of it at the time, and turning as bidden, waved once more to mother's figure, elegantly upright in the doorway' (*Orphans* 120). As a consequence of his failure to find her in Shanghai at the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War, it is not until a decade and a half later that he achieves his reunion with his mother, whose insanity has landed her in a mental institution in Hong Kong.

Many readers, above all those familiar with *Pale*, may well have a strange sense of déjà vu when they reach the description of the sweeping view Banks sees from the hill on which stands the sanatorium his mother has been taken to: 'When I stood in the breeze and looked across the harbour, I could see right into the distance to where a cable-car was climbing a faraway hill' (*Orphans* 301). For this description bears a curious resemblance to the following: 'Inasa is the hilly area of Nagasaki overlooking the harbour, renowned for its mountain scenery'; 'The sounds of the harbour, carried in the wind, still reached us as we sat on a bench in the forecourt of the cable-car station [at the foot of Inasa]' (*Pale* 103). Naomi Matsuoka, referring to the title of Ishiguro's first novel, ventures a surmise that the pale view of the hills afforded by Etsuko's apartment stands for the archetypal image of Nagasaki which abides in his memory ('nihon' 238). Matsuoka's speculation must be right on the mark; indeed, that treasured image is also represented in the very view from where Banks is standing, which quite precisely corresponds to an actual view commanded by Shin-Nakagawa, an area where Ishiguro's family lived till before leaving for England: four or five miles away to the west beyond the harbour rises the hill whose slope a little cable car is seen to be making its way up and down.[15] A plausible inference drawn from these scenic overlaps will be that the depicted view of a hill and a harbour of Hong Kong would form a projection of Mount Inasa and Nagasaki Harbour as Ishiguro remembers them.

Interestingly, his protagonist Banks detects a similar overlap between his hometown and Hong Kong. He is strolling around the latter when he recognises 'some vague echo of Shanghai' in it—an echo which seems 'as though I . . . [came] upon . . . a distant cousin of a woman I once loved . . . who remains, overall, an awkward, even grotesque parody of a much-cherished *image*' (*Orphans* 299, my

[15] Hirai, also from Nagasaki, writes that many of the city landscapes depicted in *Pale* are more accurately represented than generally assumed. Indeed, Ishiguro's parents, from whom Hirai obtained much valuable information about their son's childhood, told her that shortly before leaving Nagasaki the family had all gone up to the top of Mt Inasa in a cable car, and that their son still remembered the episode ('*Tooi*' 80).

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italics). His perception that Hong Kong appears an outlandish parody of his old Shanghai image somehow parallels our view of it as a topographical projection of Nagasaki as imprinted on Ishiguro's memory. To put it diagrammatically, Hong Kong occupies the locational vertex where Ishiguro's Nagasaki and Banks's Shanghai intersect with each other. From this, it is perfectly conceivable that, if Banks's reunion with his mother is occurring in Hong Kong, then, in the very same place, Ishiguro's with his grandparents must be.

'"Mother," I said slowly, "it's me. I've come from England. I'm really very sorry it's taken so long. I realise I've let you down badly. Very badly. I tried my utmost, but you see, in the end, it proved beyond me. I realise this is hopelessly late"' (*Orphans* 304-305). Banks's emotionally charged apology is apparently due to his knowledge of Diana's self-sacrifice: she succumbed to the abduction so that her son would be comfortably provided for. But then that is not all his emotional intensity is about. In fact, his contrite expression, 'I've let you down badly', is highly reminiscent of Ishiguro's, 'I've somehow let them down', suggesting a like repentant mood on their parts. Additionally, just as Banks could not prevent Diana's abduction and took more time to find her than he expected, so the move of Ishiguro's family to England with the ensuing decade of his parents' decisions to extend their stay, precluding him from being present at Masaaki's deathbed,[16] proved totally beyond him. But there remains a palpable distinction: where Banks succeeds in reuniting himself with Diana, Ishiguro didn't with his grandparents. This profound disparity, when considered with their emotional parallels, leads to the inescapable conclusion: Banks's belated apology serves as the vicarious atonement for one of Ishiguro's 'past wrongs', viz. his failure of filial duties to Masaaki and Kayo.

As far as the narrative is concerned, the protagonist's atonement is not enough, however. Absolution seems to be necessary as well. In the dialogue above, Banks, desperate to remind his mother of who he is, calls himself by his old nickname, 'Puffin', in exactly the same way she used to. Even though Diana remembers the nickname is her son's, she still cannot recognise him. So Banks resorts to the use of hypothesis:

> 'Excuse me. Supposing this boy of yours, this Puffin. Supposing you discovered he'd tried his best, tried with everything he had to find you, even if in the end he couldn't. If

[16] This regrettable failure of Kazuo's to fulfil the most essential of his filial duties to his once father figure probably recasts itself into the butler Stevens's deliberate *failure* for the sake of what he calls professional priorities to sit at his dying father's bedside in *The Remains of the Day*.

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> you knew that, do you suppose . . . do you suppose you'd be able to *forgive* him?'
>
> My mother continued to gaze past my shoulder, but now a puzzled look came into her face.
>
> '*Forgive* Puffin? Did you say *forgive* Puffin? *Whatever for?*' Then she beamed again happily. 'That boy. They say he's doing well. But you can never be sure with that one. Oh, he's such a worry to me. You've no idea.' (305, my italics)

His tentative hypothesis with the aid of the third person pronouns is aimed at extracting his mother's forgiveness since she is unable to place him but at the same time is subsumed into another's obsessive though unprovable conjecture: *supposing he really wanted to return to you but in the end he couldn't, and if you knew that, do you suppose you'd be able to forgive him?* The '*you*' has of course to be interpreted as the second person plural. Ishiguro's first appropriation of his protagonist's hypothesis colludes with his second of Diana's bemused reply, 'Forgive Puffin? . . . Whatever for?' For, as much as it is the manifestation of her 'unconditional love' for her son (Jaggi 8), her reply does function as the administration of absolution—a declaration that the author's sin has been forgiven. Hence Diana's verbal worry for her son—'That boy. They say he's doing well. But you can never be sure with that one. Oh, he's such a worry to me'—reads as if it were an evocation of the constant feeling of anxiety Masaaki and Kayo had about their grandson. It is true that there is no undoing his past. Nevertheless, the building of his own world imbued with atonement and absolution has enabled both of his duties and wishes to be vicariously fulfilled via authorial projection, which as a logical sequence effects a filial (if fictional) reconciliation between him and the grandparents, allowing the novelist as much as he pleases to caress his own chronic wound of loss and guilt.

VI

But one thing has intrigued us—Banks's reunion with Diana occurs in Hong Kong for all that they were separated from each other originally in Shanghai. Why is it that the former city has pre-empted Banks's hometown for their reunion? Or to put it another way: what is it about Banks's Shanghai that makes it unsuitable for the site of their reunion? In this last section one possible answer to that question will be provided.

One major clue to it would be Banks's obsession or what Ishiguro terms the 'emotional logic' that has governed his protagonist's thinking since childhood (Interview, Hogan 157). This logic allows him to assume that he can 'replay

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something that went wrong in the past and do it right this time' (158). Indeed, he completely believes that he can not only rescue his parents, but recover their own 'big, white house' in Shanghai which appeared 'grand' and of which even after these years he is still 'able to bring back that picture very vividly' (*Orphans* 51). Once he arrives in Shanghai, he immediately looks for it, finding it is being owned by a rich Chinese family whose master, like a character in a fairy tale, kindly offers to give it up for the detective to restore it as it was so that he can live there with his parents once he finds them. The moment naturally comes, however, when this logic cracks: it is when his parents are nowhere to be found in a private house (different to his old house) in which he believes they have been cooped up—'My mother, my father! Where are they? . . . Where are they? Where are they?' (273). Situated right in the midst of the war zone it is badly damaged with a big hole in the roof, a description pregnant with the implication that his long-nursed childhood fantasy is beginning to collapse like a card-house.

In the way Banks harks back to his Shanghai house can be found a nostalgic echo of Ishiguro's reminiscences about his Nagasaki house. That house in which he used to live together with his grandparents, too, was 'a rather grand and beautiful thing', and even now he has 'a very vivid picture of it in [his] mind' (Interview, Sexton 34). Moreover, the 'grass mound' and 'maple tree' we find in the garden of the Bankses' plot could be glimpsed in the former garden of the Ishiguros', according to Hirai, as of her writing in 2003 ('Nagasaki' 17). The house itself became unoccupied after Kayo's death and for its dilapidation demolished shortly before Ishiguro returned in autumn 1989. A couple of years previously he had visualised it thus: 'if I went back [the house] would be rather shabby and horrible' (Interview, Sexton 34). This rueful visualisation is in turn parallel to Banks's description of the sanatorium where his mother is: 'Turning to the house itself, however, I saw it had been allowed to grow shabby; the paint on the window ledges and door frames in particular had cracked and peeled' (*Orphans* 301). Little wonder the sentimental dialogue between the son and the mother which has been opened outside the sanatorium is powerfully evocative of its emotional parallel between Kazuo and his grandparents.

Thus, unsurprisingly, a similar logic to Banks's operates in Ishiguro's thinking. Even after he returned to and saw the actual Nagasaki he has been subject to this logic: 'in my head, all these people are still alive. Against all rational knowledge, somewhere I believe that everything is running smoothly there, much the same way as it always did. The world of my childhood is still intact' (Interview, Mackenzie, 'Two' 10). In reality, most of them together with his grandparents are no longer alive, nor does his old house stand in the family's former plot. And yet, for him, *his* Nagasaki remains

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even now 'still intact', carefully preserved as a non-existent sanctuary which must not be violated in any way and which, in so far as it is within the realm of memory and imagination, will be protected hereafter.

During his stay in Hong Kong, despite 'Jennifer's suggestion that we try and extend our journey to Shanghai', Banks evidently declines it on the grounds that 'Shanghai today is a ghostly shadow' of what it once was (*Orphans* 300). Banks's Shanghai, like the author's Nagasaki, no longer exists. In the conversation with Kenzaburo Oe, the novelist states that he can 'never return to this particular Nagasaki' (53). It is impossible for him to return to it, simply because the Nagasaki is nowhere to be found in its complete form except in his memory and imagination. The same is true enough of Banks's Shanghai: however desperately he attempts to replay his childhood there, both his old Shanghai and his blissful childhood, once lost, are lost forever. This, and Ishiguro's longing to maintain intact Banks's childhood Shanghai at least in the latter's memory, possibly resulted in the novelist's decision *not* to have his reunion with his mother occur in 'Shanghai today'—nor, by implication, in Nagasaki of today.

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