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**In the Vortex of the Mind**

**Patterns of Memory in Kazuo Ishiguro's Novels**

**Doctoral (PhD) dissertation**

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## INTRODUCTION

*a first-person narrative is, after all, a confession; and the one who has something to confess has something to conceal. And the one who has the word "I" at his disposal has the quickest device for concealing himself.*

(Cavell 107)

Kazuo Ishiguro's narrators remember. The reader can follow them decades back into their youth and adult years, to events of importance; learn about past joys and worries; parents, children and friends; and find traces of traumas half hidden, half uncovered. Yet the reader knows only fragments, never the whole story. The narrators turn and fix the reader's gaze on moments sometimes only to avert it from others. Memory, the phrase "I remember" opens recesses of the mind and shuts down others. In a way the principal entity of Ishiguro's seven novels to date is memory; through the narrators he weaves intricate patterns of memory, recalling, revealing, shaping and concealing the past.

"Memory is a powerful tool in quests for understanding, justice, and knowledge. It raises consciousness. It heals some wounds, restores dignity, and prompts uprisings" (Hacking 3). Indeed, memory has always been of special interest to thinkers, rulers and cultures in general. Losing and retaining memories at the level of the individual, and society at large were and are at the core of a number of traditions, customs and religions. Philosophers and scholars, like Plato, St. Augustine, Rousseau, Bergson, Freud, Ricoeur, just to mention a few, were only milestones in a journey shaping our understanding of one of the mind's most complex actions, from the wax tablets through palaces of memory and crevasses of the subconscious to a shape-shifting dynamic system; and the list is certainly yet to grow in the future. As perception about the mind evolved, so did the concepts. After centuries of thinking about memory as a static or a mechanical structure, researchers abandoned this idea for a more dynamic concept.

[Memory] isn't a place, a store-house or a machine for recording events, [but] an intricate and ever shifting net of firing neurons . . . the twistings and turnings of

which rearrange themselves completely each time something is recalled. (Grant 1998: 289)<sup>1</sup>

It was only the second half of the twentieth century that technology enabled researchers not only to theorize about the mind, but also see what is happening inside the skull. The magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) and functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) delivered new data about the workings of the mind and thus concepts of memory could finally be tested. Parallel with the development of memory concepts (collective, trauma, etc.) the “Decade of the Brain of the 1990s” (Nalbantian 2) saw immense development in neuroscience, neuroanatomy and neuropsychological methods due to technological advancements. It even seemed feasible to physically locate memory in the brain; track, measure and understand its working.

The next phase brought an even more complex and comprehensive approach with the Decade of the Mind (DOM), launched in 2007, an international cooperation of experts of various fields. The European Union followed suit when initiating the Human Brain Project<sup>2</sup> as a European Commission Future and Emerging Technologies Flagship in the frame of Horizon 2020. These endeavours clearly show the keen interest and the increased possibilities in research of the mind and its workings.

So where is literature? Is there a place for fiction in this hi-tech cutting edge world of scientific research? Scientific methods have their own limitations, too. Memory and memories could not have been mapped so far; in fact, there are more questions than before. An acclaimed neuroscientist, who set out to explore memory in the brain, concluded after decades of research:

Yet I have to accept the limits of neuroscience, to concede that it has so far been left to the other half of our fragmented culture, the terrain traditionally inhabited by poets and novelists, to try to explore the subjective meanings of memory. (Rose 7)

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<sup>1</sup> I have no reliable information as to the source of this remark. The secondary literature attributes it to Linda Grant (*Remind Me Who I Am, Again*, 1998), but she uses quotation marks in her original text without providing a source. Additionally, Nicola King (*Memory, Narrative, Identity*, 2000) mentions Steven Rose (*The Making of Memory: From Molecules to Mind*, 1993) as the original source, but without references. Other secondary literature just cross-references Grant or King. I emailed Linda Grant, who kindly answered in a very short period of time, writing “I’ve had a look at the page on which this quote appears and I’m afraid no source is given. The book was published in 1998 and I have no notes from that period. I wish I could help but this was not a scholarly work. I notice from the acknowledgments that I have thanked Steven Rose and I know I had a phone conversation with him so it may have come from that.” I have tried to contact Professor Rose for further information but without success.

<sup>2</sup> Human Brain Project, co-funded by the European Union, [www.humanbrainproject.eu](http://www.humanbrainproject.eu)

This is by no means diminishing the value of neuroscience, it shows that research and finding evidence is possible in the most varied fields. But it also underlines the complexity of the issue; memory cannot be researched in a single field, the work calls for interdisciplinary thinking and dialogue. The thinking process, the working of the memory is depicted in the narratives, and this is by no means less valuable than scientific research into the workings of the brain. “Indeed, memory research can be expanded well beyond the brain scans and fruit flies of the neuroscientists. The literature of memory can provide a rich and complex array of data that is tantamount to field studies for capturing episodes of memory” (Nalbantian 3).

Ishiguro’s interest in memory and his evolving depiction of the workings of memory make him an ideal choice to examine the same questions, how memory works, how the memories are structured and how they can be manipulated. Naturally, Ishiguro’s approach is not scientific, but as Rose believes novelists can add valuable elements to our understanding of the way memory works. In this respect Ishiguro’s novels, which are so dense with memories and intricate memory-chains, are valuable fields for closer examination.

I believe in interdisciplinarity, as “no man is an island”, no piece of knowledge stands isolated from other fields, may it be biochemistry, psychology or literature. My ambition with this paper is to add a fragment, however small, to the massive body of research about memory, and eventually perhaps to provoke a thought, a doubt or even a suspicion in our quest to understand the mind, this fragile yet so powerful system.

## CHAPTER 1

### THE RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

*narrative as the guardian of time*  
(Ricoeur)

Before venturing to the description of the framework for my analysis, I take a step back and explore the relationship of Ishiguro and memory. The concept goes back decades and there is an embedded question concerning the relationship between Ishiguro and Japan.

#### **Ishiguro and Japan**

When telling people that my research focuses on contemporary British writer of Japanese origins Kazuo Ishiguro's works and memory, sometimes I receive the surprised question whether I speak Japanese. Although this remark illustrates how selective hearing works, the fact remains that when speaking about the British/international writer Kazuo Ishiguro, his Japanese origins cannot be ignored.

Ishiguro was born in Nagasaki, Japan in 1954 and lived there until the age of five before moving to England with his family. He described his mother as a "Japanese lady of her generation," but added that his father "wasn't typically Japanese at all" (Hunnewell) since he was raised in Shanghai and had some Chinese characteristics. As a little boy, Ishiguro attended English schools and later university, and even though the language of everyday conversation in the parental house was Japanese, his command of the language is rather poor (Hunnewell). Yet his first two novels are set in Japan, and have Japanese narrators and characters. Therefore it is only natural to search for and find clues and features of Japanese culture, such as sliding doors, tatamis or frequent bowing to greet or show respect. Reviewers were quick to point out what they assumed as 'Japanese motifs' and likened the novels to exquisite Japanese paintings. The third novel was set in mid-20<sup>th</sup> century England, but many readers from the public and academia alike looked for "Japaneseness" in *The Remains of the Day*. As it goes, those who seek will find, claiming Stevens to be an English samurai (Patterson).

It can be argued that Ishiguro's Japanese origins and connection to that culture bring him closer to Japan than any average Western person, and this, in turn, can have certain

effects on his works. However, the importance of the setting can be questioned from the aspect of memory writing. The atomic bomb featured in the first two novels is undoubtedly a grave and Japanese momentum of history; but the trauma on the characters of the novels can be exchanged with that of other victims of that war, or war in general.<sup>3</sup> Ishiguro himself admitted the relative irrelevance of his settings and historical timing in several interviews.

I would look for moments in history that would best serve my purposes, or what I wanted to write about. I was conscious that I wasn't so interested in history per se, that I was using British history or Japanese history to illustrate something that was preoccupying me. (Ishiguro and Oe 58)

Therefore it can be concluded that the settings *per se* bear less significance, and this tendency is increasingly emphasized by the later novels with unidentifiable, dystopian or fantasy-like historical settings (*The Unconsoled*, *Never Let Me Go* and *The Buried Giant*, respectively).

Moreover, the question arises what kind of Japan is depicted in the novels. Is it the Japan of the 1950s that Ishiguro left behind as a child, and what is also the temporal setting of the first two novels? Or rather the Western myth of Japan? Lewis suggests that “[d]espite its tumbledriers and tombola stalls, the Japan in *A Pale View of Hills* is a displaced Japan, a recreation of an original that probably never existed” (Lewis, *Kazuo Ishiguro* 23), and Ishiguro’s rendering of Japan is not a realistic depiction. Later Lewis puts forward a different concept to interpret the setting.

Ishiguro’s Japan is not a country but a system, a system which he calls: Japan. The critical gaze, then, can be redirected from what Japan refers to in *A Pale View of Hills* (the way most critics reviewed the novel) to how the text refers to Japan. (*Kazuo Ishiguro* 26–27)

The same can be stated of the second novel, *An Artist of the Floating World*. Traditional Japanese elements are placed here and there, like the sliding doors of the house and the once exquisite Japanese garden belonging to it, or the *miai*, but they are more of a decorative nature, and not essentially functional elements. Ishiguro confirms this when telling in an interview, “this Japan didn’t exist anywhere, apart from in my head. It might

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<sup>3</sup> It is not, by any means, my intention to qualify or belittle human suffering on any scale, especially not those related to World War II. When comparing them, I concentrate on the psychological processes induced by trauma, as researched by so many experts in various fields.

have a vague correspondence to the place I'd arrived at off the plane, but I realized that it was my own private Japan" (Chen). This is not surprising since Ishiguro learnt about Japanese culture and literature "through the English translation of iconic Japanese writers like Yasunari Kawabata or Yukio Mishima, who acted as 'gatekeepers' to knowledge about Japan in the West, but were hardly representative of contemporary socio-cultural reality" (Shonaka<sup>4</sup> in Dasgupta 14).

An interesting aspect of the Japan-issue in Ishiguro's works is the reception of his books in Japan, especially the early Japanese novels. The mixed reception of Ishiguro's novels is a clear hint at the ambiguous relationship with Japan and Japanese culture. Ironically, when Western reviewers stressed the perceived Japanese traits, early critics in Japan regarded "his lack of 'insider' knowledge as a flaw" (Shonaka in Dasgupta 14). In a conversation with Ishiguro, Kenzaburo Oe recalls perceiving him as a "genuinely European novelist, a genuinely European personality, that this was real European intelligence" (57) as a reaction to Ishiguro's acceptance speech of the Man Booker Prize mentioning Salman Rushdie<sup>5</sup>. Oe continues by describing the image of Japan in the West as encouraged by the Japanese.

The Japanese themselves want to be perceived as peaceful and gentle, like Japanese art—landscape painting and so on. They don't want to be perceived as economic imperialists or military invaders. They would like the others to think of flower paintings, something quiet and beautiful, when they think of Japan. When your books first began to appear in Japan, that was how they were introduced. You were described as a very quiet and peaceful author, and, therefore, a very Japanese author. But from the first, I doubted that. (Ishiguro and Oe 57)

Indeed, these are the images Ishiguro was compared to explicitly or implicitly in a number of reviews, which was further enhanced by the various book cover designs published by Faber and Faber and other publishers. But this is a highly romanticized and ambiguous image; it completely eliminates Japan's darker side of history as close as World War II.

Shibata and Sugano point out that translating Ishiguro's works, especially the first two novels set in Japan, creates a strange "re-import" (23), where the cultural and linguistic context, which sounds so typically Japanese in English, needs to be re-settled in

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<sup>4</sup> Translated by Romit Dasgupta

<sup>5</sup> In his acceptance speech of the Booker Prize in 1989, Ishiguro said: "It would be improper for us not to remember Salman Rushdie in this evening and think about the alarming situation and plight in which he finds himself." (Shaffer and Wong 57)

its actual environment. Various problems and challenges arose in the process of translating and localizing the novels in their “home culture”. The Japanese translator struggled with the emotional distance implied, for instance, in Stevens’s dialogue with his father, addressing him as ‘Father’. This may sound respectful but also distant, even cold to a Western reader, but the effect is by no means the same for Japanese readers, who tend to avoid the very personal sounding second person pronoun in general conversation, and this habit does not imply respect or distance. Therefore Stevens’s “inability to display emotional closeness to his father is to a great extent *lost in translation*” (Shibata and Sugano 22). Another linguistic issue was the use of Japanese names. On Ishiguro’s explicit wish, the Japanese names were written with *katakana*, “a distinct syllabary used only for the representation of foreign loan-words or borrowed terms or proper names” (Shibata and Sugano 25) to retain their foreign sound.

Moreover, the depiction of post-war Japan is a politically sensitive subject; the country’s role in World War II is still a controversial and repressed issue. Ishiguro as a child was unaware of the grave significance of his hometown, Nagasaki, until years later he read about the atomic bomb in an English textbook (Chen). His absence from Japan may be a reason why he seems to be unaware of certain implications, which were and sometimes are still sensitive issues. For instance, the artists’ responsibility in war propaganda was heavily debated in the 1940s and 1950s; and the Japanese critic Masashi Miura misses the answers in Ishiguro’s works and finds that the lack of answers leaves Japanese readers “with puzzlement and oddity” (Shibata and Sugano 28).

It can be concluded, therefore, that the question about the connection between Ishiguro and Japan is twofold. First, it can be regarded as an intertextual relation between Ishiguro’s novels and Japanese movies, books and manga he was exposed to through multiple filters, like his grandfather’s selection, English translation, etc. Second, a question of personal history, what Ishiguro as an individual remembers, how his memories are shaped against his family background and how the elements find their way into his writing. Although I find the subject highly interesting and worth of psychological research; it is also my feeling that this would be an intrusion into the private sphere of a real person with his own rights to privacy.

However, the relationship of Ishiguro and memory is still an open question to be considered. The narrators’ interest in recalling the past is a typical trait from the very beginning of Ishiguro’s writing career. As early as 1989 Ishiguro confessed in an interview

with Kenzaburo Oe that the initial connection of writing with Japan and memory was a highly personal motivation.

I realized that this Japan, which was very precious to me, actually existed only in my own imagination, partly because the real Japan had changed greatly between 1960 and later on. I realized that it was a place of my own childhood, and I could never return to this particular Japan. And so one of the real reasons why I turned to writing novels was because I wished to re-create this Japan—put together all these memories, and all these imaginary ideas I had about this landscape which I called Japan. I wanted to make it safe, preserve it in a book, before it faded away from my memory altogether . . . I very much wanted to put down onto paper this particular idea of Japan that I had in my own mind, and in a way I didn't really care if my fictional world didn't correspond to a historical reality. (Shaffer and Wong 55)

Eventually, the earlier novels are indeed about Japan in a way, but more precisely about memories of Japan. Ishiguro remembers while creating the characters of Etsuko and Ono remembering – memories within memories where it is difficult to distinguish between fiction and reality. But is it at all possible to tell them apart when remembering? For the already mentioned reasons I do not intend to follow or discover Ishiguro's personal memories in the novels. In a short detour I recall my own personal history with Ishiguro's works and how I arrived at this research and its framework.

### **The evolution of an idea**

In order to explain my choice of method, I would like to briefly recall my history with Ishiguro's works. I first heard the name of Kazuo Ishiguro in secondary school. My American English teacher, who provided the foundation of my enthusiasm for the English language and gave us the first readings in English literature (an entire, non-modernised Canterbury tale among others) in extracurricular classes, showed the group a short excerpt from the film adaptation of *The Remains of the Day* (Ivory), around the part when the conference takes place. I found the montage of different periods interesting, as well as Sir Anthony Hopkins' depiction of Stevens, who seemed to be looking at his past (and present) with some kind of detachment, even at moments when he was losing things and people important for him. Yet with the more pressing issues of teenage life, I did not follow up on the film or the book.

The memory of that English class lay forgotten for years, until I received the reading list for a fifth-year seminar at university with Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* in it. My interest was awakened again, and it grew continuously as I was reading the novel. The narrator's hide-and-seek play intrigued me immensely, how the threads of memory were woven together, getting lost and resurfacing again. Needless to say, I wrote a seminar paper on that novel. When it came to choosing the topic of my Master thesis, I arrived at Ishiguro and memory before long. The paper, entitled "Ishiguro's Diaries. Approaching *The Remains of the Day* and *When We Were Orphans* by Kazuo Ishiguro", concentrated on the diary form and its possibilities for the narrative in the two novels. By that time I had, naturally, read all his works published, but I felt that my enthusiasm for the structure of memory would lead me (and more importantly, my thesis paper) to dangerous grounds, therefore the subject had to be strictly limited, and due to formal aspects, to the diary form, *The Remains of the Day* and *When We Were Orphans* were a logical choice for research. I still think that my thesis paper was a good start, I even incorporate some of the findings in this paper; but my feeling was that I could not seize the essence of that memory structure that fascinated me so much.

Later on, when I thought there was more to it (more to learning, academia and Ishiguro), and I applied to PhD studies, there was no question that my area of interest was Ishiguro. Around the second year of my studies, I lost momentum though. I had experimented with various subjects within the 'Ishiguro universe', emotions and emotional repression, and the early short stories among others, but I was not satisfied with any of them. I returned to memory, got immersed in Freud, neuropsychology-related memory research but became more and more frustrated as I could not find the means to describe what I saw and how I saw memory work in the novels. For me the structure of the memories and recollections was a dynamic and visual experience, like a multilevel construction, like a system of layers and shapes shifting in three-dimensional space.

Ironically, I cannot recall exactly how and when the turning point came. I think I was browsing the internet in search of the origins of a strange form, the Möbius band, and I came across a book called *Gödel, Escher, Bach* by Douglas R. Hofstadter. I had a vague idea about the Gödel theorem, liked Escher, adored Bach; I found the concept of connecting them interesting, so I looked up some reviews and summaries of the book. Perhaps it was the same day that I ordered it online. When it arrived about a week later, I dived into it. Both physically and mentally it was heavy reading for me. The mathematical concepts were well explained, but lacking background knowledge in the area slowed me

down considerably, even though I found excellent material online at MIT OpenCourseWare (Curry and Kelleher) that helped me understand some of the concepts. Nevertheless, curiosity and a growing sense of triumph drove me on. I believed that I finally found the means and the terminology to express what I could see in Ishiguro's novels, in the intricate structure of the narratives. I first experimented with the Escher-Hofstadter triangle in a conference presentation on the structure of *The Unconsoled*, which became the core of my research. Due to the encouragements I decided to explore the possibilities of using Hofstadter's concepts and Escher's lithographs in analysing the memory structure in Ishiguro's novels; the result is this paper.

### **Why Escher? Why Hofstadter?**

M. C. Escher's world is a unique and fascinating one. His drawings and lithographs are detailed, clear and simple at first sight. Yet they easily confuse the eye and absorb the mind; the rules of the physical world are often turned upside down in the images. Where is up and down? What is vertical and horizontal? What is foreground and background? What is far and what is close? Who is the observer and who is the observed? Based on his readings in mathematics, notably by H. S. M. Coxeter, György (George) Pólya, Lionel S. Penrose and his son, Roger Penrose (Schattschneider 293), Escher managed to depict ideas so complex that a number of experts used his works to illustrate scientific concepts of various areas. Some of his sources, mathematicians, like Coxeter, the Penroses and MacGillavry utilized Escher's works, in turn, as visual illustrations for mathematical principles of order (Loeb 318) and impossible worlds (Ernst 92). Coxeter referred to Escher's "intuitive geometry" a number of times. But his prints were also used in the fields of physics, geology, crystallography, chemistry, quantum mechanics, psychology, perception research and even ophthalmology (Broos 31–35).

Another remarkable thinker, Douglas R. Hofstadter weaved ideas from mathematics, music and art together, concentrating on the theories and theorems of the outstanding Austrian logician and mathematician Kurt Gödel<sup>6</sup>, the canons and fugues of the monumental composer Johann Sebastian Bach and the lithographs of the influential Dutch graphic artist Maurits Cornelis Escher, and gave his work the title *Gödel, Escher, Bach: An*

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<sup>6</sup> Gödel's first incompleteness theorem states that any sufficiently strong theory of arithmetic . . . that is consistent (or  $\omega$ -consistent) is incomplete. That is, in any such system there will be a statement of arithmetic where neither it nor its negation is provable from the principles contained in the theory. Gödel's second incompleteness theorem states that any sufficiently strong theory of arithmetic . . . that is consistent (or  $\omega$ -consistent) cannot prove its own consistency. (Cook 132)

*Eternal Golden Braid*, or *GEB* for short (first published in 1979). Hofstadter's ultimate quest was to understand the essence of the "I" which then in turn could lead to developments of Artificial Intelligence (AI). He describes his search in the Preface to the book's 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition as follows.

What is the self, and how can a self come out of stuff that is as selfless as a stone or a puddle? What is an "I" . . . ? *GEB* approaches these questions by slowly building up an analogy that likens inanimate molecules to meaningless symbols, and further likens selves (or "I"s or "souls", if you prefer – whatever it is that distinguishes animate from inanimate matter) to certain special swirly, twisty, vortex-like, and *meaningful* patterns that arise only in particular types of systems of meaningless symbols. . . . I call such strange, loopy patterns "strange loops" throughout the book, although in later chapters, I also use the phrase "tangled hierarchies" to describe basically the same idea. (Hofstadter, *Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid* P-2)

These loops and tangled hierarchies form a considerable part of the book and his ideas, as he examines various systems on small and large scale alike. This is the "doodle" behind Hofstadter's synthesis:

[A] logical circuit with the recursive ability to copy itself into self-representation and self-reference . . . The argument is that these properties belong intrinsically to the autonomic mechanisms of the loop itself and that the paradoxes in our thinking, as illustrated in Escher's prints, arise from them. (Miers 1216)

Hofstadter shows great interest in self-reflexivity and the recurrence of systems; and the structure of *GEB* invokes these concepts with its internal dynamics and the alternating chapters. Notably, Escher was highly interested in Lewis Carroll (Broos 36), whose name appears already in the subtitle of Hofstadter's book ("in the spirit of Lewis Carroll"). *GEB* is constructed of interwoven narratives with countless hypertextual winks; the chapters alternate with the dialogues of Achilles and the tortoise featured in *What the Tortoise Said to Achilles* (1895) by Lewis Carroll, an allusion to Zeno's paradox of motion.

When reading Ishiguro's novels, and following the narrators' attempts to map out their past, to lose or not lose the threads, I found that their mind and memory, and their representation, the narrative technique mirror some of the processes Hofstadter discusses. His strange loops and recursive systems appeared to correspond with the elaborately

confusing yet structured ways the narrators recall their stories. From several aspects the similarity is hardly surprising since Hofstadter's research interests, the mind and its workings are not that far from Ishiguro's curiosity concerning memory, its power and working, and the depiction of these in his fiction. Although with different means and methods, they both explore the workings of the human mind.

When I have already completed most of the chapters, I accidentally came across other papers utilizing Hofstadter's theories in literary analysis, for instance, on Joyce (Werner) or Escher's lithographs on Borges (Parker). I was partly surprised and glad that my idea of connecting these distinct areas was not as crazy and unprecedented; that others, too, have noticed some essential similarity and complementarity between Hofstadter's concepts and literary works. On the other hand, it was no surprise at all since the worlds of these authors, Joyce, Borges and on my part Ishiguro, undeniably have common traits, however subtle.

Hofstadter has built a staggering and highly complex system, incorporating the most varied concepts:

fugues and canons, logic and truth, geometry, recursion, syntactic structures, the nature of meaning, Zen Buddhism, paradoxes, brain and mind, reductionism and holism, ant colonies, concepts and mental representations, translation, computers and their languages, DNA, proteins, the genetic code, artificial intelligence, creativity, consciousness and free will – sometimes even art and music. (Hofstadter, *Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid* P-1)

It would be not only impossible, but also pointless to force everything onto and into the analysis of fictional works. Therefore in a more humble way this paper attempts to interpret Ishiguro's fiction along some of Hofstadter's ideas, and examine if and how far these theories are applicable on seemingly so distant works of fiction concentrating on memory. In my analysis I attempt to map the narrators' intricate memory paths, uncover their patterns, the focal points and the blind spots.

My main area of interest is the structure of memory writing itself. Various critics have pointed out that Ishiguro's narrators get lost in their recollections and are unreliable (Lodge 154–155). My intention is to dive into the narratives and explore the hows. How does the narrative work? How do the narrators orient themselves and get disoriented? How do they shift attention, manipulate events? In the course of the analysis I hope to find some

answers to the whys as well; the effects they create, what their conscious or unconscious reasons might be and to what end they tell and un-tell their stories.

Along the way I highlight some of Hofstadter's concepts useful to interpret certain patterns of memory in the narratives. Similarly to Hofstadter, I became fascinated with M. C. Escher's world, and the way he manages to grasp and depict abstract ideas and give them a twist. Therefore I shall keep him close at hand and from time to time return to Escher's pictures to illustrate some ideas, sometimes following in Hofstadter's footsteps, sometimes taking a different direction. Although I initially planned to use Escher's works to be only of illustrative purpose, as I dived deeper and deeper in my research and his art, I found that there are closer links. Sometimes I used my Escher albums as inspirations, as means to think about structure in the novels. I came upon images, even drafts by Escher, not mentioned by Hofstadter, which illustrated my points wonderfully; therefore I included them in this paper. Eventually, Escher's art became another pillar of my research, just as strong as Hofstadter's concepts.

### **About the structure**

Memory research experienced a boom in various fields in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The tendency is related to the traumas of World War II, especially to the Holocaust, people and victims struggling to forget, but at the same time to keep the memory alive so that later generations shall not forget. The concept unfolds the collective memory of generations. Andreas Huyssen (Whitehead 1–2) noted that the Western culture became obsessed with memories and memorials in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Countless mementos and memorials were erected; however, Huyssen also proposes that this may be considered as an externalization and therefore a deletion of memories. Ricoeur dedicated an exhaustive work, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, to the problems connected with memory, such as memory and history, collective memory, nostalgia, forgetting and forgiving. The excellent young scholar Yugin Teo analyzed these themes in Ishiguro's works in *Kazuo Ishiguro and Memory*. His research poses thoughtful questions and provides insights into Ishiguro's fiction. However, I intend to pursue a different direction in my analysis.

I divided Ishiguro's novels in three groups, based on their common features with regard to memory and form. I use different tools to highlight and illustrate my claims on the form, the working of memory and its effect. This does not mean that one concept cannot be applied to another group, but as Ishiguro's technique evolves and his interests

shift, the patterns alter and different tools and methods are more suitable to analyze them. The grouping of the novels follows the chronological order of the novels' publication. Even though this is merely one possibility to handle them, this way certain tendencies can be better identified and pinpointed along the analysis.

Ishiguro discussed in an interview (Hunnewell) that in hindsight he has written three novels on the same topic. Though later I will debate this statement, it is true that these works are closely related. Moreover, the novels were published within less than a decade, unlike the later ones; the temporal proximity of writing may intensify the feeling of similarity. Therefore my first group to be examined is Ishiguro's first three novels, *A Pale View of Hills* (1982), *An Artist of the Floating World* (1986) and *The Remains of the Day* (1989). All of them feature elderly narrators who look back on their life seeking answers, consolation and confirmation for their actions or the lack of those. In order to analyze the narrators' zigzag in time and among memories, I shall use some of Hofstadter's concepts and Genette's concepts from his *Narrative Discourse*. The background to especially the first two narrators, Japan shortly after World War II, calls for an analysis with regard to the findings of trauma literature. Finally, I explore the spiral structures, how remembering and misremembering helps the narrators deal with past and future.

The next chapter focuses on a single novel, *The Unconsoled* (1995). Various critics pointed out features familiar from Kafka's works, and even Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*, but the similarity is not elementary, as I will briefly discuss it. But certainly, this is Ishiguro's longest and perhaps the most puzzling novel so far, therefore I dedicate an entire chapter to the analysis of this work. *The Unconsoled* has many faces enabling maybe the most varied interpretations. I examine three aspects, space, time and characters, in my attempt to find order in this nightmarish chaos and to map out the narrator's thinking. This is the part where I apply Hofstadter's loop theory most extensively on various clusters, space, time and characters, in the novel.

After the puzzlement around *The Unconsoled*, the next novel *When We Were Orphans* (2000) seems to return to calmer and less confusing territories, similarly to the following work, *Never Let Me Go* (2005). Although *When We Were Orphans* bears a number of similarities with *The Remains of the Day*, which was the reason I analyzed them together in my Master paper, and when *Never Let Me Go* was published, the tendencies of *When We Were Orphans* became more apparent. Both works show characteristics of typical genre novels, those of detective stories and science fiction, respectively; yet on closer look these are emptied or exceeded. These qualities enable further manipulations of

memories. The intricate time structure and the elaborate shifting of time layers are typical for both narratives, not found in previous works. However, Genette's terminology is again useful to explore these layers.

The main body of my research ends here. After *Never Let Me Go*, for the first time Ishiguro published a collection of short stories, *Nocturnes: Five Stories of Music and Nightfall* (2009). The stories are interconnected and the topic of memory and the past are always touched upon, yet analysing those in the same way as I do here with the novels would not be possible and beneficial.

Before the final conclusion I will briefly turn to Ishiguro's latest novel to date, *The Buried Giant* (2015), which was published after a decade-long interval. The novel utilizes the tropes of different genres, again, but this time without a first person narrator, therefore the narrative cannot and should not be analyzed along the same lines explored in this paper. The main points of interest are what direction Ishiguro took there, how this new novel differs from and yet still resembles the preceding ones. Eventually I will attempt to highlight some of its implications for Ishiguro's oeuvre. However, I shall not incorporate it in the main body of the analysis due to the reason mentioned. Finally I give an overview of the findings, point out some general and overarching characteristics I noticed during my research and close the loop by opening a new one.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE ART OF NOT TELLING

*Almost everything is  
unspeakable here, and yet it  
gets spoken.*

Michael Wood (Lewis, Kazuo  
*Ishiguro* 39)

Ishiguro stated in an interview (Hunnewell) that he has, in fact, written three novels on the same topic. His first three novels, *A Pale View of Hills* (1982), *An Artist of the Floating World* (1986) and *The Remains of the Day* (1989) all focus on people, more precisely, on narrators who arrive at a point in their lives when they look back at their adulthood pondering on their actions with anxiety and hope to find affirmation that they did the right thing.

The novels may be about the same topic, but just as variations in music, or memories of an event, even slight differences in focus or tone may create different works. Ishiguro's debut novel *A Pale View of Hills* centres on Etsuko's dual narrative. The ending is ambiguous; readers, reviewers and critics have argued about the final outcome of the story, whether Etsuko and Sachiko are one and the same person, and whether Mariko has committed suicide. With hindsight Ishiguro deemed the story to be too direct and too coarse.

The ending is almost like a puzzle. I see nothing artistically to be gained by puzzling people to that extent. That was just inexperience—misjudging what is too obvious and what is subtle. Even at the time the ending felt unsatisfactory. (Hunnewell)

He may have been rather strict on himself, for critics and the audience received the book very well. Truly, the novel, compared to his later works, contains much more drama and explicit action, even the more or less covert placement of at least one suicide. But Etsuko's indecisive drifting tone is already typical of Ishiguro's unique narrative technique; the content and its handling, on the other hand, are closer to the early short stories, "Getting Poisoned" and "Waiting for J" (both published in 1981) where action and death actually

occur. This obtuse physicality of death disappears quickly, already in his next novel. The concept of weighing one's own life in doubt, however, remains and evolves.

The second book, *An Artist of the Floating World* is set in Japan shortly after the war in the early 1950s; the narrator yet again tries to recall events and turning points where he might have taken the wrong turn, but asserts himself that he did not do anything really bad. Despite the similarities, the tone and the plot are more subtle; no deaths, bombs or horrors are mentioned explicitly. Ono's broodings about his role in the floating world of pre-war Japan are more peaceful, though highly manipulative. The story seems to have evolved from *A Pale View of Hills*; Shaffer points out that Etsuko's father-in-law figure, Ogata is a direct predecessor of Ono, and also that of Stevens, for rationalizing "past 'professional' failures through the defence mechanism of repression and projection rather than own[ing] up to personal failure or poor judgement." (15) Ishiguro confirms this in an interview telling that Ono's character has been nestled in his mind ever since writing the first novel.

Eventually, in *The Remains of the Day* Ishiguro, somewhat desperately<sup>7</sup>, turns away from the Japanese setting but keeps and develops the idea of an elderly narrator taking a long, but not so hard look at the past, with Stevens's journey turning into a seemingly thorough exploration of his memories. This work marks a milestone in Ishiguro's oeuvre, highlighted not only by the numerous prizes and awards, most notably by the Man Booker Prize he received in 1989; but also the distinctive narrative voice he arrived at after the gradual evolution of style and themes. By the third novel his main themes have become evident, including his deep interest in memory, in the manipulative power of remembering and their depiction. In this aspect the first three novels clearly show the phases his memory writing went through in the increasingly subtle handling of the plot.

Etsuko's narrative alternates between two periods, and the focal point, or rather blind spot, of her omissions is her elder daughter, Keiko, and her recent suicide. But already in the next novel, the time layers are manifold and cannot be easily distinguished and sequenced. Ono's remembering is indeed floating, touching upon a memory, leaving it, later returning and reshaping it, a technique which is then fully mastered by Stevens, who builds up an intricate web by revisiting and altering certain memories. In spite of and due to this Ishiguro felt that "[he] was refining and refining the same novel" (Hunnnewell). In

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<sup>7</sup> Ishiguro claims in several interviews that he grew wary of the title of the Japanese writer, therefore he deliberately searched for a theme and setting for his next novel which has no connection to Japan whatsoever.

the *New Yorker's* review, which Ishiguro mentions in the interview, the reviewer of *The Remains of the Day* writes that

our appreciation is all for the poise and formal beauty of the writer's *performance*. We're in awe of the technical mastery that allows so much to be compressed into a single moment, a handful of telling gestures. . . We respond to the precision of the arrangement, the scrupulous care with which the standards have been met, the writer's evident concern that the reader's expectations of order not be disappointed. Ishiguro anticipates our every need. And that, finally, is what's so deeply wrong with this irreproachably composed work of fiction. (Rafferty 104)

The reviewer gives a double-edged, rather harsh verdict of *The Remains of the Day*. On the one hand he is disappointed by the clockwork precision of the novel, and he finds the main themes recurring from Ishiguro's previous works. On the other hand, he cannot help but marvel at the clear and conscious structure and style. Indeed, regarding the three novels, the sense of looking back furtively on one's life is strongly present in all of them. However, the recurring main theme does not necessarily mean that he was writing the same book. The differences are more of a developing nature. *The Remains of the Day* as Sim emphasizes it, the "change of setting while replicating theme would seem to be an integral part of the meaning of *The Remains of the Day*" (Kazuo Ishiguro 49). Eventually, Ishiguro arrived at an intricate narrative technique with this third novel that has its roots in the first two novels. Undoubtedly, when reading them, one can see the variations and the evolution of this technique. Sim (Kazuo Ishiguro 49) also comments that Ishiguro typically refines his previous work in the next novel, but this does not reduce their value or the path they set out. Nevertheless, Ishiguro harboured similar doubts as the reviewer, which might have at least partly triggered the dramatically different choice of topic and tone of his subsequent novel, *The Unconsoled*, which I will take a closer look at in the next chapter.

For the above mentioned reasons I shall concentrate not only on the third novel in my analysis, but examine the preceding novels as well, since they provide excellent examples to analyse and illustrate my claims, namely that the narration displays carefully engineered techniques to evade, disguise and manipulate the past when discussing events. In this chapter I intend to examine how this (mis)remembering works, how the mind's operations and manipulations are depicted and utilize Hofstadter's concepts and Escher's pictures to support my arguments.

What are these narrative concepts and techniques? On examining the structure of memories, it soon turns out that, as countless critics have called attention to it, the narrators lose themselves in the intricate chain of memories. One memory leads to another; later on extra details and explanations are added to it; and all this with the honest desire to explore and give an account of the past. The chain evolves into a sophisticated web of memories, and doubts may arise. Which role does the narrator take, that of the victim hopelessly lost in the past or the master pulling the threads? Moreover, on closer look the stories seem to be constructed rather of gaps, evasions and omissions; the narrators keep silent about various events, circumstances and details. Ishiguro's first narrator, Etsuko is perhaps the most secretive, she does not speak explicitly about herself or her doubts concerning her life; though this claim will be revisited later. Stevens's ramblings about dignity and greatness are far more telling about his character. Even Ono's complicated moralizing provides more insight for the reader. Nevertheless, all three narrators' situation and attitude are very much similar: repressing, omitting and manipulating memories, rationalizing past actions. However, the narrative technique obscures clear vision and covers up the yawning gaps.

Three basic concepts can be identified in the intricate net of memories. The first concept is the structure of embedded layers of narrative. This is most sophisticated in the case of Stevens, who builds up an elaborate structure of loops, when he returns to past events again and again, adding details and explanations. This structure, aimed at confusing the reader with its detail-obsessed narrator, is perfect both to hide and to lose unwanted threads. This idea leads to the second concept, when the gaps in the narratives will be examined, concentrating on what is omitted and what manages to find its way back to the recollections. Finally, the third concept is what I call the spiral-like recalling: the narrator describes another character's story or problems which are in fact his or her own.

Before proceeding to the analysis of the narrative layers in the three novels, it is worth taking a detour and examining the formal structure of the works as it may add another aspect to the interpretation. All three narrators, very diligently, try to maintain some order in the whirl of memories. By forcing their recollections into various sections, they attempt to create the impression of being organized. This, incidentally, establishes a stark contrast between form and content, the flowing images of memories and the rigidity of their structure.

## Formal aspect

As already noted, all three novels in question are retrospections by a first person narrator, a type of work Veyret calls a “fictive autobiography” and warns about its “paradoxes” (113). First, the “moment of enunciation and the moment remembered, however close they will get in the course of narration, will never coincide”; both of these typical features gain further significance in Ishiguro’s work. According to Veyret the second paradox is that a fictive autobiography is “based on incompleteness and unreliability”. As for unreliability, a number of critics interpret these novels concentrating on the “unreliable narrator”. However, Lodge remarks that no narrator is completely unreliable; there is always some truth that could be discerned among the falsehood otherwise we cannot perceive a story (154–155). The inherent sense of incompleteness is further strengthened by the elusive technique the narrators use when recalling their past. For Etsuko, Ono and Stevens the moments remembered are always far back in the past, sometimes even the narrator does not seem to know how far they date back. This is a key element in Ishiguro’s novels as I will show it.

Wong adds that, by constructing their stories, the “narrators find themselves both at the centre and at the margins of their own stories” (*Kazuo Ishiguro* 18). This clearly causes some discrepancy in the narratives as the narrators attempt to evaluate the past. Who evaluates whom? If still involved, is the narrator at all in a position to assess anything? Moreover, Philip Roth notes that “[w]ith autobiography there’s always another text, a counter text, if you will, to the one presented. It’s probably the most manipulative of all literary forms” (172). Roth speaks about autobiography; fictive autobiography opens up even more possibilities for that, therefore his suggestion is highly relevant for Ishiguro’s works, as I shall discuss in the next subchapter. After analyzing the presented text and its formal aspects, I shall turn to this other text, the one not revealed but concealed.

Etsuko’s narration is divided into two parts and eleven chapters, but she never reflects either on this division or on her act of writing. (That leads directly to the question whether she is writing, telling her story or conducting an interior monologue. There is no textual evidence as to the type of her recollections. Unlike the other narrators, she does not address anyone, which can be an indication of solitary writing or of any interior monologue as suggested.) Though the chapters roughly correspond to aspects of Niki’s five-day visit, they rather follow the thread of the internal story about Sachiko and Mariko.

In contrast to Etsuko, the majority of Ishiguro's narrators utilize some kind of explicit temporal structure.

In Ono's case there are the diary entries that help the reader navigate in the timeframe of the narrative. The narrative starts in October 1948, the next two entries come from 1949 (April and November) and the final one dates from June 1950. The timing of the entries is rather arbitrary, although usually there is an event that sends Ono down on memory lane. His present circumstances function as anchor points, they trigger various memories that need to be clarified, opening up numerous time layers and starting new threads of memories. Some of them are eventually closed, like the story of Kuroda, some are lost completely after surfacing for a brief period, for example, his parents' or his spouse's fate. Additionally, the entries start and finish without any obvious reason or justification. If there is any, it may be found in the past: Ono wishes to explain how he did not do anything bad, but even if did, his intention was for the best.

Stevens's narration is a *journal* of a *journey* of a mere six days. He undertakes a motoring trip to the West Country in the summer of 1956, and meticulously records the events on the way there, where the entries stop. Is there no return then? In some sense, there is not. For Stevens this was the farthest and furthest he could venture from the safety of home, physically, mentally and emotionally. However, the diary entries, reflecting the passing days of the journey, are titled in a falsely simplistic way Day One, Day Two (one cannot escape the Biblical allusion to the days of creation, but incidentally there is no Day Seven, no rest for this working man), adding further details as the time of the day (morning, evening) and the location (Salisbury, Mortimer's Pond, Dorset). This accurate method should create the impression of an organized person. However, this almost obsessive pedantry can also be interpreted as the desperate struggle of an individual out of his depth, displaced from his safe and well-known environment and daily routine, or an aging mind striving to hold on to facts and reality. This possibility shall be revisited later in this chapter. Regarding Stevens and Ono, an additional question arises. Their narratives also dispose the characteristics of a diary. Remarkably, Ono, who has arguably more time on his hands than Stevens during his journey or at any time working in Darlington Hall, finds opportunity to write less frequently. Nevertheless, one cannot help but wonder if this is the first time they keep a diary? The form suggests some continuity; there may have been other diaries in the past. The possibility is rather intriguing; I would, however, dispose of it for two reasons. First, based on their recollections, neither could have had the necessary amount of time for this task. Second, they are not good at diary writing. Instead

of concentrating on the daily events, both Ono and Stevens quickly lose themselves (and the reader) in the web of memories. Moreover, these memories seem carefully selected and gradually unfolded; a fact suggesting a unique process.

### **Layers of time**

As already noted, a large proportion of the three narratives consists of recollections. Even though the narrators' present time passes (for Etsuko five days, for Stevens six, whereas in Ono's case the story time takes up almost two years), there is only a limited forward motion in time, while the narrators immerse themselves in the past, the direction of their narratives is a temporally backward movement reaching much further. What Porée (36) suggests in connection with *The Remains of the Day*, that it is practically plotless, is true for *A Pale View of Hills*; as well as *An Artist of the Floating World*. Etsuko's life feels to be in limbo, still in the aftermath and shock of Keiko's suicide. Ono's description of visits he pays to old acquaintances, and the peak point of the story, the *miai* display far less activity, in contrast to the memories. However, none of the narrators attempt to write anything similar to an autobiography; the recollections are far from being exhaustive, and they do not follow any linear or *chronological* order. The narrators jump back and forth between stories from the past and events in their present, often losing the thread, thus playing an elaborate game of hide-and-seek with the reader and themselves. In order to give an account of an event, they frequently refer to other memories from various periods of their lives, creating complicated structures of analeptic jumps. Often they leave stories unfinished and return to them later or sometimes not at all, but the reader may not notice this due to the structure of different layers of time. This layering of time is similar to "the Chinese box structure" which then "gradually comes to mirror both the recesses of the past as well as the recesses of [the] mind" (Porée 36).

The elderly Etsuko describes her younger daughter's visit and reminiscences about her life back in Nagasaki when she was expecting her first child. The narrative switches between these two periods or layers which are some decades apart. It is not difficult to identify the date, the narrator gives relatively specific reference points, and at first sight the sequence of recollections follows more or less the chronological order of the events. Unlike the later narrators, she does not shift so smoothly between time layers; and the omissions are not that complete and traceless. This can be interpreted as "her broken identity is instead indirectly expressed in hesitations, uncertainties, and contradictions, in the evident pain and struggle of remembering and forgetting" (Baillie and Matthews 48).

Nevertheless, in the first novel there are already temporally displaced events that come to be one of Ishiguro's signature marks, most notably the day-trip to Inasa.

Contrary to Etsuko's recollections, Ono's memories are, indeed, floating; he creates elaborate structures; almost labyrinths of recollections. He is still attached to his present; the visit of his daughter and grandson, and the marriage negotiations keep him busy, but the day-to-day comings and goings of his life increasingly become mere trigger points for plunging into memories.

Among the three narrators examined in this chapter, it is certainly and unsurprisingly Stevens who then truly masters the shifting of time layers. His present is the summer of 1956 when he undertakes his journey, but the narration focuses on two earlier periods: the conference in 1923 and the antebellum years of the 1930s. Apart from these he brings up events from his recent past: from a few days to as far as several years ago.

The "Prologue" of *The Remains of the Day* is an excellent example of this strategy. In the mere statement of going on a journey, Stevens manages to dive into the past reaching back to Lord Darlington's lifetime, but also touches upon events in the recent past (in 1956), the previous year and some years ago. Marc Porée conducted an exhausting analysis of the "Prologue" of *The Remains of the Days* examining the tenses and the periods of time they indicate. He found that the "past always has a privilege with our butler. Hence his habit of proceeding sideways, only barely edging his way along, rarely making any substantial progress" (35ff).

My table below (for a larger size see Appendix 1, Table 1) illustrates Stevens's wanderings in the past within the short section. The horizontal axis shows the linearity of the narration, the vertical axis indicates the various layers of Stevens's past, up to the present, but nothing about the future, apart from the fact of the planned journey. The elements are grouped in accordance with the date they refer to with the temporal reference as a heading; general remarks without a temporal reference are omitted. (F stands for the present owner of Darlington Hall, Mr Farraday; D is the abbreviation for Lord Darlington, and K is Miss Kenton/Mrs Benn.)

<b>Present</b>	1956: journey plans						
<b>Recent past</b>	fortnight ago: first mention of trip	some days later: K's letter		receiving K's letter	afterwards: reconsidering F's suggestion, preparation	yesterday: conversation, awkward situation	yesterday: approval
<b>This year</b>		past few months: errors				not long ago: bantering attempt	2 months ago: expected visit of another butler
<b>Last year</b>			1955 spring: F's purchase, visit, staff plan		early days with F: bantering		
<b>Some years ago</b>						some years ago: pub talk about American manners	
<b>D's lifetime</b>							D's days: professional advice

The visual representation clearly shows the dominance of the past in contrast to the present, not to mention the future. Along the threads of associations the narrator reaches back to his recent past, but manages to squeeze in the heydays of Lord Darlington as well, creating a remarkably embedded structure. To be able to describe and analyze the relationship between the layers and the narrators' movement among them, I rely on the framework and terminology used by Douglas R. Hofstadter.

Hofstadter writes about embedded structures, calling the phenomenon a *recursive structure* and defines it as “nesting, and variations on nesting” (*Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid* 127). In order to identify the various movements within the system, he borrows terminology from computer programming, *push*, *pop* and *stack*. He explains them as follows.

To *push* means to suspend operations on the task you're currently working on, without forgetting where you are—and to take up a new task. The new task is usually said to be “on a lower level” than the earlier task. To *pop* is the reverse—it means to close operations on one level, and to resume operations exactly where you left off, one level higher.

But how do you remember exactly where you were on each different level? The answer is, you store the relevant information in a stack. So a stack is just a table telling you such things as (1) where you were in each unfinished task (jargon: the “return address”), (2) what the relevant facts to know were at the points of interruption (jargon: the “variable bindings”). When you pop back up to resume

some task, it is the stack which restores your context, so you don't feel lost. (*Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid* 128)

The number of *pushes* and *pops* is countless throughout Stevens's narrative. Sometimes there are phrases indicating a push, for instance, "there is another memory" (75), "I seem to remember" (82), "what occurred a few months ago" (128), "[o]ne memory in particular has preoccupied me all morning – or rather, a fragment of a memory, a moment that has for some reason remained with me vividly through the years" (222). These indicators, however, are frequently missing; past and distant past can merge into each other seamlessly. Similarly to a *push*, *pops* are occasionally highlighted with expressions like "let me return to my original thread" (20), "[b]ut I drift" (146), "to return to my original thread" (156). But he often misses the right level, not returning to the level of the original *push*, but popping higher up, thus leaving a number of memories incomplete. His *stack* information is either lost or incorrect, or he just chooses to ignore it.

Stevens's recursive structure is not a very neat one, here or elsewhere. His associations tend to lead him on before he can finish the story he began; and his *stack* is not quite adequate, he tends to miss where to pop back up. This creates the need to return to various threads several times, to add details and explanations, further complicating the structure. On the other hand, he is aware of these *pushes* and *pops* on the large scale; he does keep in mind where he intends to arrive. Ono is a worthy predecessor of Stevens, his wanderings in the past are of a similar nature; as I will examine in the following section.

Hofstadter's terminology is excellently suited to describe movements along the time axis, and I shall use it repeatedly; but it does not help to explain the recurring nature of the narrators' *push*, when they return to the same episodes at different points of their narration. Therefore, in order to further characterize the narrators' slippages into and within the past, it is worth examining the types of recurrence, for which Gerard Genette's categories of anachronies provide a helpful tool. Since the narrators concentrate mostly on the past, the various types of analepses can be utilized.<sup>8</sup>

## **Analepses**

According to Genette, analepsis (or retrospection) has several functions. It may add new information, which was previously omitted; or as a simple repetition of an already

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<sup>8</sup> Ishiguro's handling of time and its analysis based on Gerard Genette's theories were among the major topics examined in my M.A. thesis (2007), though from a different point of view and with a different emphasis. This subchapter draws on some analyses and findings of that paper.

recalled event it can add extra emphasis to increase its significance in hindsight; or to introduce a different aspect. Analepses can be divided into two classes, external and internal, based on whether “the point to which they reach is located outside or inside the temporal field” (Genette 61) of the narrative. Internal analepses, especially homodiegetic analepses, are of real importance for the present analysis since they “deal with the same line of action” (51) as the main narrative, hence “they present an obvious risk of redundancy and collision” (50); and this is what frequently occurs in Stevens’s (and in Etsuko’s and Ono’s) recollections.

This category, again, can be subdivided into two types. The first is named completing analepses, or returns, which refer to “retrospective sections that fill in, after the event, an earlier gap in the narrative” (51). Perhaps the most obvious example in Stevens’s diary is the missing Day Five. The events of this day are accounted for in the tranquillity of the morning on Day Six, as Porée suggests, stripped “(partly) of its impassioned or traumatic implications” (43). Stevens’s night at the Taylors and the conversation with the villagers was another stressful episode, even if not to the same extent as the meeting with Miss Kenton a.k.a. Mrs Benn. Nevertheless, Stevens needs some time to calm down and reaches back to a more distant past perhaps with consoling memories before he finally reports the ordeals of the evening.

But it is not only Stevens who needs time to recover before recalling certain events. For Ono the evening of the *miai* is a rather trying experience. According to Lewis, the *miai* is an episode of “central importance” (*Kazuo Ishiguro* 54) in Ono’s narrative, as this is the occasion when he openly confesses his sense of guilt owing to his role in Japan’s war propaganda. However, when taking a closer look at his confession, a number of suspicious elements can be found. But before proceeding to the confession itself, it is worth examining what leads to the *miai*, more precisely, how the narrator postpones its description.

The meeting of the Saitos and the Onos is preceded by long and anxious waiting. Ono’s daughters are worried that the Saitos could withdraw from the marriage negotiations, and Ono might share this concern, as he visits Matsuda to ascertain that no misunderstandings arise when the Saitos’ detective enquires about Ono. He even ventures to make the same request to Kuroda, though he fails to meet him. But the hassle around the negotiations has a larger significance for Ono. His worries are rather centred on the interpretation of his career and his own importance, and the issue of the marriage is more of a screen he can hide his broodings behind.

Ono recounts the events of the *miai* in the entry dating from April 1949, thus turning it almost into a midline in the narrative, but he puts off the full details until the end of the entry. On examining the structure of this section, an intricate labyrinth can be discovered, heavy with more obvious and enthusiastic *pushes* and less readily performed *pops* since Ono is never in a hurry to return to the present that is no longer a world where he knows and understands the rules, and, more importantly, the values.

The entry about the *miai* starts with Ono's musings on the Bridge of Hesitation about the ongoing reconstruction works which also implicate the demolition of the old. This is in turn confirmed by Mrs Kawakami when she reports the offer to sell her bar, triggering the memory of Shintaro's betrayal, which began "one evening last winter" (*An Artist of the Floating World* 100), when he mentions his ambition of taking up a teaching post; and it is then completed with the former pupil's requesting Ono to testify on a "winter's day shortly after New Year" (*An Artist of the Floating World* 100). Ono feels the betrayal especially strong since first he regarded the visit as the return to the good old days. It is only after this episode that Ono mentions the big evening, but temporally displaced, "Shintaro's visit had come only a few days after Noriko's *miai*" (105) and only to embark on other recollections. The reference is followed by a flashback, another *push* to the previous autumn to report the happy turn in the negotiations, but also the tensions building up in his relationship with Noriko. The account of a minor argument with his daughter doubles as the introduction to Ono's attempted visit previously at Kuroda's apartment – another *push*. The refusal makes a strong impression on Ono, the encounter with the twentyish pupil Enchi genuinely shakes him as it shows that he has indeed become a *persona non grata* in this new world order and with the new generation of artists. Then, prior to the evening, Ono recounts another argument with Noriko, clearly representing his own tenseness. It is only then, after the long introduction, that Ono undertakes to tell the story of the *miai*. But he cannot resist the temptation to first give a lengthy introduction of the venue. Then during the meal the Saitos' son Mitsuo confronts him (or he assumes so), and the similarity awakens the unpleasant memory of the young Enchi, so that "he finally feels pressured to accept the blame for his former political loyalties" (Lewis, *Kazuo Ishiguro* 52) and that eventually leads to his big speech, the apex of years of thinking and soul-searching.

There are some who would say it is people like myself who are responsible for the terrible things that happened to this nation of ours. As far as I am concerned, I freely admit I made many mistakes. I accept that much of what I did was ultimately

harmful to our nation, that mine was part of an influence that resulted in untold suffering for our own people. I admit this. You see, Dr Saito, I admit this quite readily. [...] All I can say is that at the time I acted in good faith. I believed in all sincerity I was achieving good for my fellow countrymen. But as you see, I am not now afraid to admit I was mistaken. (*An Artist of the Floating World* 123–124)

The confession may be regarded as a climax for Ono, after the preparation of long months and plenty of pages, and afterwards he needs three more months to feel tranquil enough to give an account of it.

Strangely enough, the guests seem to be at a loss as to the meaning of Ono's speech; and even stranger is the fact that Ono does not seem to realize this, although he reports the confused reactions. Lewis speculates that the reason for the guests' bafflement might be their lack of information on Ono's pre-war activities. Notably, Ono does not mention anything particular he should be blamed for (the betrayal of Kuroda is carefully withheld from the reader until the next diary entry). For the reader Ono's confession is a logical result of his broodings and the awakening doubt regarding his past. Nevertheless, without this preparation Ono's little speech is out of context; his displaced *mea culpa* does not make much sense.

Another possibility is that he greatly overestimates his contributions in the previous era, and has woven a "web of shame and anxiety" (Chisholm in out of essentially nothing. This misjudgement of one's significance recurs with Stevens who constantly boasts about having been at the hub of great things. But eventually it is both narrators' "fate to live long enough to see all their hopes and ambitions vanish in the wind. All they have left is the floating world of what-might-have-been" (Lewis, *Kazuo Ishiguro* 55).

### **Repeating analepses**

The second type of homodiegetic analepses, the repeating analepses or recalls, also called 'Rückgriffe' or 'retroceptions' by Lämmert (122), occur when "the narrative openly, sometimes explicitly, retraces its own path" (Genette 54). These recalls "modify the meaning of past occurrences after the event, either by making significant what was not so originally or by refuting a first interpretation and replacing it with a new one" (Genette 56). By this modification the phenomenon is close to a manipulation of memories, placing emphasis on some events and distracting attention from others.

Porée argues that Stevens does not learn anything and is unable to reassess the past; there is “[n]o distance between the ‘innocent’ relation and its retrospective ‘verification’ [...], when a former interpretation is replaced by another, which is not necessarily better or more correct” (44). However, the narrator’s constant search for turning points exhibits at least his intention to re-evaluate certain events. He claims twice that the conference was an important turning point in his life, his coming of age as a butler; especially the final evening that he recalls with “a large sense of triumph” (*The Remains of the Day* 115).

Another turning point is identified in the incident of Miss Kenton’s uninvited entering into Stevens’s pantry, juxtaposed with the sudden interruption of their cocoa evenings. Later Stevens confesses his doubts in hindsight:

Naturally – and why should I not admit this – I have occasionally wondered to myself how things might have turned out in the long run had I not been so determined over the issue of our evening meetings; that is to say, had I relented on those several occasions over the weeks that followed when Miss Kenton suggested we reinstitute them. I only speculate over this now because in the light of subsequent events, it could well be argued that in making my decision to end those evening meetings once and for all, I was perhaps not entirely aware of the full implications of what I was doing. Indeed, it might even be said that this small decision of mine constituted something of a key turning point; that that decision set things on an inevitable course towards what eventually happened. (*The Remains of the Day* 184–185)

Stevens does feel that his interpretation of the events at that time was not entirely adequate, and desperately tries to pinpoint the slippage. He hopes, exactly because so much time has passed and he is apparently wiser knowing the consequences, that he can objectively evaluate the event. A Porée observes, “[o]wing to his position as the narrating I, Stevens is technically superior to the narrated Stevens” (50), and he uses this superiority to reassess the past. However, after identifying the turning points, he does not take a step further and explore if and in what way things went wrong. This would be too much to bear. Eventually, he dismisses even the notion of turning points, musing “[b]ut then, I suppose, when with the benefit of hindsight one begins to search one’s past for such ‘turning points’, one is apt to start seeing them everywhere” (*The Remains of the Day* 185). Nevertheless, the expression ‘turning point’ appears in his narrative at various places just too many times to dismiss it too lightly (seven times exactly). The suspicion is present, but

as the case with so many other issues, Stevens goes to great lengths to assure his audience of his ignorance. Instead of weighing his past decisions, he finds excuses why something could not and should not have been done.

Shifting between time layers can be further complicated when each narrator attempts to identify the origin of certain utterances. The constant time travel might confuse not only the reader, but also the narrator, who tends to break up his recollection (recreating *pushes*) in order to explain some aspect with another story, before giving a full account of the original event. On the one hand, this type of narration is produced by an almost obsessive search for reasons and consequences, trying to give full account of something with background information in order *not* to give the wrong impression about oneself. On the other hand, in the whirl of various dates and references, the thread is frequently not clear and long periods remain unaccounted for. By concentrating on events and circumstances the narrators deem important, they divert attention from the yawning gaps in their narration. In the next part I will take a closer look at these omissions and their significance.

### **The art of not telling**

As already noted, the reader knows precious little of the narrators of the three early novels. Perhaps Etsuko is the most secretive of all, concentrating only on two periods, while details of the rest of her life appear only incidentally here and there, as infiltrations. Ono poses to be open and proud of what he did for his country, but what was this exactly? As for Stevens, who claims to have been at the hub of international politics, he has no idea of or interest in the world and its goings; his life stretches as empty as isolated he himself has become.

These narrators claim to provide glimpses into their innermost selves, but a tremendous part of their lives remains hidden. They ramble extensively about past and present, but what they disclose is relatively limited and selective. This is the art of not telling. But what they are not telling, what they decide not to remember, makes up a different, if not altogether different story (a “counter text” as Roth warns) in the background by leaving all those gaps. To illustrate this pattern I turn to M. C. Escher’s works. The lithograph *Mosaic II* (Figure *M.C. Escher: The Graphic Work* 35) plays with our perception of what is background and what is foreground, what is important and what is insignificant. The figures, however, create each other. Instead of hiding or covering it, the shape of a dark figure defines its light counterpart and vice versa. Escher wrote the following about the picture:

. . . the only regularity to be noted is the rectangularity of the complete surface. There are but few of the inner figures bordered by four adjacent ones [as opposed to *Mosaic I*]. The direct environment of the frog consists of two figures; the guitar is hemmed in by three, the cock by five and the ostrich (if that is what it really is) by six. The sum total can only be arrived at by careful calculating. (Escher, *M.C. Escher: The Graphic Work* 11)

Indeed, it is difficult not to get lost in the picture. Although the figures are stationary, frozen in a twisted posture; one pattern leads to another; one outline creates another form, and the eye moves on constantly and perceives the whole as dynamic. The gaps between two figures of the same colour come to life and take the shape of various creatures. I find a similar pattern in Ishiguro's narratives, where the expressed and the omitted are equally important parts of the story. Based on the postmodern critic Ihab Hassan's concept on silence, Wong calls the gaps "silences filling the void" (*Kazuo Ishiguro* 16) when ordinary discourse cannot express the extremity of emotions; hence the gaps represent the narrators' anxiety and pain.

This dichotomy is echoed in Caruth's assumption about trauma. She states that "the complex ways that knowing and not knowing are entangled in the language of trauma and in the stories associated with it" (4). She also argues that the trauma is such a profound shock that the mind closes in to protect itself; and even though having been witness to (or victim of) a traumatic event, the person does not know or acknowledge it. This creates a tension in the narrative of the story.

Porée suggests a double nature to the traumatic memories of the narrators. The heart of the story is in the past, the narrators are, in fact, captured in anamnesis that can be defined as

beyond the mere recalling of things past, . . . a structure of subjectivity in which a primal trauma is both relived obsessively, and also erased, censured, cast into oblivion. So that anamnesis includes remembering, as well as forgetting all. (Porée 35)

However, even if something is "cast into oblivion" and omitted, it still leaves a trace in the narrative through its absence. What are these omissions, where are the gaps in the narratives? In Etsuko's case the blind spots, or rather blind phases are her childhood and early youth, everything before and shortly after the bomb; her meeting and marrying Jiro; the circumstances of her leaving Japan, then her subsequent life in Britain. It would not be

entirely true, however, to say that there are no facts available; but the information is hidden, mentioned indirectly, embedded in conversations about different, seemingly innocent topics. But similarly to the mutual relationship of the dark and light figures in Escher's *Mosaic II*, Etsuko's intention to concentrate or direct attention to certain memories and avoid others is worth examining since the well- and not so well-hidden memories are equally essential. Apart from searching for this hidden information, my aim is to pinpoint the narrator's technique of hiding them, to find not only what they hide but find out how they do it.

Before proceeding further with the analysis of *A Pale View of Hills*, it is important to highlight and explain some areas of interest. Especially Etsuko, but also Ono are unique among Ishiguro's narrators in a sense that the historical context of their narratives is an extremely sensitive one. The political realities *The Remains of the Day* is set, with the Cold War and the Suez crisis in Stevens's narrative present and the emerging Nazi power in the recollections are charged periods as well. Nevertheless there is no direct experience of a war or violence, unlike the historical events of the near past in Nagasaki. The horrors of the war and the atomic bomb are traumatic experiences both for the individual and on the collective level. When discussing and interpreting Ishiguro's first two novels, the historical aspect cannot and should not be omitted or overlooked. Research on trauma memory provides a rich and deep insight for interpretation, and I will mention some concepts of trauma research. However, concentrating solely on the traumatic aspect limits the horizon of interpretation, and may lead the analysis astray. Wong suggests an alternative point of view.

While it is difficult to declare that a novel like *A Pale View of Hills* is *not* a truthful account of post-war Nagasaki, it is more likely that the novel *is* a faithful imaginative rendering of the emotional life of one woman remembering a tumultuous time in her private life set in the charged atmosphere of post-atomic warfare. (Wong, *Kazuo Ishiguro* 13)

As my analysis aims to show, Ishiguro's patterns of memory recur in various forms in his works, but there are common traits in all the narrators' struggle with remembering and forgetting. The way memory functions, and how it is depicted in the novels is not essentially different, regardless of the dimension of the narrators' trauma. This shows that the core of Ishiguro's memory writing, just as the narrators' "quest for consolation" (Wong, *Kazuo Ishiguro* 5) is universal, which can be connected with and heavily

influenced by, but not restricted to a particular historical era, geographical region or social system.

Returning to the personality of the narrators, as already mentioned, there is little to know about Etsuko in the period prior to the time of the inner story set in Japan. There are two persons who knew Etsuko in her maiden years, Mrs Fujiwara and Ogata-San, but even their recollections are scarce and well-hidden. Etsuko makes two direct allusions to the time before her marriage. Once during a conversation with Mrs Fujiwara she admits to sometimes thinking of the late Nakamura, her beloved from her youth. The other instance, when she is interrogating her father-in-law, is even more intriguing.

“I must have been such a burden to you in those days,” I said, quietly.

“Nonsense.”

“But the rest of the family. They must have thought I was a mad girl.”

“They couldn’t have thought too badly of you. After all, it ended up with you marrying Jiro. Now come on, Etsuko, enough of this. Play me something.”

“What was I like in those days, Father? Was I like a mad person?”

“You were very shocked, which was only to be expected. We were all shocked those of us who were left. Now, Etsuko, let’s forget these things. I’m sorry I ever brought up the matter.” (*A Pale View of Hills* 57–58)

The conversation is triggered by Ogata-San finding Etsuko’s old, and apparently beloved instrument, a violin, which brings back memories from the time they met, shortly after the bomb fell on Nagasaki. However, as Molino (328) suggests, this exchange reveals that Etsuko does not clearly remember her wartime experiences. This is hardly surprising, Leys explains, “as the traumatic experience in its sheer extremity, its affront to common norms and expectations, shatters or disables the victim’s cognitive and perceptual capacities so that the experience never becomes part of the ordinary memory system” (Molino 328). The lack of any direct reference to her childhood and youth may be a result of the shocking experience of the war and the unconscious effort to suppress and forget it.

Similarly, as several critics have pointed out, despite the spatial and temporal proximity, the atomic bomb is hardly mentioned, only as a marginal affair, as a background to some story or memory, but never in its own monstrosity. Yet, as is the case with the entire narrative, there are hidden clues as to Etsuko’s memory, which is not that hazy after all. The most telling remark she makes comes in connection with, not so surprisingly, Ogata-San and their visit to Nagasaki’s Peace Park, where a statue was

erected *in memoriam* those killed by the atomic bomb. (Incidentally, this is the only occasion the narrative uses the institutionalized and formal expression “atomic bomb”, otherwise it is mentioned merely as “the bomb”, and only three times apart from the Peace Park incident.)

It was always my feeling that the statue had a rather cumbersome appearance, and *I was never able to associate with what had occurred that day the bomb had fallen, and those terrible days which followed.* Seen from a distance, the figure looked almost comical, resembling a policeman conducting traffic. It remained for me nothing more than a statue, and while most people in Nagasaki seemed to appreciate it as some form of gesture, I suspect the general feeling was much like mine. And today, should I by chance recall that large white statue in Nagasaki, I find myself reminded primarily of my visit to Peace Park with Ogata-San that morning, and that business concerning his postcard. (*A Pale View of Hills* 137) (emphasis added)

Etsuko considers the statue more of a comically awkward figure than a memorial reflecting the gravity of the events in Nagasaki. But to have that opinion one needs to have at least some impressions of the tragedy. Therefore I suggest that Etsuko does have recollections of those days, clearly shown in her remark, but she chooses to bury and conceal them, and avoid any direct focus. This attitude is not atypical of people traumatized by shocking experiences. However, her suppression of troubling memories is not entirely successful on a closer look. Even though she firmly states that the white statue brings back memories mostly of her outing with Ogata-San, she does not fail to mention her principal problem with the figure. Moreover, she lets it slip that she does recall the image from time to time, despite her statement of hardly thinking of Nagasaki. Etsuko, not for the first time in the narrative, makes a point of ascertaining that she does not think of or remember something, only to the effect that she is, in fact, much more aware of a number of things in her past than she would like to admit or let the reader believe.

For Lewis the key to the gaps in Etsuko’s narrative is the idea of displacement, as “the story hides itself behind layers of displacements” (*Kazuo Ishiguro* 35). He identifies various types of displacement: geographical (Etsuko’s move from Japan to England), cognitive (Etsuko’s memories), psychological (Etsuko-Sachiko), familial (Keiko-Mariko) (Lewis, *Kazuo Ishiguro* 27) and I would add temporal (day-trip to Inasa). Furthermore, there is a displacement between the narrative levels, the frame story (the elderly Etsuko in England) and the inner story (her memories), when Etsuko gives the old photo of the

harbour of Nagasaki to Niki with the remark that “Keiko was happy that day” (*A Pale View of Hills* 182); whereas previously she remembers a day-trip with Sachiko and Mariko to Inasa, which is the only event when the little girl was happy. For Molino the incident is a clear sign of Etsuko’s disconnection of the memory. He argues that

[e]ither Etsuko has carefully rewritten the memory over the years substituting the experience of Sachiko and Mariko for one actually between herself and Keiko, or Keiko’s suicide has forced into Etsuko’s consciousness long suppressed memories that Etsuko can only conceive and articulate as the story of some other woman. (Molino 331)

Molino suggests that Etsuko’s memories went through a long process of gradual change, a rewriting of the past; or that Keiko’s suicide triggers a tremendous onset of recollections her mind is not quite capable of accepting. Either way, Etsuko’s narrative is ridden with indirections, omissions and displacements of similar kinds. LaCapra offers an explanation to these phenomena.

[U]ndecidability and unregulated *différance*, threatening to disarticulate relations, confuse self and other, and collapse all distinctions, including that between present and past, are related to transference and prevail in trauma and in post-traumatic acting out in which one is haunted or possessed by the past and performatively caught up in the compulsive repetition of traumatic scenes – scenes in which the past returns and the future is blocked or fatalistically caught up in a melancholic feedback loop. In acting out, tenses implode, and it is as if one were back there in the past reliving the traumatic scene. Any duality (or double inscription) of time (past and present or future) is experientially collapsed or productive only of aporias and double binds. (LaCapra 21)

A traumatized person’s sense of time, the distinction between past and present may be disturbed. Moreover, the past can become dominant over both present and future due to the “compulsive repetition” of the past and the traumatic event. LaCapra also suggests that these can be signs of a trauma which has not yet been dealt with.

There is another aspect to the trauma and this art of not telling, namely the extremely strong visual imagery underlying the narrative. Visual memory functions slightly differently and it can be less controlled, therefore the assessment of trauma memories needs to include this aspect as well.

Traumatic experience, beyond the psychological dimension of suffering it involves, suggests a certain paradox: that the most direct seeing of a violent event may occur as an absolute inability to know it; that immediacy may take the form of belatedness. The repetitions of the traumatic event – which remain unavailable to consciousness but intrude repeatedly on sight – thus suggest a larger relation to the event that extends beyond what can simply be seen or what can be known, and is inextricably tied up with the belatedness and incomprehensibility that remain at the heart of this repetitive seeing. (Caruth 91)

In the analysis of memory writing, especially if it concerns trauma, the visual aspect cannot be neglected, similarly to the psychological distance between seeing and comprehension. Among a number of theoreticians, Caruth argues that being eyewitness to an event that traumatized the individual may result in his lack of understanding and knowing on a conscious level what had happened. However, the mind can be caught up in repetitive visualization of the experience, in an attempt to comprehend. This quest, de Man argues, is dubious due to the individual's, the mind's "knowledge of the impossibility of knowing [that] precedes the act of consciousness that tries to reach" (75). The essence of a traumatic memory is "the inability to know it" for the mind cannot comprehend the event. As already stated, the memory remains there and can resurface.

[A] traumatic experience can remain buried in silent blind spots of memory, relived at unanticipated moments, and experienced with distortions and displacements that further the trauma and may compel the sufferer into avoidance that prolongs the traumatic memory. (Molino 325)

The memory of the event or some images may surface unexpectedly, and not always in the same form, but distorted or displaced. This can intensify it in a certain way and prolong the individual's torment. Etsuko, quite abruptly in the narrative, mentions her dream being connected to a little girl on the swing she saw earlier on the playground during her walk with Niki.

At first it had seemed a perfectly innocent dream; I had merely dreamt of something I had seen the previous day—the little girl we had watched playing in the park. And then the dream came back the following night. Indeed, over the past few months, it has returned to me several times. (*A Pale View of Hills* 47)

When the dream returns, it is not that innocent any more, but haunting her sleep; and Etsuko revisits the memory of the playing girl again and again, feeling that something is wrong with it. “The fact that I mentioned my dream to Niki, that first time I had it, indicates perhaps that I had doubts even then as to its innocence” (*A Pale View of Hills* 55). Later she connects it with Mariko, however, as this explanation seems unsatisfactory, she speculates further. Additionally, quite unexpectedly in her recollections, Etsuko holds a rope when talking to Mariko one evening; a fact the child does not understand and grows suspicious of, according to Etsuko. The scene is repeated again at the bridge.

The little girl was watching me closely. “Why are you holding that?” she asked.

“This? It just caught around my sandal, that’s all.”

“Why are you holding it?”

“I told you. It caught around my foot. What’s wrong with you?” I gave a short laugh.

“Why are you looking at me like that? I’m not going to hurt you.”

Without taking her eyes from me, she rose slowly to her feet.

“What’s wrong with you?” I repeated.

The child began to run, her footsteps drumming along the wooden boards. She stopped at the end of the bridge and stood watching me suspiciously. I smiled at her and picked up the lantern. The child began once more to run. (*A Pale View of Hills* 173)

As Sim observes, the “unexplained repetition adds an element of the macabre to the proceedings even as it heightens the frisson of the uncanny” (*Kazuo Ishiguro* 30). This feeling is further strengthened by elements such as the serial killer attacking children in the neighbourhood, a little girl found hanged on a tree or the mother drowning her child as witnessed earlier by Sachiko and Mariko. Etsuko does not report actually *seeing* these images, though as a victim and a survivor of the war she may have been eyewitness to very similar situations; but by inserting them in her narrative, she creates a visual background that is certainly present in her mind. Yet the imagery is only complete with Etsuko’s confession about Keiko’s death scene – again not physically present, but the impression is rendered even clearer with the help of her imagination and “horror”.

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. (emphasis added) (*A Pale View of Hills* 54)

Then her recognition of the recurring dream comes a little later, “the little girl isn’t on a swing at all. It seemed like that at first. But it’s not a swing she’s on” (*A Pale View of Hills* 96). Though not explicitly stated, the allusion is very strong to the hanging body swinging on a rope, thus the loop is completed implicitly. Yet the narrator seems unable to bring herself to finish the thought; even though she claims that the image has lost its morbidity. The process of mourning and “working through” has not been completed yet, if ever it is possible at all.

This short section reveals something else. The (imagined) image of the daughter’s corpse hanging for days was the sight connected to Keiko’s suicide; the image becomes a representative of the shock, the horror and the subsequent tormenting of the mother’s soul and conscience. Whenever Etsuko thinks of Keiko and her death, this is the image that comes to her mind. She cannot avoid brooding on it most of the time, as the word ‘continually’ indicates. This image is probably an ever present one as she managed to accustom herself to it, and the pseudo memory lost its morbidity. Interestingly enough, the expression ‘wound’ is used in explaining her attitude towards the image. This coincides with Caruth’s description of trauma as “the wound of the mind” (4).

. . . trauma seems to be much more than a pathology, or the simple illness of a wounded psyche: it is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available. This truth, in its delayed appearance and its belated address, cannot be linked only to what is known, but also to what remains unknown in our very actions and our language. (Caruth 4)

Both in Etsuko’s remark and Caruth’s analysis the wound becomes a separate and independently behaving entity that exists in symbiosis with the owner. It is not simply a wound any more, but a messenger of some transcendental, hidden knowledge. It is not attached only to the conscious level of recognized truth (“to what is known”), but also to something deeper by functioning as a connection, an obvious reminder of unknown truth. The known and unknown, the acknowledged and the suppressed, the visible and the hidden appear simultaneously in the narrative, creating its tension as remarked by numerous critics.

Based on the above, it is not unfounded to claim that “Etsuko’s ‘real’ story is told exclusively by indirection” (Shaffer 16). Therefore it is only natural to take a closer look at Sachiko and her story if the reader wants to fill at least some of the narrative’s enormous gaps. But before proceeding to the analysis of Etsuko’s inner story in the next subchapter, some other aspects of the omissions need attention.

It is important to state that gaps are not limited to events; a number of characters are also eliminated from the narrative. Etsuko’s entire family is missing (presumably killed by the atomic bomb, but never mentioned directly); her second husband and Keiko are absent, too. Lewis points out that “absence in *A Pale View of Hills* – absent fathers, absent daughters, absent bombs – is at the heart of the heart itself. There is little affection in this book, but a great deal of coldness and loss” (Lewis, *Kazuo Ishiguro* 44). The same can be concluded of Ishiguro’s succeeding narrators. Ono reports the unfolding conflict with his dominant father, the pointless and intimidating “business meetings” and later the ritual burning of his paintings, but never mentions him or the mother again as if punishing and exiling them from his mind. Then Ono’s wife, Michiko is strangely absent from the narrative, too, her name is uttered only twice by Ono (both in conversation with the old acquaintance, Matsuda). Ono’s only son, Kenji, who suffered and died in Manchuria, is no difference. The memory of him is strictly kept at bay. This is a recurring pattern in most of Ishiguro’s novels: when the person is mentioned it is only in connection with another issue. Here Ono’s recollections are not focused on the son, as if the mind cannot yet bear the full realization of his loss and has to divert attention from it. Additionally, when Kenji’s name comes up, it is frequently not the person, but his absence that is mentioned.

As for Stevens, he completely omits his mother, and remarks of his brother quite factually, “I should explain here that I am one of two brothers – and that my elder brother, Leonard, was killed during the Southern African War while I was still a boy” (*The Remains of the Day* 41), on the margin of his father’s great stories about dignity; but he never returns to Leonard again. Finally, Stevens’ relationship with his father is a highly complicated one. The father cannot be omitted from the narrative entirely, due to his physical presence, but it is kept to a minimum, at least apparently – I shall examine their relationship later in this chapter.

Absence, on the other hand, is a major factor in the narrators’ and other characters’ life. They are absent from their families’ and from their loved ones’ life. Etsuko was not there for Keiko when she needed her, a fact she seems to realize and admit too late, “I feel only regret now for those attitudes I displayed towards Keiko” (*A Pale View of Hills* 88).

For Keiko much of her short life was made up of absences: the emotional absence of her mother, the physical absence of her father, Jiro, to be substituted by the ignorant English, therefore emotionally and culturally absent step-father, Sheridan, whose own daughter, Niki gave the verdict, “I suppose Dad should have looked after [Keiko] a bit more, shouldn’t he? He ignored her most of the time. It wasn’t fair really” (*A Pale View of Hills* 175); and finally her own displacement and absence from Japan and paternal family.

Similarly, Ono rarely refers to his children’s youth. It may be that he was absent frequently, otherwise how could he have gathered pupils around him? However, the reader can guess, based on his daughters’ comments and behaviour, that whenever he was around, he was not a very affectionate father.

‘Setsuko probably has no idea of what you’re like these days, Father. She only remembers you from when you were a tyrant and ordered us all around. You’re much more gentle these days, isn’t that so?’

I gave a laugh to show Setsuko this was all in good humour, but my elder daughter continued to look uncomfortable. Noriko turned back to her sister and added: ‘But he does take a lot more looking after, moping around the house all day.’ . . . ‘You don’t seem to believe me, Setsuko. Father’s very different now. There’s no need to be afraid of him any more. He’s much more gentle and domesticated.’

‘Noriko, really...’

‘He even cooks meals from time to time. You wouldn’t have believed it, would you? But Father’s becoming a much better cook these days.’

‘Noriko, I think we’ve discussed this enough,’ Setsuko said, quietly.

(*An Artist of the Floating World* 13–14)

Chances are that Ono grew to be very similar to his own father: distant, dominant and suppressing his family. However, the two daughters’ different attitude may indicate a change, the war and his fall from grace might have been a turning point in his life.

The list of omissions does not end here. A number of critics missed any mention or hint as to any intimacy in the narrators’ life; however, it is exactly this shortage that is a telling feature of them. Indeed, Etsuko and Ono bring up nothing concerning this topic. They both talk more about their children than the spouses. Etsuko’s first husband is featured in her recollections, but these are neutral, almost sterile, mostly lacking any personal aspect, not to mention the sexual sphere. Ono mentions Michiko five times in his narrative, but always as a side remark: the wife protesting about the investigation required

by the future in-laws, or promising the late bloom of the elder daughter – mostly trivial matters. It is Stevens who reveals the most, in his own way. According to his records, his most intimate experience with a woman occurs when Miss Kenton enters his parlour uninvited to discover that he is reading a sentimental book. During her teasing for the book's title, they are physically the closest to each other ever.

Then she was standing before me, and suddenly the atmosphere underwent a peculiar change – almost as though the two of us had been suddenly thrust on to some other plane of being altogether. I am afraid it is not easy to describe clearly what I mean here. All I can say is that everything around us suddenly became very still; it was my impression that Miss Kenton's manner also underwent a sudden change; there was a strange seriousness in her expression and it struck me she seemed almost frightened.

*(The Remains of the Day 175–176)*

Stevens does sense that something extraordinary is happening. But he cannot really account for that, he is captured by this 'peculiar' feeling for a moment or two, but afterwards he is practically livid with anger, which he describes with his usual understatement, "I cannot recall precisely what I said, but I remember showing Miss Kenton out of my pantry quite firmly and the episode was thus brought to a close" (*The Remains of the Day 176*). In other words he panics at losing his so well-guarded composure and withdraws in a hurry.

Using omissions and absences in a story is a conscious technique to reveal certain things in an indirect way, as Ishiguro commented on the way Stevens edges through his journal:

[Stevens] ends up saying the sorts of things he does because somewhere deep down he knows which things he has to avoid. He is intelligent enough, in the true sense of the word, to perceive the danger areas, and this controls how his narrative goes. The book is written in the language of self-deception. Why he says certain things, why he brings up certain topics at certain moments, is not random. It's controlled by the things that he doesn't say. That's what motivates the narrative. (Swift)

Not only do omissions make up a separate and different story, they also direct attention to other characters. Indeed, there are gaps in the narrative, but if one looks beyond the 'I' of the narrator, interesting pieces of information can be gathered about the way they describe other characters and what is revealed about them. In the next subchapter I will concentrate

on the narrative about these other characters and suggest that the narrators are strongly present there as well.

## Spiral

Before proceeding with the analysis of the novels, I would like to introduce a set of theories by Hofstadter, that of the *Strange Loop* which I will rely on to capture and illustrate some of the memory patterns in Ishiguro's fiction. In Escher's lithograph *Waterfall* (see Appendix 2), based on R. Penrose's perspective drawing (Escher, *M.C. Escher: The Graphic Work* 16), the onlooker's eye starts to follow the stream of water in the aqueduct as it travels along the line, the curves, the waterfall and finally returns to the same place where it started. The loop is closed but that should be impossible in the paradigm of our physical world and the force of gravity. The individual sections of the water flow look realistic, yet combining them results in a paradox system where water seems to flow upwards defying gravity.

Based on this image, Hofstadter states that it is a paradox system; and in such systems "the *Strange Loop* phenomenon occurs whenever, by moving upwards (or downwards) through the levels of some hierarchical system, we unexpectedly find ourselves right back where we started." (*Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid* 15) Additionally, whereas some loops recur in themselves as I will describe in more detail in the following chapter, there are open loops which apparently do not end, i.e. recur in themselves, and at the same time they produce the steps endlessly, for instance in the drawing *Print Gallery* (see Appendix 2). Here a man in the gallery is looking at a picture of a harbour and a town where a woman is looking out of the window which is directly above a gallery where a man is looking at a picture of a harbour and a town and . . . the sequence could go on endlessly. After producing a set of steps the process returns to the starting point, but descending one level deeper in the world of the picture. The figures' gaze is directed towards the movement of the loop, leading the (external) observer's eye to wander along the loop endlessly. It is similar to a spiral, moving in the same course but ever rising (or descending), never returning to exactly the same spot. Hofstadter added later,

"strange loop" is [...] not a physical circuit but an abstract loop in which, in the series of stages that constitute the cycling-around, there is a shift from one level of abstraction (or structure) to another, which feels like an upwards movement in a

hierarchy, and yet somehow the successive “upward” shifts turn out to give rise to a closed cycle. That is, despite one’s sense of departing ever further from one’s origin, one winds up, to one’s shock, exactly where one had started out. In short, a strange loop is a paradoxical level-crossing feedback loop. (*I Am A Strange Loop* 101–102)

This phenomenon I find to appear in the Ishiguro novels<sup>9</sup> already of the 1980s, when the narrators focus on other characters and describe their struggles whereas in reality they speak about their own problems. Wong points out that “two levels of narrative voice” (*Kazuo Ishiguro* 19) are present in the novels: the ‘extradiegetic’ narrator, superior to the narrative, and the ‘homodiegetic’ who participates in the story (terminology of Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan). However, the boundary between the two roles and temporal layers often becomes blurred when the extradiegetic narrator manipulates past events or is drawn into the story due to the enduring emotional involvement.

In this respect the narrators of *A Pale View of Hills* and *The Remains of the Day* are ample examples of the troubled individual trying to cope with the burdens of the past, but unable to discuss or think about them, which is a natural defence mechanism of the human mind. For Etsuko the recent past contains a trauma she cannot face directly. In order to work through the emotional burden of the daughter’s suicide, she needs an agent to project and act out her own memories and deepest worries. In Ono’s case this projection strategy is slightly different, connecting past and present, as I will discuss later. Stevens is concerned with the past as well, but has another, forward pointing anxiety about himself in time where his memory of the father plays an important role. All these instances are examples of a memory pattern that I call spiral memory chains or structures. In the final part of this chapter I examine this memory pattern in the three novels.

### **Dealing with the past**

Etsuko’s narrative is very direct, the story of the Japanese friend is an obvious choice of displacing her own worries and guilt; whereas Ono is more subtle as I will show it briefly before turning to Stevens and his even more suppressed and hidden clues. This order of analysis, apart from the obvious chronological aspect, is also beneficial to examine how Ishiguro’s memory technique evolved.

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<sup>9</sup> The initial idea of the spiral structure occurred to me some years earlier when examining *The Remains of the Day* and the patterns of Stevens’s memory narrative. My first experimental thoughts on this structure were introduced and then published as a conference paper, the second part of this subchapter draws on the concepts and findings of that paper.

The entire narrative of the elderly Etsuko in *A Pale View of Hills* is a carefully constructed evasion of, but at the same time obsession with the traumatic events of her past. Baillie and Matthews point out rightly that “[t]rauma itself is always at once present and absent: the traumatic past is always present, but never in its original form” (49). In order to be able to deal with her past, Etsuko introduces another character, Sachiko, who she claims to have known. The story of their short friendship is mainly about Sachiko and her troubled young daughter, Mariko.

Ishiguro comments in an interview, “it’s really Etsuko talking about herself, and possibly that somebody else, Sachiko, existed or did not exist . . . Whatever the facts were about what happened to Sachiko and her daughter, they are of interest to Etsuko now because she can use them to talk about herself” (Mason and Ishiguro 337). Etsuko picks fragments of her own life and of another woman’s, reshapes them and builds up something possibly very similar to what actually happened. She is strangely outside, telling about someone else, but also inside the story, revoking her own past and trying to deal with her sense of guilt in connection with her firstborn’s fate.

Sim points out the novel’s “expert use of doppelgänger figuration” (“Kazuo Ishiguro” 29) which further strengthens the uncanny nature of the narrative. Wong agrees on the presence of a “*doppelgänger* or spectral double” (Wong, *Kazuo Ishiguro* 32), but she focuses only on Sachiko as a possible double. Sim, on the other hand, suggests that the novel has several doppelgänger characters, or even sets of doppelgängers. The image of a haunting mad woman recurs in several instances, the woman Mariko claims to have seen and who lives on the other side of the river, the mother drowning her child in hysterical despair, and Etsuko describing herself as a “mad girl” (*A Pale View of Hills* 58). The idea of the alter ego provides intriguing aspects of interpretation, but I take a step further and suggest that these characters can be interpreted not as individual characters but as spin-offs or projections of the self, its worries, suppressed fears and memories.

Another figure worth examining is Mariko, Sachiko’s strange daughter. She is a difficult case as a child, moody, reckless, antisocial, and also the victim of her mother’s negligence. Children in Ishiguro’s works can often be interpreted “as troubled projections of the traumatized adult characters” (Bennett 83). This time, however, the child is rather a projection of Keiko, a representation of her introvert and perturbed nature. Critics were quick to point out the slippage in Etsuko’s narrative when talking to Mariko on the bridge: she switches to first person singular.

“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. We stared at each other for a moment, then she looked back down at her hands.

“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.”

(*A Pale View of Hills* 172–173)

It is possible that the same conversation took place between Etsuko and Keiko before leaving for England, with the same promises given. Yet the reader knows how tragically that story ended. It is a logical assumption that “Etsuko’s narrative of Sachiko’s treatment of Mariko is a coded way for her to comment on her own treatment of Keiko” (Shaffer 21); though she does not utter a single comment. She seems to be anxious about the warning, “in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you” (Matthew 7:2). Etsuko does not use a hard measure on Sachiko, neither as a comment in her narrative, nor in conversation face to face. She merely suggests actions in favour of Mariko, or expresses certain doubts, but does not enter into open conflict. Moreover, Etsuko has her second daughter, Niki telling her that she had done the right thing. But even with this double confirmation she is not entirely consoled.

Baillie and Matthews argue that Etsuko also feels trapped in the traditional role and responsibilities of a Japanese wife, and Sachiko stands for everything the young Etsuko admires and deep down longs for, “radical, new, and shocking ideas of independence and self-determination” (48), which would eventually contribute to her leaving Japan for good. However, the pull of tradition is too strong on her, even decades later and far away from her native culture, she uses an agent to talk about ideas so opposite to the values she grew up with. She puts phrases as “Japan is no place for a girl. What can she look forward to here?” (*A Pale View of Hills* 170) into Sachiko’s mouth, which may well be doubts and hopes of her own mind that she cannot express. Yet Etsuko eventually finds the way to tell her story, as Ishiguro stated in an interview, it is in a way “the emotional story of how she

came to leave Japan, although that doesn't tell you the actual facts" (Mason and Ishiguro 338).

According to feminist interpretation, Etsuko's ambivalence, even negative feelings about pregnancy and motherhood are responsible for the contradictions in her narrative (Baillie and Matthews 49). These misconceptions are never explicit, however, her insistence on being happy and optimistic about the future and the birth of her child come too often to be plausible. Even the elderly Etsuko struggles with the concept of motherhood.

Despite Etsuko's displacement of her anxieties through the re-telling of the story of Sachiko and Mariko, she is unable to exist in a stable present *and* recover her maternal self. Her inability wholly to occupy linear time is revealed in the continual and contradictory eruptions of her repressed memories of motherhood and of Keiko's childhood. (Baillie and Matthews 51)

Shaffer goes even further when suggesting that the narrative reaches beyond this. Based on the Freudian concept of the death wish and the duality of sadism and masochism, Etsuko explores "the taboo of infanticide at its very core" (36) and following the same thread, I may add it involves the image of killed children, sometimes murdered by their own mother. As earlier discussed, the significance of visual images is prominent in *A Pale View of Hills*; maternal filicide appears too often to ignore it. Etsuko does feel responsible for Keiko's death, and her memories are full of foreshadowing the tragedy. Sim insists that the narrative is "driven by a desire to pull together a series of events detailing violence done to children and done by children" (*Kazuo Ishiguro* 32) which eventually functions as a premonition (or warning) from Etsuko.

The underlying structure of Etsuko's remembering is therefore similar to the woman in Escher's *Print Gallery*. She tells about her friend and her conduct, but the reader soon realizes that Etsuko is looking at herself, covering and uncovering the mistakes of her younger self, secretly exploring concepts of female emancipation, but most importantly, weighing up her guilt in the fate of Keiko.

The case in *An Artist of the Floating World* is somewhat different from both the predecessor and the successive narrator (but will recur in the fourth novel, *The Unconsoled*), as I shall briefly explore before turning to *The Remains of the Day*. In contrast to Etsuko, Ono does not project memories, anxieties outwards, but he himself becomes the embodiment of everything, especially the paternal dominance he rebelled

against in his youth. The father's intimidating and oppressive conduct towards the child Ono is presumably mirrored by the adult Ono in his relationship with his family, as already discussed. The strongly authorial master–apprentice relations and conflicts are also re-enacted by Ono. His own exile (and that of the former favourite Sasaki) from Moriyama is repeated by Ono's pupil Kuroda, where the banished becomes the banisher. A remarkable feature is his constant uncertainty as to the source of certain phrases; was it the former teacher or he who made those remarks?

It is possible, of course, that Mori-san did not use those exact words. Indeed, on reflection, such phrases sound rather more like the sort of thing I myself would declare to my own pupils after we had been drinking a little at the Migi-Hidari. . . . But then again, as I have said, many phrases and expressions which came to be most characteristic of me I actually inherited from Mori-san, and so it is quite possible that those were my teacher's exact words that night, instilled in me by the powerful impression they made on me at the time. (*An Artist of the Floating World* 151)

On the one hand, Ono acknowledges the former teacher's legacy (unlike the father's), but also limits it to superficial features, like gestures, expressions and cheap wisdoms. Moreover, the fact that they are interchangeable deprives them of their singularity and individuality, and enhances the continuity of tradition, rather than the possible impact of the individual. On the other hand, the narrator refuses to recognise any further similarities between himself and his teacher or his father. Sim argues that “Ono's recollection of the events seem forced and selective. It appears to be driven by self-interest, by current needs and concerns rather than by a genuine desire to attain self-understanding” (*Kazuo Ishiguro* 37).

Scanlan observes that when Ono is “[c]onfronted with a painful situation, he is likely to abstract it, generalise about it” (Lewis, *Kazuo Ishiguro* 59). The transition from the subordinate to the dominant and oppressive is a recurring motif in Ono's life, forming a sinister loop and suggesting a vicious power circle: people may come and go, but the hierarchical relations always render the individual to either role. Scanlan also suspects a “fundamental confusion of himself with the people he discusses” (Lewis, *Kazuo Ishiguro* 59), and in this respect he is not at all that different from Etsuko. Sim even proposes the presence of “Oedipal undertones” (*Kazuo Ishiguro* 39) in connection with Kuroda when the incident of burning Ono's pictures is repeated figuratively in the burning of the pupil's

works. This situation is very much akin to the scene in *Print Gallery*, when the observed can become the observer as history repeats itself.

### **Dealing with the future**

A more hidden and complex, but still relatively well-definable example of the spiral structure in *The Remains of the Day* is Stevens's narrative about Stevens senior. Among Stevens's memories the father has a prominent role; a fact which may not be apparent immediately since any mention of him is scattered, embedded in the explanation of other events or concepts. Stevens senior is mentioned very early in the course of the narrative, already in the first day's entry, although it is just a passing remark. As the journal, the journey and the remembering proceed, Stevens gradually unveils the last months of the father's life, sometimes only in the context of describing his relationship with Miss Kenton. Nevertheless, the events the narrator recalls only as a background to explain the complex nature of the conflict with the housekeeper, are also significant in themselves, as I attempt to show, how and when Stevens *père* appears or is suppressed in the son's mind and narrative.

Stevens senior is first mentioned only as the source of Stevens's beloved parables which he uses to illustrate what he means by dignity in his profession. The first story, the father's favourite, is a common anecdote about a butler, who shoots a tiger hiding in the dining room under the table without any fuss and ensures smooth preparation of dinner. He reports the occurrence in the famously calm and understated English butler-style "I am pleased to say there will be no discernible traces left of the recent occurrence by that time" (*The Remains of the Day* 37). This is something like Wodehouse's Jeeves could have said. The story complies with the butler-stereotype so much that its authenticity becomes doubtful. In the two other stories the father plays a prominent role; and they are supposed to prove his high professional standards.

The next story recounts how Stevens senior drove three intoxicated gentlemen around the countryside, took their rude comments and orders without objection; but made them apologize by his silent statute when offending their host, the employer of Stevens senior. The narrator of the story recalls with awe, and Stevens recounts it with complete admiration, "there was something so powerfully rebuking, and at the same time so unassailable about his figure looming over them that Mr Charles's two drunken companions seemed to cower back like small boys caught by the farmer in the act of stealing apples." (*The Remains of the Day* 40).

In the last story Stevens senior is asked to serve a guest, a general who was responsible for a disastrous and infamous battle a decade before, where Stevens elder brother had died. Based on what Stevens tells about the manoeuvre, an attack on civilians; it could be deemed as a war crime, yet the general was entertained and valued by his host due to a “lucrative business transaction” (*The Remains of the Day* 42) – a fact nothing to do with dignity, but Stevens does not seem to brood upon this aspect. Nevertheless, Stevens senior provides excellent service to the general, who turns out to be unashamedly boasting about his military career; and Stevens is yet again extremely proud of his father.

The stories are at the core of Stevens’s idea of the universe, they inspire and motivate him; the fact that they are somehow all connected to the father is a telling sign of the son’s adoration. Stevens’s awkward denial of Lord Darlington to Mr Farraday’s guests and then claiming it to have been an act of loyalty is a bizarre and distorted re-enactment of the father’s story when he hides his identity from the general who was responsible for his elder son’s death years earlier.

Stevens sees his father as the perfect butler of his time, one that he strives to become. Moreover, he develops the idea of professional excellence one step further when he claims to consider moral factors in his choice of a lord to serve. Stevens positions his father and himself at the top of the profession. However, when the father arrives in Lord Darlington’s household, following the death of his previous employer, he is well advanced in age. Stevens fights to reassure Miss Kenton of his father’s qualities, but as Stevens senior’s condition rapidly deteriorates, the mistakes he commits become more and more striking.

In her letter Miss Kenton reminisces about an event Stevens only reluctantly recalls. The incident she mentions dates back to this same period some thirty years before, the period Stevens’s father was employed at Darlington Hall, when they were watching Stevens senior from a window while he was “looking down at the ground as though he hoped to find some precious jewel he had dropped there” (*The Remains of the Day* 52). Although Stevens hints that there “are some very pertinent reasons why this memory has remained with [him]” (*The Remains of the Day* 52), the circumstances, just yet, are not explained. Instead, he gives an account of some earlier events which led to that moment: the arrival of Miss Kenton and Stevens senior at Darlington Hall, then the ongoing series of conflicts with Miss Kenton. The figure of the father reappears in this context of recollections, as Miss Kenton repeatedly calls Stevens’s attention to the errors committed by his father. First the incident with the dust-pan, described as “a trivial, but irritating error” (*The Remains of the Day* 58), then the silver polish. After the initial surprise

Stevens, thirty years ago and in the present alike, plays down the significance of the mistakes, “[a]t first, I found it hard to credit such an error to my father. But I soon reminded myself that such trivial slips are liable to befall anyone from time to time” (*The Remains of the Day* 52). A number of other errors follow, but are not detailed in the narrative; eventually the climax is reached with the misplacement of the decorative Chinaman, when the son reduces Stevens senior’s duties, as he reluctantly remembers.

“These errors may be trivial in themselves, but you must yourself realize their larger significance” (*The Remains of the Day* 65). The sentence is first attributed to Miss Kenton who apparently said this during the heated exchange with Stevens concerning his father. Later, however, Stevens reconsiders and attributes it to Lord Darlington, when he expresses his worries after the fall of Stevens senior. This uncertainty as to the origins of particular sayings is not new; as discussed, Ono, too, struggles to identify even more statements. The interchangeability weakens authenticity and raises doubts. Although the ominous fall is alluded to very early in the course of the narrative (in Miss Kenton’s letter), only here does the narrator give a full account of it. As that certain afternoon is repeatedly recalled by Stevens, in a spiral-like recurrence, the details are unwillingly and only gradually provided. As a result of the accident the father’s tasks are reconsidered, and shortly afterwards his condition deteriorates dramatically.

Finally, Stevens senior’s death is mentioned on the margin of the conference’s account. When the narrator later evokes that afternoon again, looking at the figure of the father from the window with Miss Kenton shortly after admitting the full story of his fall in the garden and its implications, the incident is placed now in a strikingly new context, filled with the gravity of the elderly man’s situation and foreboding his imminent death. The image shows direct similarity with Escher’s *Print Gallery*: the father is observed by the relatively young Stevens and Miss Kenton, which in turn is remembered and looked upon by Miss Kenton a.k.a. Mrs Benn; and her mention in the letter triggers the recall for the elderly Stevens.

Among the memories of various events Stevens’s thoughts return to the father, always revealing a little more, and shifting the details or altering circumstances. This chain of recurrences resembles a spiral, and even though the events unfold in a chronological order, Stevens in fact descends in a vortex into the depth of his memories. Scattered as those memories are in the narrative, Stevens continues to return to them again and again. If the pattern of remembering is interpreted as a vortex, what force keeps it moving, what is at the centre it revolves around? What makes Stevens revisit those events? In order to

answer the questions, one needs to look more closely at the figure of the father. He is clearly a monumental character in his son's life and mind; however, he is highly controversial, too. Stevens senior is a model for his son both professionally and in character; but he is also an imperfect father. Stevens too obviously hints at the distance between them. At one point he mentions that his father "could seem extremely forbidding viewed in certain other contexts" (*The Remains of the Day* 40), implying that he has seen his father look threatening more than once. The awkwardness and official politeness of their communication betrays a problematical father-son relationship in spite of the son's claim of utmost respect. In his attempt at becoming a great butler, Stevens not only wants to live up to the father, but possibly surpass him. He continually compares himself to his role model, attempts to find new aspects, such as the moral standing of the employer, where he has outperformed his father. On the side, a question arises here. Does or can a perfect butler have children? Stevens clearly avoids any situation that could eventually result in an intimate relationship. He strongly disapproves affairs between the housekeeper and the butler – perhaps based on his own experience of his parents.

The other reason for Stevens's constant return to the occurrences around his father, especially his decline, is an untold, but ample fear of his own aging and deterioration. Already in the Prologue Stevens mentions that he has committed some mistakes.

The fact is, over the past few months, I have been responsible for a series of small errors in the carrying out of my duties. I should say that these errors have all been without exception quite trivial in themselves. Nevertheless, I think you will understand that to one not accustomed to committing such errors, this development was rather disturbing, and I did in fact entertain all sorts of alarmist theories as to their cause. (*The Remains of the Day* 5)

Stevens refers to his own mistakes with exactly the same expression used in connection with the father's errors, "trivial in themselves". Moreover, he plays down the significance of these mistakes, just as he did in his father's case. Naturally, he looks desperately for reasons outside himself and finds the mistakes to "have derived from nothing more sinister than a faulty staff plan" (*The Remains of the Day* 5). However, the threat of the gradual decline of a perfect butler is looming in the background. Additionally, Stevens downright refuses any allusions to his age. At the start of the trip the old man warns him in a bantering manner (Stevens's favourite) that in some years Stevens may not be able to climb the steep path. Though previously undecided whether to go up the hill or not, he

immediately feels the urge to defy the man's "vulgar" allegations to his age, and climb the hill. Afterwards he ascertains that even though the walk was "strenuous . . . it failed to cause me any real difficulty" (*The Remains of the Day* 26).

When analyzing the father–son interactions, or rather the son's impressions and recollections of the father, I can see another strange loop forming that arches over generations. The father's professional errors, or at least those of a similar nature are committed by Stevens – history seems to repeat itself. Naturally, Stevens cannot defy the passing of time; he, too, shall slowly decline. What is more perturbing to Stevens having witnessed the loss of the father's glory is that he knows what may await him. Denying the significance of the errors is only a postponement of admitting to losing his own strength. This decline could be more menacing than death itself, since after striving for being a great butler, who perfectly inhabits the role; he must lose it step by step – a humiliating process.

Only once does he partly admit that the mistakes could have larger significance, when he breaks down on the tier, saying:

I am far from reaching the standards I once set myself. More and more errors are appearing in my work. Quite trivial in themselves – at least so far. But they're of the sort I would never have made before, and I know what they signify. (*The Remains of the Day* 255)

In this respect the evocation of the father's decline is the unconscious echo of his long suppressed fears. The parallel becomes even more explicit if one regards the choice of words: the expression "trivial in themselves" reappears every now and then in various contexts throughout the novel, sometimes referring to the father, sometimes to Stevens himself.

Returning to the strange loop in Escher's *Print Gallery* where the visitor to the gallery becomes the subject of the exhibited picture, I can discover the same kind of loop here: Stevens describes the father's deteriorating condition, but the process is in fact happening to him. Instead of being the audience to the decline of a great butler through remembering, he is the protagonist of this act.

## **Conclusion**

As presented in this chapter, Ishiguro's narrative technique and evasive language of memory show remarkable skills even at the beginning of his writing career. The retrieval of the past has a double nature already in his early novels; the narrators attempt to reveal

critical periods of their lives to find meaning and consolation in the turn of events. Yet they conceal immense parts of their personal story.

It follows no definite order or pattern . . . The past is not explored layer after layer; instead we have a layer here, a layer there, and at times even, the different temporal tiers are confused and conflated . . . Ishiguro is not interested in the exhaustive restitution of the past but in its selective exhumation, in what the narrator's selections or omissions reveal of him. Hence the technique of 'soundings,' leaving many areas of his character's past unexplored, uncovered. (Porée 51)

Ishiguro does not tell a story, he rather "untells" it. This double hide-and-seek of revealing and concealing the past creates a slow but intense dynamics in the first three (as well as in the subsequent) works. The next novel, *The Unconsoled* takes a different direction in certain aspects, the way memory is depicted and the effect it creates. Though some critics claim a complete turn-around, I think the change is not that dramatic, Ishiguro's deep interest in memory establishes a thread of continuity among these novels, however different the handling is.

### CHAPTER 3

## IN THE VORTEX OF THE MIND

*Behold the plains, caverns and  
abysses of my memory; they are  
filled beyond number with  
innumerable kinds of things*

(Augustine, Confessions 17)

*The Unconsoled*, Ishiguro's fourth novel published in 1995, marks a significant digression from the path set out by his previous novels, the only apparent continuity being the use of the first person narrator. Ishiguro stated in an interview that he wanted to write something else, something that he was not expected to produce. Moreover, as Wong puts it, "*The Unconsoled* represents a bizarre and entangled tale whose allegorical value is more dubious and whose parables are no longer those related to identifiable place, situation, and history" (Kazuo Ishiguro 67). Indeed, the location and the time are uncertain and examining them from the aspect of physical reality may not provide sufficient insight into the world of the novel.

*The Unconsoled* can hardly be summarized briefly or in a simple way. Ryder, a renowned English pianist spends three days in a fictive, presumably Central European town to give a recital of modern classical music. It soon turns out, however, that this is not his only task. The intellectual elite of the city expects him to turn the tide and reawaken cultural and community life. Moreover, various other people he meets, like Gustav, the hotel porter, Hoffmann, the hotel manager, ask him bizarre, ridiculous and insignificant favours. Hoffmann pleads with Ryder several times to look at his wife's collection of clippings about the pianist; Gustav asks him to mention the town's hotel porters in his speech before the recital to achieve a higher esteem for them. Ryder also promises him to speak to Gustav's adult daughter, Sophie, because the two of them have not talked since she was eight despite living under the same roof for a long time. Moreover, the reader has a first impression that Ryder is a stranger in the town, yet he runs into people who knew him from childhood or his youth. Sophie turns out to be his partner and Boris, her little boy his own (or adopted) son.

Vince Passaro pins down the main characteristics of the novel when he describes it as a “world of drifting reality and constant inappropriateness” (Wong, *Kazuo Ishiguro* 67). Additionally, the novel is full of spatial and temporal inconsistencies. When Ryder wants to practice a piano piece, he is led to a place which turns out to be a toilet cubicle. After driving hours to a restaurant, he can open a door and be back in his hotel in the middle of the town. He is confused most of the time, always late or even missing appointments; he seems to be entirely out of control of both the events of his visit and his own life. Eventually, he does not deliver any speech or perform at the long awaited recital, but nobody seems to notice that. After three chaotic days he sets off for his next destination, content and satisfied with himself, leaving the reader in utter perplexity.

The early reviewers were generally bewildered by *The Unconsoled*. First of all, as I already mentioned, apparently the novel takes an entirely new direction from the themes and topics Ishiguro had been previously known for. *A Pale View of Hills* and *An Artist of the Floating World* are both set in Japan, and though the setting of *The Remains of the Day* is England, a number of common elements can be discovered in these three novels: elderly first person narrators looking back at their lives, digging up memories, searching for reasons of acting this way or that. Even the different location was not an obstacle in comparing the novels. A number of reviewers pointed out the similarity between the extremely strong sense of duty in Stevens, the butler and that of the legendary Japanese samurais. Ishiguro seemed to have received his own category in the wide contemporary literary horizon, characterized by that elusive atmosphere of Japaneseness the West has long been captivated by and flirting with in its own way. Ishiguro expressed his frustration over this category in several interviews. However, after his first novels and awards, that was generally expected of him.

It is no surprise that on reading *The Unconsoled*, which was, seemingly, a far cry from his previous works, readers and critics were not only baffled, but also frustrated. The review titles clearly show these sentiments (Matthews and Groes). Some emphasized the feeling of being lost with the titles, “Ishiguro in the Underworld” (Wood, “Ishiguro in the Underworld”), “A New Annoying Hero” (Kakutani), “Tossed and Turned” (Kaveney), “Chaos Theory” (Shone). Others contrasted it with Ishiguro’s previous novels creating intellectual-sounding puns: “A Pale View Ills Without Remedy” (Cunningham), especially with the highly esteemed *The Remains of the Day*, usually in a negative way, “Bad Dreams: After *The Remains of the Day*, a Weird Non-Sequitur” (Gray), “Remains of the Novelist” (Simon), “The Butler Didn’t Do It, Again” (Iyer). A large number of critics

found the novel's dreamlike characteristics the most significant, giving review titles as "Leaving Behind Daydreams for Nightmares" (Allen), "Meandering in a Dreamscape" (Eder), "Anxious in Dreamland" (Menand, "Anxious in Dreamland"), "A Dreamscape of Music and Memory" (Janah). But among the negative voices there were also those, who almost overcame the initial doubts, for instance the novelist Anita Brookner and claimed that the novel is "almost certainly a masterpiece" (Brookner).

### **The many facets of *The Unconsoled***

Despite his being an eminent figure in contemporary literary life, only a relatively small amount of secondary literature is dedicated exclusively to Ishiguro's works, and especially to this particular novel. Yet scholars' take on *The Unconsoled* exhibits a surprisingly vast array of interpretation that I have not noticed with the other novels. Before turning to my research, I would like to introduce some other interpretations. The great variety is a clear indicator of the novel's evasive qualities and potential to signify different concepts.

A number of reviewers and interpreters of *The Unconsoled* rely on Freud in their approach to the novel, concentrating on various elements and utilizing Freud's different theories. Barry Lewis refers to Freud's concept of displacement and condensation as characteristics of dreamwork when interpreting the narrative. Not only single elements and events are displaced, but the entire setting of the novel "is far removed from what was assumed to be the social and historical fidelity of Ishiguro's first three novels" (*Kazuo Ishiguro* 108). Displacement and condensation go hand in hand when Ryder's past in England emerges in the Central European setting of the novel, for instance, when Ryder discovers a striking similarity between the hotel room and his childhood bedroom in his aunt's house "on the borders of England and Wales" (*The Unconsoled* 16). This incident is interesting in various ways, and it opens up new perspectives of interpretation as I will discuss it later.

In the spirit of Freud, Lewis also points out that a number of Ryder's latent anxieties, such as the fear of public exposure, can be traced in the text (*Kazuo Ishiguro* 107); the reception attended in a single dressing gown is an ample example of this. The wish-fulfilment feature of dreams is also very much present throughout the novel, the immense, almost religious respect around Ryder is one of the most explicit examples. However, as Tim Jarvis observes in connection with the "Freudian psycho-geometry" (164), the characters form a number of family triangles, such as Ryder-Sophie-Boris or Hoffman-Christine-Stephan, in fact so many trios that "a proliferation of configurations" suggests

the destruction of “the stable, original model of psychoanalysis” (Jarvis 164). But since other characters can be added to the trios, it is therefore more beneficial to examine groups of characters as I will do later.

Gary Adelman’s verdict of Ryder is simple and cruel, evoking the Freudian father complex:

Ryder, a concert pianist who lives in the past, haunted by memories of parental abuse. Fearful of failure, conditioned by his parents to believe himself a mediocrity, he is driven by the fantasy of winning their favour and deserving their love, so that he can escape the fate of becoming what he is already in essence, the spitting image of his hated father. (Adelman 167)

According to him, all of Ryder’s problems and motivation boil down to the single drive to please his parents, and everything around him reflects this family triangle and the power relations in it. I find this approach highly insightful, and the text is full of remarks and memory shreds pointing in this direction; nevertheless, it fails to include a number of other aspects in Ryder’s world.

An entirely different direction is taken by a number of critics and scholars who interpreted *The Unconsoled* with the background of our present world and its problems, both on the level of the individual and on a broader international level. For Cynthia Wong the main theme of the novel represents the “truth of contemporary existence: deep loneliness and isolation” (*Kazuo Ishiguro* 78). Ryder’s lack of any real connections, either to people or places, and his refusal to understand or even to seek to understand the world around him reflects the dislocation experienced by the late-twentieth-century individual. Wong utilizes Zygmunt Bauman’s definition of the postmodern nomads, who “wander between *unconnected* places” as “they move *through* identities” (166) when she observes that Ryder wanders through strange situations and places, and a great variety of identities is accumulated during the process (*Kazuo Ishiguro* 66). This is true in a sense, Ryder does wander between places; but their connection is established exactly by his wanderings. This way the nature of this connection, instead of being random, becomes an essential element of interpretation.

Katherine Stanton, on the other hand, argues that the various favours the citizens ask of Ryder are in fact not at all unimportant, because they alert us “to the pervasiveness of claims on all of us.” (12) The overwhelming flood of these various claims creates the pressure of decision and selection among our obligations. In her reading the novel makes

“a serious ethical point through [the] unimportance” of the tasks, thus reflects “a newly uncertain Europe” (Stanton 12). This concept “uncertainty” is echoed by Ishiguro in an interview when he muses over the challenges of the modern world:

It is not so much that we are holding down our darker urges; these days it’s almost hard to hold on to a centre, as there is always, tauntingly, some other person you could be, some other person you could be married to, some other career you might have, some other lifestyle you might have, if only you’d join the gym. We’re living in a world where the horizon is forever taunting us to be somebody else. . . . It’s almost like an antithetical (*sic*) problem: it’s hard to hold onto any sense of yourself, because we’re being told you can be anything you want, if you just put your mind to it. (Matthews 119–120)

Quoting Derrida, Stanton argues that the demands are significant since every single person is responsible for the other, and vice versa, creating an immense web of mutual responsibility. However, Derrida also proves that “the experience of ethics as impossible is an *everyday* one” (Stanton 13), thus pointing out Ryder’s daunting conflict in facing an overwhelming number of banal duties. Therefore the novel’s main point could be defined as “a distinction between ethics as an everyday experience of the impossible and ethics as actually possible” (Stanton 13).

On the other hand, Stanton supports Louis Menand’s idea claiming that Ishiguro’s novels cannot be characterized as psychologically realist, and the “flatness of his characters and the flimsiness of their internal lives are evident;” especially when their life reaches a climatic point, the novel describes their situation in “characteristically stilted prose” (Stanton 14). The disposal of the notion of psychological realism puts forward the idea of ethical experimentation and the dream concept. Following Wood’s interpretation, which distils the novel’s problematic to troubled relationship between parents and child, stating that “[a]t the center of this inconsolable place are the unappeasable parents, the parents for whom no performance is ever good enough” (Stanton 16). Stanton’s proposal takes the issue to a global or political level, when she suggests that the parent-child relationship and Ryder’s constant outsider existence parallels “Britain’s contested relationship with Europe” (17), mentioning Thatcher’s nationalism contrasted with Blair’s attitude as a man of Europe. This conclusion sounds tempting but also baffling since it contradicts most of Ishiguro’s statements when he asserted that current politics and geopolitical factors do not play any part in his choice of story or setting.

Stanton also insists that the unnamed city Ryder visits is actually the embodiment of Europe's division, past and present, pointing out evidences in the brick wall running across the street or the controversial Sattler monument. Additionally, the frequent dislocation refers to the disappearing borders of Europe as the result of a long historical process starting with the break-up of the Eastern Block, the reunification of East and West Germany and completed by the Maastricht Treaty. Jeannette Baxter follows a similar thread when she claims that the "unnamed urban setting of *The Unconsoled* is not one city but a palimpsest of soft and malleable European cities that resist geographical fixity" (135). In her interpretation the novel follows the traditions of the surrealist idea of the labyrinth as a metaphor for dislocation and 'lost-ness' typical for Central Europe. The novel's "aesthetic of nowhere" (Baxter 134) resonates with the loss of culture and identity in post-war Europe. Stanton goes as far as to classify *The Unconsoled* as a European Union novel, thus becoming part of a broader category she calls "cosmopolitan fiction" – a genre overlapping with Paul Jay's "global fiction" which "represents and responds to the various processes of globalization" (Stanton 23).

However intriguing this approach seems, it fails to consider a broader, more universal perspective. What Stanton defines as clues for the burdened European past are in fact so general that they cannot be interpreted plausibly as signs for Ishiguro's concern for the European Union. Moreover, Ishiguro stated in various interviews that the setting of his novels is of secondary importance. He commented slightly frustrated on the "Japanese" interpretation of his novels, "I sometimes feel that if I had written a book like Kafka's *Trial*, people would say to me, 'What a strange judicial system the Japanese have'" (Bryson 44).

For Wai-chew Sim a reason for the novel's very existence is Ishiguro's weariness with his being categorized "as a supplier of English and Japanese *authenticity*" ("Kazuo Ishiguro" 103). After the first two novels set in Japan and his third one, *The Remains of the Day* having been interpreted by some as a portrayal of the Japanese mentality, Sim suggests that the fourth novel's "aggressive push into the realm of Kafkaesque expressionism" ("Kazuo Ishiguro" 103) has a twofold purpose: the first is to get rid of any connection to real places and focus attention on universal human themes; and the second is to create a pastiche of the butler novel. The pastiche motivation is present in Ishiguro's following novel, *When We Were Orphans*, too, which is, among others, a highly ironic evocation of the grand detective stories. As for his first argument, the strong connection between Kafka's world and *The Unconsoled* was noted by reviewers and critics alike, yet

it can be misleading. Precisely this very obvious similarity enables interpretations like Stanton's and Baxter's, which examine the novel as an analogy for Central Europe or the European Union, and ignore more universal themes.

Other critics, who noted the apparent similarity with Kafka, also claim that the difference between Kafka's works and *The Unconsoled* runs deeper and is more profound. For Tim Jarvis *The Unconsoled* has more coherence than the Kafkaesque universe due to the fact that "Ryder's proliferation and doubling is still partly tied to the idea of the unitary coherent subject" (Jarvis 164). However chaotic and disturbing Ryder's multiplication seems, there is a rationale behind it. From the aspect of the main character and narrator, the novel is indeed structured and logical, provided one accepts its governing principle, which may be a dream concept. As Lewis points out, Amit Chaudhuri mentions another significant characteristic feature which sets apart the two works when he observes that *The Unconsoled* lacks the "allegorical social critique" (Kazuo Ishiguro 125) of Kafka's *Der Prozess*.

In conclusion, various approaches exist in reading *The Unconsoled*. The novel may be interpreted on an almost universal level when it offers an analogy for the ethical problems of the everyday individual and the international challenges facing today's Europe. The proposal is an interesting one, nevertheless, it only fits the concept of the European Union with great difficulties, it echoes a temporarily, geographically and also politically determined aspect. Even to date of this paper, only some years after the publication of Stanton's analysis, the European challenges have greatly changed in the wake of the global economic crisis, the financial turbulences of the Eurozone, mass migration and Britain's uncertain future outside the European Union. By the attempt of squeezing *The Unconsoled* into the "big" picture of daily politics, these interpretations limit themselves to their "here and now" which has already become yesterday's news, only a small spot and a moment in the rapidly changing world.

Last but not least the geopolitical and economic aspects are in contradiction with Ishiguro's declared goal of writing about universal themes "most people can relate to" (Kridler 153). Ishiguro was confused by notions struggling to attach his novel to certain events, claiming:

I was keen to write a book that was so strange that no one would mistake it for anything other than some expression of something I was thinking or feeling. Still, I believe this tendency to want to tie things down is quite strong, even with *The*

*Unconsoled*. I've read some reviews that say it's a thinly veiled allegory about the collapse of the communism. [laughs] . . . It was by and large a landscape of imagination. (Kridler 151)

It is, indeed, the landscape of imagination that holds the key to interpreting even the more baffling elements. Along these Barry Lewis suggests that the town Ryder wanders in has “the impossible geography of a print by M. C. Escher” (*Kazuo Ishiguro* 108). Indeed, the feeling of disorientation characterizes not only the narrator; the spatial and temporal fallacies continually confuse the reader as well. In examining memories I intend to follow the dream-approach, but alter and expand it. In doing so, I shall rely on M. C. Escher's illustrations and selected ideas of Douglas R. Hofstadter.

### **Strange Loops**

Escher's lithograph, *Dream* (see Appendix 2) can be used as a parallel to illustrate the problem of *The Unconsoled*. The bishop (or his tomb statue) and the mantis, two main elements of the picture are both part of a realistic world; however, their joint presence creates a bizarre universe. Even dimensions seem to collide, either the mantis is unnaturally large or its surroundings are abnormally small. The unreal atmosphere is further strengthened by the eerie background, the lonely Gothic vault without the edifice it belongs to, only the dark starry sky and the black nothingness can be seen after several steps of stone floor. As Locher points out, in the interpretation of the *Dream* “two different points of reality” coincide, therefore its “meaning is ambiguous: is the bishop dreaming of a praying mantis or is the entire picture the dream of its creator?” (9)

Ryder's wanderings are so confusing that several critics utilized the dream concept as interpretative device for the novel, as I mentioned previously. The question, however, might be reversed, similarly to Escher's *Dream*: does Ryder dream the events? Are they maybe somebody's nightmarish fragments? Or could other characters force the narrator's role of their own story on Ryder? Or perhaps a forgotten and declining city dreams of its redemption through music? Another radical option would be that the entire work is a piece of post-modern music put down in words, lacking melody or harmonies, constructed of disharmonies which are connected with a single deconstructed and elusive main theme that is Ryder. Music, especially modern music, is, indeed, an underlying *Leitmotiv* of the novel. These approaches are generally far from the established interpretations of this work, and I will not pursue them either. Nevertheless, they are useful in widening the horizon for the

understanding of *The Unconsoled* that is critical not only to interpret, but also to be able to read the novel.

Returning to the dream concept, I find it is too pragmatic, it imposes a certain route and a certain tradition of interpretation, that of dreams and Freud. But even if one accepts the idea of the dream, there are questions to be answered, for instance the one I have already asked, who is dreaming? When does this person dream? Assuming Ryder is the main character, when does he sleep? A critic pointed out that the sense of place becomes unreal whenever Ryder is on the verge of falling asleep. If he does, indeed, fall asleep at these points, when does he wake up? Does he wake up at all? Or does he dream within his own dream and loses himself in the embedded structures of visionary worlds?

Another area to examine is the content of these dreams. There are childhood memories, events and characters of some kind of present time, although it is unclear whose present it is, and some of these characters bear uncanny resemblance to the narrator so much, that their individuality can be, and will be questioned later on in this paper. Prospero concludes “We are such stuff / As dreams are made on, and our little life / Is rounded with a sleep” (Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, 4.1.156-58). Indeed, we ourselves, our history, our thoughts are the contents of our dreams. But if our life is nothing but a sleep, a dream, then why does Ryder’s adventure make the reader feel lost? The question of waking up is essential. If we can wake up to reality, the dream loses some of its significance and meaning. Interpreting fears and wishes through a dream is a double filtered reality, and as such, highly unreliable and unstable to serve as a basis of analysis of the person.

There is one general feature which is constant throughout the novel: the uneasy feeling of manipulated reality, similar to a dream that is created by the brain, the mind. I would therefore eliminate the intermittent dream device and suggest that what one sees is not Ryder’s dream, but his mind and its workings. This mind merges memories, hopes and worries, manipulates them and struggles with them. To grasp, describe and explain these processes has been and remains one of the greatest challenges of cognitive sciences. Hofstadter proposes the concept of loops and strange loops as described in the previous chapter. This concept can be utilized here as well, since these above mentioned actions of the mind can be interpreted as loops. The mind is capable of producing endless loops and sequences, no matter if in sleep or awake, therefore it is not important any more if Ryder is dreaming or daydreaming. *The Unconsoled* is loaded with various loops. In fact, these

loops ensure the reader's constant sense of disorientation. I shall support my claim by examining these loops.

On examining the loops, three main types can be distinguished: spatial, temporal and character loops. The importance of these loops is that they entirely disconnect Ryder's world from reality. Their very existence proves that however similar his world seems to be to what a reader may conceive as the real world, it is governed by different rules. And these rules, as I will attempt to prove it, are in fact the rules of the mind. The mind needs certain limits, which is the reason for the similarity, but it can bend and manipulate its own content, and incorporate the fears, memories, thoughts. By examining the loops and their nature I would like to provide evidence for my suggested reading of *The Unconsoled*, as a fascinatingly elaborated picture of a single anxiety-ridden and memory-burdened mind.

### **Loops of space**

The first group of loops which I intend to examine is related to physical space. This type is perhaps the most straightforward and easily recognizable. Moreover, bending rules of space, along with those of time, disturbs one's sense of reality instantly, so that a reader may find it difficult to overcome them. As Escher says, the mind needs certainties, "fixed points" ("Approaches to Infinity" 38) and the physical rules are among the most fundamental ones. If they are partially or completely lost or corrupted, one can easily lose essential points of reference.

Lewis (*Kazuo Ishiguro* 105) claims that the Freudian idea of displacement is acted out when Ryder turns up at various places which are distant in space and time. According to Freud, displacement occurs within a sequence of fantasised events when an idea, object or person is either substituted by something that has no direct connection with it; or its importance is transferred to a trivial element. In the first case the act is similar to an allusion, in the second the resulting effect is defamiliarisation, the element is turned into an off-centre one. However, Freud also states that "the dream-content no longer resembles the core of the dream-thoughts and that the dream gives no more than a distortion of the dream-wish which exists in the unconscious" (Freud in Stanton 16). Therefore interpreting any dream or dream-story is a highly complex task, no one-to-one correspondence exists between dream and reality or individuals.

Several critics pointed out the impossible geography of *The Unconsoled*. Indeed, Ryder seems to use shortcuts; he opens a door in the countryside inn, squeezes through a narrow corridor and steps into the back room of a cafe in the Old Town. These passages

function like wormholes in space, connecting various places distant from each other. Dark unlit corridors Ryder walks down for getting around are frequently recurring elements.

Moreover, when examining the loops of space, one finds that the occurrence or location of these loops is highly useful for Ryder. Whenever he needs to escape from somewhere, a reception or an embarrassing disagreement, he just turns and opens a backdoor which leads him exactly to the place where he wants to be. Similarly, distances grow when he needs them to. An ample example is the drive with Sophie and Boris through the countryside, following a red car. The reader's sense of space is disturbed in various ways. Sometimes Ryder goes through a door onto a corridor and walks out of it at a physically remote place. At other times a place transforms into a different one, changing its dimensions and characteristics before the very eyes of the reader. Finally there are those routes that come back to their own start. In the next sections I examine these various loops of space, how and when they occur and whether there is any particular pattern to them.

### **Passages**

He led the way to the corner of the lobby and through a pair of heavy swing doors. We entered a long gloomy corridor with dark wood panelling along both walls. There was so little natural light in the corridor that even at this point in the day a row of dim wall lamps have been left on. (*The Unconsoled* 22)

We had reached the far end of the atrium and we paused in the dark while Stephan unlocked the doors leading out to the corridor. I glanced back and the area where we had been dining looked hardly more than a small illuminated pool in the darkness . . . The corridor turned a corner and became very dark, so much so that as we hurried down it I had more than once to put my hand out for fear of veering into one or the other wall. Apart from at its very end, where some light was coming in from the glazed doors leading to the hotel lobby, there appeared to be no lighting whatsoever. (*The Unconsoled* 148)

Whenever Ryder enters a corridor, which is usually poorly lit, narrow and winding, he enters the backstage of physical space, and he moves between places which are distant from each other. In the first excerpt he walks in the same building, the hotel, but its dimensions are enlarged to a monumental size by the long walk through the corridor. The hotel and its dominant manager, Hoffmann play a significant role both in the town and in Ryder's world, as I will discuss it later.

The corridors function similarly to worm holes, also known in physics as the Einstein–Rosen bridge; wherever they open up, physical distance loses its meaning.

A hypothetical hole or tunnel in the fabric of spacetime. . . . spacetime has a very complicated, multiply connected structure in which ‘tunnels’ and ‘handles’ supply short cuts between apparently distant points. In principle, sufficiently large wormholes might allow one to travel to a distant part of the Universe much more quickly than light and, in some situations, to travel in time. (Ridpath)

When Ryder takes a shortcut through a corridor, he usually arrives back at the hotel. Hotels are practically Ryder’s home, as he spends most of his time there when travelling from country to country, from city to city. Since hotel rooms are not very different from each other, the illusion of familiarity can be created without much difficulty. This time, however, the hotel becomes something of a centre. Strangely enough, all roads lead to Hoffmann’s headquarters. If one considers the role the manager takes in the town’s life, inexhaustibly organizing and manipulating events as well as people, his hands reach everywhere and to everybody, just as the hotel’s corridors seem to weave a web not only in the town but also through its surroundings.

Corridors are useful, “positive” elements that take Ryder wherever he wants to be. Its counterpart, the sinister connection is the cupboard, which seems to hold unexpected and unpleasant surprises. These enclosures propel out of control, as if the mind were no longer able or willing to bend space. The most prominent example is when Ryder opens a door at a reception which turns out to be a door to a storage room, and all its contents tumble out immediately.

I drifted towards the door, and giving one of the uniformed men a curt nod, as though to say: ‘There’s no need to stir, I know what I’m doing,’ pulled open. Whereupon, to my horror, *the very thing I had most feared occurred*: I had opened a broom cupboard and, at that, one which had been filled beyond its capacity. Several household mops came tumbling out and fell with a clatter onto the marble floor, scattering a dark fluffy substance in all directions. Glancing into the cupboard, I saw an untidy heap of buckets, oily rags and aerosol cans. (*The Unconsoled* 278) (emphasis added)

Ryder’s wanderings are burdened with cupboards, small and uncomfortable places, confined and usually leading to embarrassing or impossible situations. One cannot escape

the allusions to Lewis Carroll's rabbit hole in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. Apart from this, Barry Lewis lists other similarities between *Alice* and *The Unconsoled*; for instance, the "maniacal dialogues" (Kazuo Ishiguro 124) between Ryder and the townspeople requesting various favours bear a striking resemblance to the conversations Alice has with the creatures of Wonderland. However, as critics pointed out, the two books' similarity is only superficial, since Ryder lacks any sort of agency in his own story; in contrast, Alice plays an active role in her adventures where the rabbit hole takes her. Gray notes that Ryder is "totally passive" and "accepts his Wonderland blithely" (Lewis, Kazuo Ishiguro 124). But does he just float passively, accepting wherever others drag him or send him? Despite his being lost most of the time, Ryder somehow manages to turn up where he wants to be; moreover, he also manages to find places which meet his needs, such as the opening above the concert hall providing an excellent spot for observation without being noticed by the audience. If he is just a passive drifter, he definitely has a useful amount of fool's luck. But is this the case?

Escher's lithograph *Belvedere* (see Appendix 2) is an excellent illustration of the problem. The ladder connecting the two levels of the building is straight, yet its foot is inside the building and the top is leaning against the outer side of the second floor. The ladder is similar to the corridors Ryder walks between remote places. I have already suggested that the corridors function like wormholes which provide access to various locations. But is it the corridor which does the trick? Returning to Escher's *Belvedere*, the ladder seems just ordinary, whereas, at a closer look, the building is the one rather extraordinary. Ernst Bruno observes that only some of the structures adhere to the physical laws.

[T]he extreme right and the extreme left pillars behave normally . . . The other six keep on joining front side to rear side, and so must somehow or other pass diagonally through the space in the middle; and this merchant, who has already laid his right hand against the corner pillar, would quickly discover if he were to place his left hand on the next pillar along. (91)

In fact, it is the building that plays with the ladder in a very subtle way. Similarly, during Ryder's corridor walks the world around the corridor, or rather at the corridor's end changes shape, strangely enough, according to Ryder's needs. Therefore it can be concluded that it is Ryder who has the active role. He may be burdened by others'

requests, but he knows very well where he wants to end up, or his mind knows it and shapes this world accordingly.

## Memories

Loops of space do not only stretch through space, but they may also encompass time when memory fragments of a place visited interfere with Ryder's perception of his current location. Lewis refers to an incident as displacement when Ryder identifies a hotel room as his own childhood room in England.

The room I was now in, I realised, was the very room that had served as my bedroom during the two years my parents and I had lived at my aunt's house on the borders of England and Wales. I looked again around the room, then, lowering myself back down, stared once more at the ceiling. It had been recently re-plastered and re-painted, its dimensions had been enlarged, the cornices had been removed, the decorations around the light fitting had been entirely altered. But it was unmistakably the same ceiling I had so often stared up at from my narrow creaking bed of those days. (*The Unconsoled* 16)

The hotel room doubles as Ryder's old bedroom, only it has nothing in common with that one. Apart from the physical distance between this Central European town where he is now and England, the features of the room are completely different, it is larger and in better condition (plastered and painted), probably simpler as there are no cornices and it is decorated in a different style. In other words, the similarity exists only for Ryder. I would not call it displacement, it is rather a loop which was formed utilizing a memory about a place in his childhood. Wong highlights the incident as an example of "how Ishiguro mixes psychology with the character's sense of material reality to produce a compelling scene in which past and present merge." (*Kazuo Ishiguro* 72)

Another striking example of the memory space loop is the old car Ryder finds outside the gallery where he attends a reception. When he manages to squeeze himself into the shabby old vehicle, a transformation begins, similarly to the hotel room, and the object becomes a tool, a trigger for old memories rushing at him, the parents' quarrels and the child's desperate attempt to ignore the problems.

In order to demonstrate the process of this and similar recalls, I would again turn to Escher. Based on a conversation about the Riemann surfaces<sup>10</sup>, Escher made a sketch (see Appendix 2) that illustrates a mathematical concept. In a letter to Professor Sparenberg, who brought the issue to his attention, Escher describes the drawing as follows (Ernst 83).

For convenience' sake, I call your "two spaces" Pr. (for the Present) and Pa. (for the Past) . . . Pr. may be regarded not only as a gap in Pa. but also as a disk masking a part of Pa. Thus Pr. is both in front of Pa. and also behind it; in other words they each exist as separate spatial projections in exactly the same area of drawing.

Past and present become spatial representations, overlapping each other as separate entities. But then Escher continues and suggests a further developed realization to this concept, where the two spheres, past and present, are even more closely intertwined and thus interacting with each other.

In the center two bulges lie next to each other; on the left is Pa., ringed around by Pr., and on the right Pr., ringed around by Pa.

When I think of the flow of time I realize that it moves from the past, via the present, to the future. Leaving the future out of our consideration (for it is unknown and so cannot be depicted) there is a stream moving from Pa. to Pr.

Escher's sketch illustrates the structure of Ryder's memory space loops where the two time spheres overlap. In his mind Ryder merges the two distant places and different periods in his life and brings them together. In fact, the object in his present, in adult life (mind) has one singular reason of existence, to trigger the recall of memories and to organize them. These memories may involve the object itself (the room, the car); but more often they tell about Ryder's difficult childhood and the parents' bad relationship. Moreover, in his memories the object is usually a hiding place for the little boy, something that helps him forcefully avert his attention and thoughts from the parents' quarrelling or his father's arrogance. The situation has not changed significantly, for the adult Ryder apparently concentrates only on the object; the problems are mentioned as passing remarks. This superficial tone, however, is a telling feature how he still attempts to suppress the unsettling memories which arise nevertheless. This is a method Ishiguro's narrators so

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<sup>10</sup> A Riemann surface is a surface-like configuration that covers the complex plane with several, and in general infinitely many, "sheets." These sheets can have very complicated structures and interconnections (Knopp 1996, pp. 98-99). Riemann surfaces are one way of representing multiple-valued functions; another is branch cuts. (Weisstein)

readily use: describing trifles that gradually turn out to be the peripheries of traumatic experiences, as discussed in the previous chapter.

### **Circular tracks**

The last type of spatial loops is the closest to the literary meaning of the word, the circular track which returns to the starting point. Lewis points out that “*The Unconsoled* is full of such excursions that collapse back in on themselves” (Kazuo Ishiguro 108). It can be a small circle, a casual stroll with the Countess at the reception, or a larger one, a tram ride where the tram has no terminal station, but travels around the city. These circular routes serve multiple purposes. They enable Ryder to squeeze more into his day than physically possible, and to spend time actually outside of physical time, to think, to assess damages. When Ryder cannot find the way to his next appointment, the gallery, he is advised to follow a red car as the simplest way to get there. Despite the fact that they linger before departure and take a lengthy break at a service station, the red car never disappears. Again, one cannot miss the allusion to *Alice* where the little girl follows a white rabbit and ends up in Wonderland.

Moreover, literally, a loop is created at the end of the story when Ryder sits down exhausted in the tram and prepares for breakfast. Even though he has not accomplished anything, he did not deliver the piano recital or the speech, and Sophie left him taking Boris with her, he concludes that

[t]hings had not, after all, gone so badly. Whatever disappointments this city had brought, there was no doubting that my presence had been greatly appreciated—just as it had been everywhere else I had ever gone. (*The Unconsoled* 534)

With regard to the balance of the present visit, one cannot escape the suspicion concerning his other visits, in fact, his accomplishments and entire reputation. His visit could be deemed as a complete catastrophe by the reader. Ryder arrived late and unprepared (not having even his itinerary), and started off his stay by giving a highly controversial interview with photographs of him posing in front of some monument of dubious reputation. His private life constantly interfered with his professional engagements. He invariably failed at fulfilling requests small and big ones alike. Finally, the main purpose of his visit, the piano recital never happened. This could break someone’s career or at least seriously damage their reputation. Nevertheless, Ryder settles down “secure in the knowledge that [he] could look forward to Helsinki with pride and confidence.” (*The*

*Unconsoled* 535) The story might start again: arriving at an unknown city, rushing or being rushed through various appointments and leaving within a few days—this is what Ryder’s life consists of, an eternal cycle of short visits.

As described in this section, *The Unconsoled* displays a large variety of spatial loops, which seem to be generated and organized by Ryder’s mind, his needs and anxieties. In this respect, both physical location and distance lose their meaning. In some cases the place and the journey serve merely as a background to an encounter, to a thread of thoughts and recollections, an escape or the outburst of suppressed anger. In other cases, however, the places and objects trigger memories and become substitutes for a safe haven, a family he has never had. But the mind does not stop here, in his private universe Ryder does not only use space for his own ends and needs, but he is also in control of time, to which I shall turn my attention in the next part.

### **Loops in time**

The second type of loops is temporal. These loops are like bulges in Ryder’s timeline along the linear time of everybody else, enabling him to squeeze much more into his time than possible, for instance, a lengthy conversation in a short elevator ride. This also questions the perception of time. Does it have a permanent unit? Or is it completely subjective? Again, as with the spatial loops, what implications does it have?

Temporal loops often appear alongside spatial loops; and Ryder is not able or willing to entirely dispose of the rules of this dimension either. In fact, time is a central, rather burdensome and frustrating element in his life. Every now and then he feels the urgency to do something to use his time well, or he experiences enormous anxiety that he has wasted his time and missed something important. The constant pressure of time is perhaps the only issue he really fears. It seems he can barely catch up with his schedule moreover, to do so, he is obliged to miss appointments and keep others waiting for longer periods of time. On the other hand, time, similarly to space, serves him and his needs in a covert way. In this part I shall look at the loops of time and their nature to show that Ryder is, indeed, very much in control of this dimension, too.

Despite fussing about the lack of time and constantly missing meetings, Ryder can find time for the most extraordinary tasks. In order to do so, he moves around in time similarly to space: while time slows down for him to accomplish lengthy visits to the countryside or have short naps in hidden rooms, for others, usually waiting for him somewhere, time accelerates considerably. On the linear thread of “real” time these loops

are created when Ryder splits away from it and sets off to fulfil his paternal or professional duties, then his time perception is reunited with that of the others, and he continues along it, only to make the next digression even more bewildering.

The earliest example for a temporal loop is the elevator ride when Ryder arrives at the hotel, and talks to Gustav, the hotel porter and Miss Stanton, who is apparently in charge of his schedule. The conversation takes up long pages in the book, but they arrive at the right floor only when finishing the exchange. But there are numerous other incidents when Ryder seems pressed for time; nevertheless, he always manages to carry out various tasks. Ishiguro provides an answer to the technical implications of the condensed time.

Often Ryder looks a bit odd because he promises a kid something and then turns around and forgets. Over the course of a lifetime, we do this the whole time. You promise friends that you'll always be friends, or spouses that you'll always be together; or that you're going to live a certain way, and then you meet the same person five or six years later and they're doing something completely different. You don't think that they are completely mad or amnesiac or something, but just that that's the way life is because five or six years have passed. It's only when you look at it from a certain perspective and compress it into a few days that it starts to look like very strange behaviour. (Kridler 153)

Compressing and condensing time this way returns in Ishiguro's oeuvre later, in *Never Let Me Go* and the short life span of its characters, as I will discuss in the next chapter.

### **Time travel**

Ryder's ability to bend time at his will enables him to undertake something like time travel. As already mentioned in the previous section, the flow of memories evoking troubled moments of his childhood is often triggered by an object or place that he perceives as similar to its past counterpart. At that point his time travel begins, he is back in the same situation, the same anxieties he has experienced when young and vulnerable to the parents' bad relationship. The process can be again illustrated with Escher's sketch, when past and present merge. During these memory sessions time stands still for the others, and Ryder struggles yet again to crack some hidden problem in his childhood. But this is hopeless. Ryder has become an adult but has not achieved maturity. For him everything that matters remained the same; he is the same person, emotionally dependent on his parents' approval. He still believes that the relationship between them can be

mended by a brilliant performance he is waiting to accomplish. Ryder has not learnt any lessons in life, and he is still not able to cope with his troubled childhood.

The incident with the red car illustrates the process well. Ryder, on the way to a reception, finds an old and abandoned car similar to his parents' vehicle. In fact, Ryder is convinced that he is looking at the same car, "I knew I was looking at the remains of the old family car my father had driven for many years" (*The Unconsoled* 261). Memories come rushing at him, and using a moment of inattentiveness on Sophie's part, he decides to clamber inside the car just as a curious or fearful child would do, and dive into his childhood.

There was just enough of a gap to enable me to squeeze in, and after a small struggle I managed to clamber onto the seat.

Once inside, it became clear that one end of the seat had fallen through the floor of the car, and I found myself unnaturally low. Through the window nearest my head I could see blades of grass and a pink evening sky. Re-adjusting myself I tugged at the door until it was almost shut again—something obstructed it from closing completely—and, after a few moments, found myself in a reasonably comfortable position.

Before long, a deep restfulness started to settle over me and I allowed my eyes to close for a moment. As I did so, I found a memory coming back of one of the happier family expeditions undertaken in the vehicle, a time we had driven all over the local countryside in search of a second-hand bicycle for me. (*The Unconsoled* 263)

When inside the car, he feels calm, but only for a short time. Contrary to the first thought, the recollection that comes to him is probably among the more shattering ones. During a visit to an old lady, he realises the discrepancy between others' perception of them as a happy family and the actual truth. The realization comes suddenly: "it had dawned on me that to this old woman my parents and I represented an ideal of family happiness" (*The Unconsoled* 264). This is already a step towards facing the actual facts, but it seems that Ryder never travelled that route entirely.

### **Character loops**

The last and most complex phenomenon is the character loop. Ryder meets various people and sometimes he realizes only later that a person is a family member or that he was on

good terms with that person back in his youth in England. Strangely and embarrassingly enough some new acquaintances share intimate details about their private life. The unexpected encounters and even more unexpected recognitions at least partially unveil his troubled connections with others. Moreover, as Steiner observes, “Ryder’s disconnection from people and places is ‘unendurable to reason’” (Wong, *Kazuo Ishiguro* 67). Why does the reader’s sense of reality rebel against a multitude of characters? Additionally, the same feeling of unease and disorientation seizes the reader as in Ryder’s physical world. We look for a secure and fixed point in vain; Ryder can *override* rules of space and time effortlessly. Ishiguro provides a hint that helps the reader understand the dynamics of encounters when he stated in various interviews:

[T]his is a biography of a person, but instead of using memory and flashback, you have him wandering about in this dream world where he bumps into earlier, or later, versions of himself . . . projections of how he fears he might end up. (Jaggi, “Kazuo Ishiguro with Maya Jaggi” 114)

I wanted to have someone just turn up in some landscape where he would meet people who are not literally parts of himself but are echoes of his past, harbingers of his future and projections of his fears about what he might become. (Steinberg in Sim, *Globalization and Dislocation in the Novels of Kazuo Ishiguro* 65)

Therefore it is worth examining the characters not as individuals, but their possible connection to Ryder, to his past and his anxieties. In what respect could they be “echoes”, “harbingers” and “projections”? Based on Kafka’s universe, Tim Jarvis suggests that the key terms are doubles and trios since “the individual is either trapped in the triangular father/mother/child relationship of the family or ‘doubled’ by discourse, as subject of both enunciation and statement” (164). However, in *The Unconsoled* the character groups are larger, consisting of more child figures, several father avatars and a multitude of dysfunctional relationships. The characters from the past and possible future walk and talk side by side, Ryder’s past can co-exist with his fears in his mind. In this sense the characters can be examined and grouped in relation to Ryder.

### **The Ryder doubles**

Gary Adelman plainly states that in “[e]very encounter Ryder is encountering ego projections of himself” (168). I would adjust this claim by adding that not only some random ego projections, but some of the encounters represent certain periods and stages in

Ryder's life. Similarly to the memory space loops, his mind brings together characters of his past, reviving memories, characters of an alternative and dreaded present, and of a similarly threatening future. Boris is like the little Ryder, he, too, has to endure the lows of the parents' complicated relationship, the fact that both mother and (step)father toss him around, sometimes lovingly embracing and caring for him, and at other times handling him as a nuisance, punishing him emotionally for no actual reason. Boris could come to the same conclusion the child Ryder has arrived at; that he does not want a family or children.

The ambiguous relationship between parent and child (also parent and his/her partner) can be illustrated with the manual Boris receives as a gift. Ryder picks up the book at the strange cinema visit casually, but the act leaves Sophie flooded with emotions for Ryder because of his attention towards the boy. Boris keeps it as a token of the unity of the family, stating at various points how useful the manual is since it "shows you everything" (*The Unconsoled* 287, 334, 335, 470, 471), first with some forced excitement and later on with more and more desperation and panic. Cynthia Wong rightly points out that the only thing Boris would really need but it does not show is how to mend a broken family (*Kazuo Ishiguro* 76). At this point, however, Boris is perhaps not entirely the embodiment of a memory, but also wishful thinking. Ryder once recalls an event telling the young Fiona that he liked being lonely, without a family, and that he had started "training sessions" (*The Unconsoled* 171) to be able to endure loneliness. Boris, on the other hand, does not accept this fate passively, he struggles constantly for attention. At the end of Ryder's visit he glimpses Sophie and Boris embracing each other. In the end Boris seems to get his mother's undivided attention and love, something that Ryder has never experienced.

There was at that moment something so private about their comforting of each other that it seemed impossible even for me to intrude. And as I went on gazing at them, I began to feel, for all their obvious distress, a strange sense of envy. I moved a little closer until I could almost feel the very texture of their embrace. (*The Unconsoled* 531)

The feeling of envy is a telling sign that despite his training to become independent of everyone and not wanting to belong to anyone, he still misses close contact and intimacy to another human being. Moreover, it can be also a hint of Ryder's deep anxiety that he cannot cast aside. Had he acted differently and tried to do something about the situation with his parents, he might not have been that abandoned as a child. Later on he attempts to

regain the parents' attention and love, as Stephan Hoffman does. Similarly to the adult Ryder, Stephan already or rather still believes that the path to his parents' heart and to a normal family is his outstanding musical achievement. Ryder still acts like younger children do when they blame themselves for the parents' deteriorating relationship. Stephan's role is to tell the son's version of the sad story of losing the parents' love for their only child at an age when he can observe and interpret events in a relationship. Wong observes that the "strategy of remembering one's own painful past in the context of another person's" (*Kazuo Ishiguro* 74) is skilfully used in Ishiguro's previous novels as well.

Lewis adds Hoffmann, the hotel manager to the set and calls them character displacements (*Kazuo Ishiguro* 111). He argues that Hoffmann is the 'would be' musician, he suffers greatly of lacking any musical talent but admires music and people within the circle of the gifted. On the other hand, he is not a musician, his path and character is not similar to any other Ryder-alternatives. Moreover, his relationship with Ryder and the other characters is different, therefore I agree with Adelman in calling the hotel manager an alternative father figure, parallel to Ryder senior, who dominated the childhood of the narrator, and his unfulfilled expectations still haunt the son. In this respect Ryder is rather in pair with Boris. But Hoffman's character is far more complex in Ryder's mind. As I have already mentioned earlier, Hoffman and his hotel have an uncanny significance in the town's geography and society. When Ryder escapes an uncomfortable situation through a corridor, he usually arrives at the hotel. Similarly, Hoffman knows everyone; his grasp reaches well beyond the walls of his hotel. He is part of the closest circle of the town's elite, the main organizer of cultural events, inexhaustible and inevitable. Adelman goes as far as to claim that "Hoffman is the true director of this theatrical company of Ryder's psyche" (173). Moreover, one cannot escape the implications of his name, E. T. A. Hofmann and his surreal tales.

### **Memory characters**

Every now and again Ryder stumbles upon characters from his childhood or youth, strange as it may seem, given the fact that he grew up in England, and the setting is now somewhere in Central Europe. It is even stranger that neither he, nor the other person shows any surprise that their paths cross so far away from what they call home. Ryder's accidental encounter with Geoffrey Saunders could not be more casual.

‘Hello old chap,’ he said. ‘Thought it was you, rotten evening it’s turned out to be.’

‘Yes, miserable,’ I said. ‘And earlier it was so pleasant.’ (*The Unconsoled* 45)

Apparently they have not seen each other since their schooldays, but their first sentence is about the weather, which makes them, indeed, the archetypes of Englishness. Another figure from Ryder’s school years is Jonathan Parkhurst, who, similarly to Saunders, shows no surprise at seeing Ryder. Whereas Saunders seems a harmless figure, rather a person who turned out to be a failure, in contrast to Ryder, Parkhurst is an uneasy, even hurtful memory. It turns out that Parkhurst is still in touch with other schoolmates who regularly meet and ridicule Ryder.

The question arises why Ryder meets these characters, why does his mind pick them from the past. In the case of Saunders the answer seems obvious, he stands for old fears and hurt feelings from Ryder’s schooldays. Being there and witnessing Ryder’s glorious arrival in the city as a saviour sets the balance right, Ryder proves that he was able to reach his goals and outperform expectations by becoming a famous pianist. However, the figure of Parkhurst seems too oblivious to this, and he only repeats the vicious gossips told about Ryder.

### **Enactments of the past or an alternative present**

Ryder does the same to Boris as what happened to him as a child. Adelman suggests that both Ryder and Boris were born of extramarital relationships and the fathers (Ryder *père* and Ryder, respectively) punish their partner and the child for that. But Gustav and his relationship to his daughter, Sophie echoes the burdens of Ryder’s childhood, too. Gustav’s punishment of stopping talking to his daughter is whimsically used by Ryder against Boris on several occasions. In Gustav’s case the outcome of the punishment is a lifelong silence between him and Sophie. Adelman points out that it is a rare hopeful sign that Gustav admires his grandson, and Sophie seems to be able to give love and protection to her only son. Additionally, Boris finds a true ally in Gustav, somebody he can look up to, a person whom the young Ryder only could dream of.

When Ryder sees Sophie and Boris embracing each other they become a representation of the kind of human connection and emotional closeness he has never experienced. In this respect Boris becomes a child he wanted to be, or rather one who receives true love and protection against a cruel father. This is something the young Ryder was not given, the mother chose someone else over her child, it could have been either her

husband or another man. When Ryder sees Sophie and Boris embrace, he knows what he is not part of, but, as several critics suggest, he never really wants to be part of, he “is spiteful and even vicious in protecting his remoteness” (Adelman 170). The young Ryder identified a crucial weakness in his emotional dependence on the parental protection, and decided to begin his training in emotional detachment early, a mission that proves to be unsuccessful in a way since he still longs to have his parents’ appreciation.

### **Shadow characters**

Some of the characters I call shadow characters because the only reason for their presence (or existence) is to say something Ryder needs, either to console him and confirm his reputation as a world-famous pianist, or to insult him in a rather cruel way. The unconsolated Ryder is badly in need of some comfort and encouragement that everything is fine, all will be well. These consolations are like lullabies to an anxious child, the speaker goes into details as to the resolution of a difficult situation or a problem which has been nagging him for long. When children experience some distress, they need somebody to reassure and comfort them. If no such person is available, they perform this act for themselves, and this is exactly what happens with Ryder. His mind is highly resourceful in creating substitutes for consolation, perhaps by the mother or a partner. A typical example of the “lullaby” is when Ryder and Boris travel by bus to the old apartment, and a stranger, who is not even a shadow character, only a soothing voice whispering from behind their seats about the desired outcome of their quest.

[A] trip of this kind is almost bound to cause a little worry. It’s perfectly natural. But really, if I may say so, I think you have every reason to be optimistic. . . . I feel sure you’ll find Number Nine. Of course, you’re worried just now, so many things could have gone wrong, you’re thinking. That’s only natural. But from what you’ve just told me, I feel sure it’ll turn out well. (*The Unconsolated* 208)

The stranger tells a fantasy of their arrival at the old apartment, the new inhabitants, their friendly welcome and of course the joyful reunion of Boris and his beloved Number Nine, where Ryder becomes the hero of the day. The entire situation is impossible, but this is exactly the type of consolation that Ryder wants to hear.

But not only shadow characters sing their lullabies; Sophie, Gustav, and others help him in need, and need arises often. Ryder becomes more and more agitated through the

course of events, at one point he even breaks down in tears. In that case Miss Stratmann comforts him by telling him the dreamy story of his parents' visit in the town some years earlier. Even though Ryder relatively often receives consolations, he is the one who cannot be consoled truly and for long. He always creates the conditions for distress, frustration and dissatisfaction. Despite the long triads to Sophie and Boris about longing to settle down and have a normal life, he enjoys being constantly on the road. At one point he recalls telling Fiona that he never wants to have a family, and the reader realizes that the child's desperate threats turned out to be real, the adult Ryder indeed feels content and safe travelling alone around the world.

Beside consolation, Ryder also needs confirmation. The personnel of the hotel, the Hoffmann family, various citizens, the gathering of porters calling him "the world's finest living pianist" (*The Unconsoled* 11) or "a famous and renowned person" (*The Unconsoled* 394) and ensuring him that "everyone you'll meet has the utmost respect for you and all you stand for" (*The Unconsoled* 187) strengthen his self-confidence, which is not strong at all. His constant worry about the parents, the anxieties and the rude shadow characters are all telling signs that he is very much in need of confirmation.

Various critics pointed out that parental dissatisfaction is at the core of Ryder's everyday struggle. Nevertheless, under all the tricks to find consolation there is always doubt and the masochist notion to hurt and abuse himself. Other groups of shadow characters fulfil this need. The journalist and the photographer, Fiona's friends, guests at the reception – they all speak ill of Ryder in his presence as if he were not there, plot against him and tell the most monstrous opinions of him. The most striking example may be the short trip with the journalist, when they discuss how to trick Ryder without his hearing or realizing it.

'I said, we seem to have got the shit convinced. I think he's going to go along with it.'

'Well,' the journalist shouted back, 'he's co-operated so far, but you can never take these types for granted. So keep up the flattery. He's come this far up and he seems quite happy about it. But then I don't think the fool even knows the significance of the building. (*The Unconsoled* 180)

Their utterances unveil another Ryder, different from the one described in superlatives by most of the citizens. This Ryder is utterly vain and stupid, and does not realize that he is

tricked into a situation that later turns out to be a rather sensitive issue. These remarks express his fear of failure and the anxiety of being incompetent.

### **A side remark**

Before my closing remarks I would like to take a short trip away from the narrative. Well after publishing *The Unconsoled* Ishiguro cooperated with Anglo-American singer Stacey Kent on her album *Breakfast on the Morning Tram*, in 2007. He has been a long-time admirer of Kent's music. In Ishiguro's words:

In many ways, her approach as a singer is similar to my approach as a writer: when I hear her sing I feel she captures a sense of internality. It's the thing that draws me to her as a novelist, as I'm used to working in the first person; listening to what someone is thinking to themselves, capturing the faltering hesitancy and little rushes of enthusiasm, and many great singers don't do that. (Jacques)

He wrote the lyrics of four songs for Kent, "The Ice Hotel", "I Wish I Could Go Travelling Again", "Breakfast on the Morning Tram" and "So Romantic"; notably all feature characters travelling somewhere. It is the song which gave the album's title, "Breakfast on the Morning Tram" (see Appendix 1) that has direct connection to *The Unconsoled*. The lyrics could be the ending credits for the novel, when Ryder boards the circular running tram and finds an unexpected feast. This is the moment when he settles down and decides that his stay in the city was eventually a success; and the lyrics reflect the mellow mood of contentedness.

The song is exactly the kind of lullaby Ryder would like to hear. Acknowledging minor mistakes ("things didn't quite meet expectations") but on a hopeful tone ("soon you'll forget your heartache") since the good atmosphere, friendly people and delicious food make you forget all troubles.

### **Conclusion**

Finally I shall turn again to one of Escher's lithographs to illustrate the structure of *The Unconsoled*. The print *Relativity* (see Appendix 2) creates a sense of disturbing insecurity, a perplexed search for fixed points or planes upon which the mind can build an acceptable system to create the necessary sense of order. This is similar to Ishiguro's novel, where the reader continuously looks for reference points. Hofstadter points to the staircases as

“islands of certainty” which are essential for our mind, since “we base our interpretation of the overall picture” (*Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid* 97) on them.

The paradox becomes obvious only when observing the system on a higher level. If Ryder’s unconsolated wanderings and their loose structure are examined, one could find the same paradox. Not only are some elements misplaced, but the entire system is more or less a chain of spatial, temporal and mental paradoxes. It is, therefore, adequate to suggest the world of a dream as a key to understanding and interpreting the novel, because dreams do not need to adhere to the rules of our physical world. However, establishing this frame around the work somewhat limits the possibilities of interpretation. If there is a dream, there need to be waking moments, too. I expand this frame by proposing that what we see is in fact the depiction of a single mind and its workings. In this respect, it becomes unimportant if this mind dreams, daydreams or hallucinates. The characters, though seemingly numerous and different, are not individuals but composites of “real” images, memories fears and possibilities. Hence, not only certain events in the story are strange loops but the entire work describes a strange loop: a human mind.

Naturally this human mind also makes mistakes when remembering; there is one point where it can be pinpointed without doubt. On his first evening, Ryder visits the cinema showing one of his favourite movies, *2001: Space Odyssey* (Kubrick) and he is watching “Clint Eastwood and Yul Brynner on board the spaceship” (*The Unconsolated* 94). Since these two actors do not appear in Stanley Kubrick’s movie, it is clear that Ryder does not remember the characters correctly.<sup>11</sup>

*The Unconsolated* is so far Ishiguro’s most complex novel and most complicated structure. With the suggested framework (and giving up some expectations) it becomes possible to navigate through the narrative. Interpreting the fragments with certain detachment provides an insight into the apparently irrational workings and processes of the mind. Why is a mantis resting on the bishop’s chest in Escher’s *Dream*? Why is Ryder meeting his ghosts and travelling restlessly? We will never know for certain, no objective logical explanation exists or will exist. But if we regard them as depictions of fragments connected through some subjective logic, the representation becomes acceptable.

But then again, Escher, Hofstadter and many others have concluded that the mind needs fixed points, anchors, it needs to build a system and create some sense of order. Supposing *The Unconsolated* is not (almost certainly) a masterpiece, but, as others said, a

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<sup>11</sup> It was an intentional mistake by Ishiguro, as he told in an interview, “It’s the one place in the book you can actually point to where there is a difference between the book and reality in real life” (Kridler 127)

monstrosity, a constant attack against sensibility; this mind, interpreting Ishiguro's novel in a dissertation paper, managed to stretch as far as to find some regularities and build a structure; standing as a proof for both the flexibility and the diligent rigidity of the human mind.

## CHAPTER 4

### SHAPING THE PAST

*I am the thought you are now  
thinking.*

(Hofstadter, *Metamagical Themas*)

*The Unconsoled* marked a significant turning point in Ishiguro's work as discussed in the previous chapter. Following the initial turmoil, the voices praising the novel's merits became stronger and more distinct. Nevertheless, a wide range of the reading public eagerly awaited the next novel, which was apparently closer to reality. His next work, *When We Were Orphans*, published in 2000, was well-received both by readers and reviewers. After the experiments of *The Unconsoled*, Ishiguro turned to other forms and genres, but always maintaining his focus on memory. Moreover, "there are significant formal, generic, and stylistic innovations in *When We Were Orphans* that embody a further stage in the evolution of this variegated and powerful *oeuvre*" (Machinal 80). The subsequent novel, *Never Let Me Go* followed in 2005, taking yet another direction with its dystopian theme.

As in the previous chapters, first I look at the formal aspects of the works. I find this an important point since the narratives' form has been so far in conflict with the content. The flow of memories was often in stark contrast with the overly disciplined entries of the narrators. Moreover, sometimes certain deductions could be made as to the narrators' interest in appearances (mainly Ono and Stevens). Since both *When We Were Orphans* and *Never Let Me Go* exhibit very obvious traits of various genres, a relatively novel element in Ishiguro's writing, I examine these characteristics whether and to what effect they participate in the narrators' memory game.

I will revisit the *strange loop* concept, the narrative returning to certain events and adding more details, which reaches its peak in *Never Let Me Go*. Then I attempt to take it a step further utilizing Hofstadter's ideas and Escher's lithographs. The structure of memories in the two novels becomes even more elaborate, the time layers overlap each other creating intricate patterns that are difficult to follow, but a detailed analysis, based

again on Genette's terminology, can uncover the workings of the memory flow, not bound to temporal order, but rather following an "emotional logic" (Paine 143).

Memory has a strong underlying connection with images. In fact, visual memory can exert strong influence on the interpretation of events. Both novels depict images recalled by the narrators that they use sometimes as cornerstones to reproduce past events (mainly in *When We Were Orphans*), or to create powerful scenery revealing the inner landscape. Finally I venture some theories about the narrators' motivation to remember the past; I will analyze how their will to recall certain events may influence the memories themselves.

### **The formal aspect**

The journal structure of two previous male narrators, Ono and Stevens, reporting the narrators' events from daily life, returns in Christopher Banks' story. *When We Were Orphans* is divided into seven parts, each part corresponding with an entry of different date. The entries span over almost three decades and half the world from England to Shanghai. Christopher Banks begins writing his journal on 24<sup>th</sup> July 1930 in London; the next two entries from 1931 and 1937 take place in London, too. Then the following three entries are recorded in the same Cathay Hotel in Shanghai within a month, September (two entries within a fortnight) and October 1937. Finally, the last entry dates from 1958, London. Clearly, the year 1937 weighs down the narrative in various ways; four entries date from this year. Even despite the excess of recollections dating back to his childhood in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the length of the entries still indicates the period's significance in the narrator's life. Moreover, 1937 is a turning point in his life; everything before leads up to the events of this year; and everything afterwards (as far as the reader can deduce from the last entry) happens to make amends to the mother. This process or quest is completed, or rather the narrator gathers enough strength to record the outcome, in 1958.<sup>12</sup>

The last entry contains the most explicit, and yet the least decipherable hints as to the narrator's and his adopted daughter's life in the past two decades, the turmoil of the World War II and the tense era of the Cold War, even though both have certainly affected their

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<sup>12</sup> All clues as to the exact date of the final meeting with the mother are well hidden. The narrator mentions that Jennifer's first hint to join him on his journey came five years ago (299); and later refers to his mother's death after his Far East trip. The conversation with Jennifer he reports in the entry is described as "discussing the trip again last month" (305), therefore they must have discussed it previously. This means that the mother-son reunion happened anytime between 1953 and 1958. Working out the clues is already hard investigation work and in *Never Let Me Go* the complex time reference structure is developed further and taken to a new level.

lives in some way or other. The text does not provide any clear details about this period, only references. It looks as if this entry was preceded by various others, as faithfully as possible recording the unfolding of the investigation about the mother, and perhaps Jennifer's life, presumably with some kind of tragic event in it.<sup>13</sup> However, these entries are missing, they are not in Christopher Banks' journal, as if the wind has blown them away like Diana Banks' cards and it was not worth the effort to go and collect them.

At one point the breeze lifted a few cards off the table, but she appeared not to care. When I collected the cards from the grass and brought them back to her, she smiled, saying: "Thank you so much. But there's no need to do that, you know. Myself, I like to leave it until many more cards have accumulated on the lawn. Only then do I go to gather them, all in one go, you see. (304)

The son is not bothered with the missing entries either. The point is not the logical order, but the game for Diana Banks and the act of recording for Christopher Banks. Nevertheless, the division into entries still exhibits a (somewhat haphazard) order of a journal. It more or less follows some chronological order, and the unfolding of an investigation. However, the entries or parts are subdivided into chapters; a fact that seems to point outside the story towards its fictionality. The twenty-three chapters do not correspond to the units of the narrated time or the extensive recollections. This is certainly an alienating feature reminding the reader it is a novel they are reading and not a journal. Perhaps this author, too, strives for order or the illusion of order.

*Never Let Me Go* displays a similar structural disparity. The narrative, set in England in the late 1990s with a narrator in her early thirties, is divided into three parts. The first concentrates on the period at Hailsham probably in the late 1960s and beginning of the 1970s, the second on the three friends' relatively short stay in the Cottages, and the third on the narrator's life as a carer for thirteen years in the 1980s and 1990s. The focus of the three parts is the events occurring in three different stages of her life, childhood, youth and adulthood, at three distinctive locations. In the case of the first two, Hailsham and the Cottages, respectively, and in the third part the common element is Kathy's endless driving from one "health" centre to another. Yet there are constantly infiltrations of the older, narrating Kathy, forebodings, recollections of recollections and explanations; I will discuss the elaborate time structure of the narrative later. But beside the division in accordance

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<sup>13</sup> The little Jennifer was too cheerful for having experienced the tragedy of the parents' death and her conclusion of life must go on is suspicious of suppressed trauma. Perhaps the burden of that trauma caught up and she may have experienced nervous breakdowns, even an attempted suicide.

with the story frame, her narration is subdivided into chapters, altogether twenty-three. Again, no logical explanation inherent in the story accounts for this feature.

Contrary to *When We Were Orphans*, the story seems to have been recorded by Kathy in a relatively short period of time in the late 1990s, instead of following a journal-like structure, reporting and commenting more or less real time on how the events unfold. This standpoint enables the narrator to provide a homogenous narration where everything had already come to pass. Incidentally, this feature also gives room to some shaping, forming and editing, as I suggest later. On the other hand, Kathy is no exception in Ishiguro's line of wandering narrators: she repeatedly refers to being on the move, driving from centre to centre. This sense of drifting, never stopping or resting is reflected in the narrative's meandering course among past events. Therefore Kathy is a true successor of Stevens's or Ryder's way of narration of never being at the same place. Kathy might as well sit down every day at a different desk in a different room, but never at home.

### **The question of genre**

Both in *When We Were Orphans* and *Never Let Me Go*, Ishiguro utilizes techniques and tropes of various genres; but at the same time he distorts the traditional<sup>14</sup> literary categories, and tricks readers' expectations. The distortion enhances and is enhanced by the narrators' patterns of remembering, forgetting and omitting events. Taking a closer look at the genres and the way they are distorted reveals some of the ways memory and memory writing works.

*When We Were Orphans* has been categorized in various genres. Perhaps the most obvious, therefore most often mentioned one is detective fiction. The titles of reviews clearly indicate that their writers were reading and interpreting the novel in this sense; for instance, "In search of lost crimes" (Jaggi, "In Search of Lost Crimes") or "The Case of the Missing Childhood" (Gorra) underline this connection by giving a title using the vocabulary of typical detective stories. A number of scholars also emphasize the novel's close connection to detective fiction. For instance, Machinal discusses the detective novels and the legacy of Sherlock Holmes stories. She establishes that the first part of the narrative is loaded with intertextual references to Conan Doyle's novels (80) from the description of Christopher's flat to the narrator's "confidence in theoretical reasoning and science as the means to combat criminals" (81). The famous predecessor is even

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<sup>14</sup> Naturally, the term 'traditional' can be disputed, here for the sake of simplicity I mean broad categories.

mentioned by name when one of the class mates at the boarding school declares about Christopher, “But surely he’s rather too short to be a Sherlock” (10). The narrator’s repeated references to events and investigations absent in the narrative are also a reminiscence of the Sherlock stories.

Indeed, a number of concepts, elements and objects are borrowed from the great predecessors, most notably the magnifying glass. Christopher receives one on his fourteenth birthday from his friends at the boarding school. After a detailed account of the merry afternoon in the café, he finally comes to the opening of his present.

What I did eventually uncover was a weathered leather case, and when I undid the tiny catch and raised the lid, a magnifying glass. . . . Its appearance has changed little over the years; it was on that afternoon already well travelled. I remember noting this, along with the fact that it was very powerful, surprisingly weighty, and that the ivory handle was chipped all down one side. I did not notice until later – one needs a second magnifying glass to read the engraving – that it was manufactured in Zurich in 1887. (*When We Were Orphans* 8)

His present, the magnifying glass is typically used in detective novels as an indispensable object of the craft, and it was intended rather as a joke by his friends, due to his interest in investigations. Ironically, Christopher, both the teenager and the adult narrator, firmly believes that his dream of becoming a detective is a closely guarded secret. This is not the first and only occasion when his assumptions and narrative collide with information from others.

During the course of the narration he places intentionally casual side remarks here and there claiming that he has solved cases with the help of his magnifying glass. However, the actual situations he describes as serious detective work seem more akin to a child posing with the adults’ objects hoping to look like his hero. On one occasion Christopher tries to discover traces of a murder months after the crime; “I was on my front, scrutinising with my magnifying glass one of the slabs that projected over the water” (*When We Were Orphans* 31). Apart from looking ridiculous, the endeavour is hopeless and impossible; and by this time he is supposed to be an acclaimed detective. This not only discredits Christopher both professionally and as a narrator; but also the notion of detective fiction in general. It is not the magnifying glass that makes a detective. Perhaps the most morbid situation occurs when he examines the wounds of a Japanese soldier he assumes to be Akira, the childhood friend.

Then carefully removing the ragged jacket of his uniform, I examined his wounds again, using the torch and my magnifying glass. I was still unable to ascertain a great deal; I had been afraid that the wound under his arm was gangrenous, but it now struck me the foul smell might be coming from something smeared on his clothes, perhaps from where he had been lying on the ground. On the other hand, I noted that he was alarmingly hot and utterly drenched in sweat. (*When We Were Orphans* 254)

Again, the adult becomes a little boy desperately holding on to the device he believes to be the key to deciphering the mysteries, finding the lost ones and banishing all evil from the world. He is brutally confronted with the reality of the pointless violence of war and the sordid profaneness of the broken human body. The situation is so incomprehensible that its morbidity turns into some grotesque ridicule dealing a further blow to the detective story.

But this is not the only feature borrowed from detective fiction, and then distorted and ridiculed. The plot, Christopher's mission to investigate the parents' disappearance and find them, is in fact a mock investigation. The narrator skilfully builds up the investigation story; he provides a thorough account of the events that led to the beginning of the assignment, mentions the library researches and foreign correspondences; introduces the characters: the morally uncompromising mother, the wavering father, the treacherous Uncle Philip, and the brave and observant child. After the longish preparations the investigation finally swings into motion with the journey to Shanghai, where the reader learns about the ambivalent nature of the community in the International Settlement and the daily life of a Chinese city on the verge of occupation – this is the touch of the exotic. The plot thickens, serious investigation begins involving in-depth interviews with various people, visiting the crime scene, namely the old home with the new inhabitants, and even diving into Shanghai nightlife. The obligatory romantic thread with the slightly scandalous is represented by Sarah Hemmings, a.k.a. Lady Medhurst and their almost elopement. The tour in the warren depicts all the adventure elements required, wandering and crawling in the ruin labyrinth, hiding from the enemy, distant shootings, weapons and a wounded comrade, a chance encounter with strange people, and finally reaching the house to victoriously liberate the parents and reunite the family.

The only problem with this detective story is that it is nothing else but a child's role play game in the backyard with all the naive assumptions of an eight-year old about the world and his own importance. However, Christopher's story finally has a proper ending (or something that comes close to it). As in all detective stories, there is an unexpected turn

and final revelation to solve the mystery. Ironically, Uncle Philip's confession reveals that although the characters are the same, the real story is a far cry from Christopher's fantasy. The reality of this twentieth-century crime story is immeasurably more cruel and sordid than the narrator's neat detective story from the Victorian era. When the young Christopher and Akira started the parent-rescue role plays, they settled on some aspects of the story.

After this it was always Akira who took great care to ensure my father's comfort and dignity in all our dramas. The kidnappers always addressed him as though they were his servants, bringing him food, drink and newspapers as soon as he requested them. Accordingly the characters of the kidnappers softened; it turned out they were not evil after all, simply men with starving families. They truly regretted having to take such drastic action, they would explain to my father, but they could not bear to see their children starve to death. What they were doing was wrong, they knew it, but what else were they to do? They had chosen Mr Banks precisely because his kind views towards the plight of the poorer Chinese were well known, and he was likely to understand the inconvenience to which they were putting him. To this, my father – whom I always represented – would sigh sympathetically, but then go on to say that whatever the hardships of life, crime could not be condoned. Besides, inevitably, Inspector Kung would sooner or later come with his men to arrest them, then they would be thrown into prison, perhaps executed. Where would that leave their families? The kidnappers – represented by Akira – would respond by saying that once the police discovered their hideout, they would give themselves up quietly, and wish Mr Banks well as he rejoined his family. But until then, they were obliged to do their utmost to make their scheme work. They would then ask my father what he required for his dinner, and I would order on his behalf a vast meal of his favourite dishes – roast sirloin, buttered parsnips and poached haddock always among them. As I say, it was Akira rather than myself who tended to be the more insistent on these luxurious aspects, and it was he who added many of the other small but important details: my father's room would have a fine view over the rooftops to the river; the bed would be one his captors had stolen for him from the Palace Hotel, and thus the ultimate in comfort. (*When We Were Orphans* 110–111)

This longish passage is a key to Christopher's interpretation of the events and his expectations concerning the parents and his chosen profession as a detective. The narrator

insists that he was not the inventor of these details, yet when as an adult he conducts the investigation, he assumes more or less the same conditions. In this respect he has not changed at all. His framework of the story is still the young boy's fantasy, the romantic detective novel where everything is proper and very colonial. It seems that maturity and the process of growing up, inevitably burdened with disillusionments and learning about the world, have all avoided Puffin and left his world intact. It is no wonder therefore that his version of the events reflects a boy's concepts about the adults' world. The narrator goes to extraordinary lengths to protect this world view and construct a story that adheres to its conditions.

Several critics (Slaughter 181; Levy 2) argue that *When We Were Orphans* can be interpreted as a *Bildungsroman*. The narrative follows the growing up of Christopher Banks, yet no *Bildung*, no real development, or the other meaning of the German word, education, occurs. As previously discussed, even the adult Christopher harbours the child's beliefs, and the process of gradual awakening and coming of age is completely missing. In fact, it is carefully avoided, and apparently prevented by others upholding the fantasy. Maturity is presumably reached after the talk with Uncle Philip, in the twenty-something year gap of the narrative. In the last entry the narrator exhibits a more mature (and disillusioned) understanding of the world.

Christopher's coming of age was long postponed but then it comes quickly and brutally. The one or two hours spent with Uncle Philip tear away the cocoon woven by the protective mother and held up through her sacrifice. From this point of view it is no wonder that the story breaks up there for two decades. Up to this point the child's games were played with his rules. After the revelation a new era starts for Christopher when he sets out to find his mother. The investigation continues, but this time there are no mitigating circumstances, no kind kidnappers, only the immense burden of the knowledge that every day his mother might suffer more abuse and humiliation. Time probably becomes a lethal enemy, and the fight against it must be a cruel struggle. When mother and son are finally reunited, the roles have changed. It is Christopher who knows the facts; and the mother is in the state of joyful nescience due to her mental condition. Christopher has grown up, whereas, ironically, in the mother's mind only the child Puffin exists and has always existed. In a way time stopped on the day of her abduction for both of them. It finally caught up with Christopher in October 1937, but never did so with the mother.

In *When We Were Orphans* Ishiguro takes the traditions of detective fiction, picks typical plot elements, characters and attributes embedding them in the journal form. But

then the result is a contorted story where the detective genre is deconstructed and ridiculed, turning the novel into some pastiche of itself. Machinal claims that the novel “exposes and ruptures the deeper ideological implications of the [detective] genre itself” (80). In this process a strong disruptive force is memory. It is memory, manipulated and decontextualized, that creates the case, the fake connections and becomes a drive in the narrator’s actions. How and to what effect memory is shaped, tricked and layered I will examine later on in this chapter.

Similarly to the preceding novel, Ishiguro mixes various genres in *Never Let Me Go*. The element of the *Bildungsroman* is present in the narration, Kathy accounts for her and her friends’ childhood. McDonald points out that presenting the period of education in a person’s life is an excellent opportunity to show their development and the shaping of their personality. A key concept is the description of the school years, the formative age. He suggests that “novels which depict schooling provide a fruitful forum by which the narrator’s agency in a complex power structure can be framed, questioned, and understood.” (77) The narrative presents a picture of Kathy as an introverted personality who surrenders to Ruth, and passively accepts her dominance, just like most of the members of their group. However, the dynamics of the relationship are not that simple. Kathy may seem passive, but she recognizes and understands the mechanism and also the fragility of Ruth’s tyranny. In some cases Kathy protects the hegemony and insists on keeping up appearances, like in the incident with the pencil case or when she does not want to gang up against Ruth and her childish game with the other exile from their group. On the other hand, sometimes she is revengeful and knows exactly where and how to hurt her friends.

Following a different thread, a number of reviewers and critics emphasized the science fiction elements of the novel. Indeed, *Never Let Me Go* has certain characteristics typical of science fiction stories such as cloning. In fact, science fiction journals and communities discussed the novel as a piece of science fiction writing. *The New Yorker* reviewed it under the subtitle “Ishiguro’s quasi-science-fiction novel” (Menand, “Something About Kathy”). *The Guardian*’s reviewer (Harrison) grudgingly admits in his review “Clone Alone” that based on the setting (alternate Britain, alternate 1990s) it should be described as science fiction; yet he misses science from the equation. The reviewer of a science fiction association was even enraged by the lack of any scientific

considerations of cloning, and deems the novel “[i]nteresting but seriously flawed”<sup>15</sup>. Nevertheless, in 2006 the book was shortlisted for the Arthur C. Clarke Award for the best science fiction novel<sup>16</sup>. Indeed, the *Never Let Me Go* “presents a parallel world that uses motifs and ideas familiar from science fiction in order to produce the effect of ‘cognitive estrangement’ that is one of the genre’s main characteristics” (Sawyer 236).

Moreover, the publication of *Never Let Me Go* almost coincided with the movie *The Island* (Bay). It is impossible to ignore the similarities of the two plots, both of them feature clones in a secluded place, awaiting the time when their organs are surgically removed to serve “normal” humans. However, the two protagonists of the movie escape the facility and fight for their lives through various adventures in the real world; whereas Ishiguro’s clones accept their fate unconditionally. The two closing scenes emphasize the striking contrast between the attitude of the novel’s and the movie’s clones. After a critical system failure, the inhabitants of the movie’s clone facility are shown running through corridors towards the exits as if knowing what they are escaping, and the guards abandon their posts. When reaching the outside world, they joyfully stand together and gaze into the distance, experiencing the open sky for the first time in their life.

This victorious and optimistic ending scene of the movie stands in stark contrast with Kathy’s closing paragraph about her solitary visit in the “lost corner” Norfolk. Having lost Tommy, she indulges in a small fantasy of seeing him again from the distance. But she does not experience any dramatic breakdown; after stopping briefly, she drives on “to wherever it was [she] was supposed to be”. In spite of the lack of any explicit drama, or perhaps due to it, the scene is very intense. Additionally, it encapsulates the basic problem many science-fiction fans and other reviewers or readers had with Kathy and her friends: why don’t they just rebel, run, and demand life and opportunities? Is it not what any human would eventually do? Indeed, any *human*. But what makes a human? Is it physical appearance, social and emotional capabilities, basic instincts? Philip K. Dick’s *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*<sup>17</sup> along with its movie adaptation *Blade Runner*<sup>18</sup> provide a possible answer, which is, in a certain sense, more optimistic than Ishiguro’s novel (Sawyer 240). Sawyer’s suggestion “that authenticity is not the same thing as originality” (240) gives a new and, according to my readings in the topic, unexplored

<sup>15</sup> Elisabeth Carey, New England Science Fiction Association, <http://www.nesfa.org/reviews/Carey/neverletmego.htm> (accessed 1/9/2015)

<sup>16</sup> The Arthur C. Clarke Award website, <https://www.clarkeaward.com/previous-awards/shortlists/> (accessed 1/9/2015)

<sup>17</sup> Philip K. Dick, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, Doubleday, 1968

<sup>18</sup> *Blade Runner* (1982) directed by Ridley Scott

dimension to the science fictional reading of the novel and the interpretation of the characters' actions and inactivity. This question is being complicated further as advances in Artificial Intelligence and deep learning open hitherto unimaginable possibilities, and lead to serious debates and uneasiness about defining the terms originality and creativity, among others. These questions, however, lead to distant territories I shall not pursue.

In contrast to the science-fiction elements and the above mentioned issues, a number of reviewers and critics point out that the real significance of the novel is not in the these elements, they only form a background to the story.

It does not imagine a future world at all, nor does it bother about the grounds for the unsettling reality it posits. Ishiguro's lack of interest in the science of his fictional world is overt and is encoded within the narrative. (Mullan 104)

Lewis agrees with this when he approaches the question of genre on a more abstract level suggesting that Ishiguro's "interests do not lie in the cloning per se but in its metaphorical potential" ("The Concertina Effect: Unfolding Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*" 201). What is this metaphorical level, and what are the underlying existential questions of the novel? Despite his misgivings about the work, Wood rightly states that *Never Let Me Go* "achieves great and moving speculative power, not because of what it has to say about the dilemma of cloning but because of what it has to say about ordinary life's unwelcome resemblance to the dilemma of cloning" (Wood, "The Uses of Oblivion"). Ishiguro gives an even simpler summary in an interview.

These people basically face the same questions we all face . . . What are the things you hold on to, what are the things you want to set right? What do you regret? What are the consolations? And what is all the education and culture for if you are going to check out? (Freeman)

Ishiguro never abandoned the themes of regret and consolation. This has been a central topic throughout his novels. Nevertheless, the question of education and its value is a new element among his interests. What difference does it make to read the classics, to learn geography? Harrison concludes his review of the novel on a more general note, saying the following.

This extraordinary and, in the end, rather frighteningly clever novel isn't about cloning, or being a clone, at all. It's about why we don't explode, why we don't just wake up one day and go sobbing and crying down the street, kicking everything to

pieces out of the raw, infuriating, completely personal sense of our lives never having been what they could have been. (Harrison)

Indeed, this is the core idea and dilemma of the novel. But before proceeding any further, I would like to examine another genre-thread, which arises in most of Ishiguro's works<sup>19</sup> due to the first person narrator, namely the autobiographical writing.

*Never Let Me Go* is the first and so far the only one in the line of Ishiguro's novels where the narration does not have a plotline in the present. Etsuko reports the ongoing visit of her daughter, Ono and Christopher Banks write about the remote past but include journal-like elements about their present as well; and Stevens diligently records the daily adventures of his journey in a diary-style apart from looking for turning points in his past. In contrast, Kathy does not care much for her present (or future), everything important has already happened in her life, and she describes those events. Her narrative is therefore reminiscent of an autobiography, which is basically "the story of a person's life written by that person" (Holman 43) with elements of introspection, where memory is a simple tool in the process. Works of this genre typically contain experiences gained during education, the coming of age, often testimonies to loss and trauma in later life, and meta-fictional references to the process of writing (McDonald 76). These are all present in the narrative. However, McDonald also points out that the novel "utilizes many of the techniques of the autobiographical memoir, while simultaneously barring itself from classification as an example of this genre" (75) and suggests the term 'speculative memoir'. The result is an autobiography drained of its usual depth and acknowledgment of a fuller life outside the textual boundaries, but fixated instead on what little experience the protagonist holds (McDonald 78).

In conclusion, *Never Let Me Go* plays with elements and expectations connected to various genres. Yet all the genres mentioned here are also disrupted, drained of their original focal points, values and usual outcome. It is again memory and the imprint of remembering that distorts the neat frames. On the other hand, the fissures and gaps created by the genre deconstructions open new possibilities for the narrative to tell about the narrators without telling it. Parallel to the deconstruction of genre stereotypes, memory represents a constructive power as well.

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<sup>19</sup> The only exemption being the latest novel to date, *The Buried Giant* (2015)

### **Memory in temporal verticality – the temporal embedded structure**

Already in *The Unconsoled*, time took on interesting characteristics. I pointed out how the narrator can bend and stretch time according to his own needs; when chance encounters can last unrealistically long, and prolonged absences seem to be a brief waiting time for others. In the next two novels time is yet again a tricky and elusive quantity, and subject to the individual's (the narrator's) mindset. Although in a different position and different circumstances, I believe both Christopher and Kathy's narrative structure and the need to remember are essentially the same. I will examine them, drawing attention to some differences and in the end I hope to arrive at a common denominator.

As already noted, Christopher's records are very precise, always indicating the date when he notes down his adventures and his investigative recollections. He also gives glimpses at the world around him, society life in London in the 1930s and the Sino-Japanese conflict, as a prologue to the imminent chaos and destruction of World War II. Yet the latter is rather the reader's anticipation, the knowledge of what is to come. Though Christopher mentions the serpent and the chaos that is to engulf the world, he is unaware of the historical tides around him and concentrates only on the case of his parents, representing for him all the evil there is. In this respect, even though embedded in history, he is strangely detached from it and probably lagging behind as his faith in traditional detective stories indicates. A similar trait can be discovered in Kathy's narration.

*Never Let Me Go* is set in the 1990s, and covers a period of the approximately 30 years of Kathy's lifespan starting in the late 1960s, then through the seventies and the eighties. In the history of the United Kingdom these decades are full of economic, social and cultural turbulences, yet none of them finds its way into the strangely secluded life of the characters. The densely populated country seems vacant in the narrative as Kathy drives long hours on endless empty roads, frequents forsaken service stations for an occasional coffee, and has always an eye out for the school premises and former Hailsham students. Mullan points out that "[i]solation is the very condition of Kathy H.'s narrative of recollection." (112) Kathy and the others live in a bubble, isolated from everything by being a clone. This is not the case for Christopher; still, he is isolated in other ways. From the aspect of this paper, the most significant is the bubble his mother reinforced for him after the disappearance of the father, and it is surprisingly long lasting, as the old Uncle Philip concludes.

Unlike *When We Were Orphans*, in *Never Let Me Go* there are no references as to the changing times in the country; the clones form small and hidden communities within England. This is especially true for Hailsham students, apparent in Kathy's remark "any place beyond Hailsham was like a fantasy land; we had only the haziest notions of the world outside and about what was and wasn't possible there" (*Never Let Me Go* 60–61). Even though she refers to her much younger self here, the situation does not change later for her or her fellows, they have no idea about the world of "normal" people, as they call them (an interesting choice of word by the narrator). Anything beyond Hailsham and the facilities for clones is not part of their reality. There is a single remark by Miss Emily how the clone issue is regarded in the (fictional) "normal world". She gives a brief glimpse into the societal and political trends governing the shadow world of the clones when she mentions the efforts of the supporters of Hailsham and other similar institutions, and the changes in the public's general opinion. However, even these remarks are vague and not fully elaborated; the rest of the narrative is completely isolated from the changes of time.

Currie suggests that the narration has a "sense of the future" through the utopistic cloning motif, but at the same time a "sense of the past" is invoked by the immense body of recollections; these in turn create an "odd historical present" (*The Unexpected: Narrative Temporality and the Philosophy of Surprise* 151). However, I doubt this "sense of the future" is really present. As I already argued, the cloning issue is of minor relevance to the plot. The narrator's future is extremely limited and bound to her own very short life expectancy as she is about to start the process of donations by the end of the year. Whereas the present is, indeed, "odd" since there are only a few reference points to historical time. The timelessness, the "scarcity of historical locators and specific temporal references" (Currie, "Controlling Time: *Never Let Me Go*" 93) removes the historical time frame, and only Kathy's subjective time remains. This, on the other hand, opens the possibility for "temporal paradoxes" in the narration, such as the recollection of forgetting and the recollection of anticipation (Currie, "Controlling Time: *Never Let Me Go*" 93). I find this idea also true for *When We Were Orphans* in some ways. It is only Christopher's narrative present that includes temporal references, his childhood accounts are placed in the child's timeless word. Therefore the lack of chronological order and the temporal paradoxes characterize his narrative as well.

The two narrators do not exactly struggle to remember; but they both mention the difficulties experienced when trying to recall certain events and details. Christopher and Kathy are taken aback by the fact that memories they thought would remain with them

forever crystal-clear are becoming hazier with time. When recounting, even recording their memories they fight against losing them. The existence of memories is an odd issue. They are not physical entities so what does it mean to lose them? The loss of a memory is experienced as not remembering something, i.e. forgetting it. St Augustine writes about the nature of forgetfulness in his *Confessions*.

When I mention forgetfulness, I similarly recognize what I am speaking of. How could I recognize it except through memory? I refer not to the sound of the word but to the thing which it signifies. If I had forgotten what the force of the sound was, I would be incapable of recognizing it. So when I remember memory, memory is available to itself through itself. But when I remember forgetfulness, both memory and forgetfulness are present—memory by means of which I could remember, forgetfulness which I did remember. But what is forgetfulness except loss of memory? How then is it present for me to remember when, if it is present, I have no power of remembering? What we remember, we retain by memory. But unless we could recall forgetfulness, we could never hear the word and recognize the thing which the word signifies. Therefore memory retains forgetfulness. So it is there lest we forget what, when present, makes us forget. Should the deduction from this be that, when we are remembering forgetfulness, it is not through its actual presence in the memory but through its image? If forgetfulness were present through itself, it would cause us not to remember but to forget. Who can find a solution to this problem? Who can grasp what is going on? (Augustine xvi)

He argues that the very existence of a person, object or event is lost when one forgets them. What is forgotten is gone forever without a trace, one cannot remember even the act of forgetting because then it has not been forgotten. Therefore to remember forgetfulness should be a paradox. Along the same line, the recollection of forgetfulness should be impossible.

Based on this, Currie argues that if there is some time, a “mediating time locus” (“Controlling Time: Never Let Me Go” 94) between the narrated event and the act of narration when it was forgotten and later the memory came back for some reason, then the temporal paradox is solved and the “recollection of forgetting” becomes possible. This is of crucial importance in the case of Ishiguro’s novels, especially with these two narrators, Christopher and Kathy. They both record their memories long after the majority of events have happened, in fact, by the time they start their recollections everything that mattered

has come to pass; and both of them mention the fading quality of memories. Both narrators recall events that were considered forgotten but for some reason these memories “resurface”. One example is Christopher’s recollection of an event when his father assures him of being on the right track after a period of personal weakness, “Today, thanks to your mother, I’m someone much much stronger. Someone, I dare say, Puffin, you’ll one day be proud of” (84). The announcement confuses the child, and that confusion is remembered by the adult, and then he describes his younger self’s search for meaning.

For a long time, I had no clear idea what he might have been referring to, and I tried in vain to match one recollection or another to his words. Eventually I did settle on one memory from very early in my life, from when I could have been no older than four or five – a memory which even then, when I was nine years old, had already grown hazy in my mind. (*When We Were Orphans* 85)

This is an intricate structure for a recollection. The adult remembers the nine-year-old boy who recalls an episode four or five years earlier, more precisely the adult recalls an act of (quasi) forgetting and then remembering by the child. But it also poses some questions. As Linda Williams puts it in connection with the concept of Freud’s *Nachträglichkeit*: “The child sees or hears something, but the material is itself only gradually inserted into a narrative or a coherent picture as it is actively reworked in memory – a reinterpretation and reinscription of the scene, taking place over time in the development of the subject (1995: 16)” (King 18). The narrator recounts an episode when he and his mother find the father in his study in utter despair, claiming that “We’ll never get back to England. We can’t raise enough. Without the firm, we’re simply stranded. . . . My God, who do you take me for? It’s beyond me, you hear?” (*When We Were Orphans* 86) The child’s memory is so remarkably clear that even the adult narrator feels the need to comment on.

But this is how, admittedly with some hindsight, I have come to shape that memory. . . . If my father had not, years later, made that curious speech beside the bandstand, I would probably never have dredged up this memory at all. (*When We Were Orphans* 87)

Due to the appearance of precise back-tracking of events and memories, the re-remembering is almost credible. On the other hand, there is not only one temporal gap but two: between the adult and the nine-year-old then the nine and five or four-year old, which raise doubts even higher. Moreover, both child-selves and especially the adult fail to

interpret the father's strange conduct. The memory is certainly a shocking one, seeing a parent in a condition of such despair can undoubtedly upset any child; this may be the reason even the adult can recall the incident. The child might not yet be able to understand the situation and its implications; but an adult could easily guess the kind of demand the wife puts on her husband, the resulting tension between the spouses, and these may even plant the seed of suspicion concerning the circumstances around the disappearance of the father. However, Christopher fails to see the signs of a strained relationship; in fact, he fails to explain the event as a whole.

A number of times Kathy repeats this complex structure when she remembers having something forgotten then remembered again. For instance, when recounting Tommy's approaching her after accidentally slapping her. "This was all a long time ago so I might have some of it wrong; . . . I'd more or less forgotten all about it when Tommy stopped me a few days later" (*Never Let Me Go* 12). Additionally, the narrator often mentions that she discussed this or that event in Hailsham with either Ruth or Tommy later on when she was caring for them. "Ruth and I often found ourselves remembering these things a few years ago, when I was caring for her down at the recovery centre in Dover." (*Never Let Me Go* 15) This creates an exciting and highly complex time structure in her narrative. When writing her memoir she remembers a time when she remembered the event with others. The embedded structure, which also implies the temporal gap between event and narration, intensifies doubts about the accuracy of those memories.

Moreover, a forgotten-and-remembered memory can acquire new context and significance. It is not rare that Christopher finds himself recalling new details and by interpreting or re-interpreting them the event gains importance in the plot of his childhood.

There was one other small incident from those weeks following my father's disappearance which I have now come to believe highly significant. I did not always regard it so; in fact, I had more or less forgotten it altogether when a few years ago, quite by chance, something happened which caused me not only to recall it again, but to appreciate for the first time the deeper implications of what I had witnessed that day. (*When We Were Orphans* 113)

This feeling of an event's added significance is echoed in Kathy's recollection of a crucial fight with Ruth and Tommy in the churchyard that led to starting her training as a carer, and thus the final break-up of the trio.

As I've said, it wasn't until a long time afterwards – long after I'd left the Cottages – that I realised just how significant our little encounter in the churchyard had been. I was upset at the time, yes. But I didn't believe it to be anything so different from other tiffs we'd had. It never occurred to me that our lives, until then so closely interwoven, could unravel and separate over a thing like that.

But the fact was, I suppose, there were powerful tides tugging us apart by then, and it only needed something like that to finish the task. If we'd understood that back then – who knows? – maybe we'd have kept a tighter hold of one another. (*Never Let Me Go* 180)

Based on Genette, Currie calls this structure the *proleptic past perfect*. The narrator has knowledge of the situation, and foreshadows events to come. Instead of the psychologically ambiguous terms of 'anticipation' and 'retrospection', Genette introduces the concepts of 'prolepsis' for "any narrative manoeuvre that consists of or evokes in advance an event that will take place later" and 'analepsis'<sup>20</sup> for "any evocation after the fact of an event took place earlier than the point in the story where we are at any given moment" (40). In the prolepsis the remembering narrator can lend the significance to the events.

This phenomenon has already occurred in Ishiguro's earlier novels, perhaps most typically in Stevens's narrative where he identifies turning points with hindsight, but then later somewhat discredits those turning points by claiming that if looking for them, one can find turning points everywhere. This is, however, not the case here. The narrators do not directly take back the significance of certain events, yet they discredit them in some ways. Christopher's interpretation of those situations proves incorrect in the end, when Uncle Philip's intrusion into Christopher's story provides the ultimate solution to the mystery. As for Kathy, there is even less clarity regarding the turning points. She is the only surviving participant of the story, there is no one to contradict her version or interpretation.

*When We Were Orphans* has a double time structure. The narrative's present is the adult's life in the 1930s; the other layer is the adult's memories, the child's story that naturally has a strong link with the adult's actions. If these stories are regarded as two units, then the child's story does not have an ending. Of course, childhood's end is a highly debatable question, one can argue that it is connected to a certain age or a certain (maybe traumatic) event. The narrative more or less "phases out", though the parents'

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<sup>20</sup> The term was mentioned earlier, in Chapter 2 of this paper, but for the sake of balance I include Genette's definition of 'analepsis' here again.

disappearance and leaving the International Settlement, the scene of his early life, certainly mark some changes. Here and there Christopher provides details about life in England, but in comparison to the Shanghai era, these are rather scarce. It can be concluded that the child slowly disappears, giving place to the stages of adult life. The distinction between the selves of different age is strongly emphasized in the narrative by the narrator's sometimes harsh critique of his younger self, even if only some years younger.

This twofold structure can be found in *Never Let Me Go*. In an interview Ishiguro discussed the considerably shorter life span of clones, compressed into mere twenty-thirty years, and he compared this to a concertina, how it works, "I just concertina-ed the time span through this device" (Freeman). Inspired by this comparison, Lewis analyzes the time structure of *Never Let Me Go* based on a concertina effect. He claims that

memories invoke other memories and become folded into themselves in many layers. Each layer has its own associations that criss-cross and overlap with each other. Such foldings can be multiplied almost infinitely. ("The Concertina Effect: Unfolding Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*" 203)

Indeed, it is difficult to follow the narrative along chronological lines. Paine (143) suggests that the recollections follow an "emotional logic". Here again I return to Escher and Hofstadter when proposing the spiral model for interpreting the structure of memories. It is typical that the narrator mentions an important element then the narrative trails off into another direction, but later returns to the person, object or event providing more details. Only after several rounds does the reader understand the full significance of that element.

Earlier I introduced Hofstadter's concept of recursive structures with push and pop movements, and stack information. Briefly summarizing, *push* means to open a new task (memory), and *pop* to return to the thread followed before the push. The *stack* contains the information necessary for finding this place (memory). As earlier with the Prologue of *The Remains of the Day*, I will illustrate the multiple embedded structures of Kathy's recollections from Chapter 2. The vertical axis is the narrator's past with her present at the top, then the past is divided into two distinct periods, the Hailsham years and Kathy's life as a carer but before Tommy's death. The Cottages are mentioned, but at this point no event is linked to it, therefore I omit the place and time in this table. The two time sections are then further subdivided based on the temporal locators the narrator provides. Sometimes the exact period of time is given later and in cross-references, for instance Tommy's approach happens "on that afternoon", referring back to the previous chapter,

but then a clue is inserted in the conversation, “But we were thirteen by then” (12). The reference to the class, Senior 2 comes even later. I added an extra line at the bottom of the column for a general explanation about the Exchanges that gain a larger significance only later. The horizontal axis represents the sequence of recalls, but, naturally, it also indicates the passing of time. The names and expressions in bold are only casually mentioned here, but they all come to play important roles in the narrative.

present	lament on hazy memory		looking back now: importance of Exch. ( <b>Sales</b> )			
carer, after R's death, relationship with T			not so long ago: discussing his troubles with T			
carer, reconciled with R			few years ago, summer, after R's 1st donation: remembering with R at a recovery centre ( <b>recovery centre, Cottages</b> )			
Senior 2, age 13	next months: observing pranks played on T	one night (dorm): discussing T's situation ( <b>creating, Exchange</b> )	dorm-talk: T not trying - for years, since Juniors	around that time, Senior 2: T's persecution stops	before long: why T changed his behaviour	couple of months back: talk with <b>Ms Lucy</b>
	that afternoon (ref to Ch 1) meeting T in the staircase	next weeks: observing T, tantrum incidents				Juniors: T's ridiculed painting ( <b>Ms Geraldine</b> )
Explanation	Exchanges, <b>Tokens</b>					

The complexity of the embedded structure is clearly visible. There is a *push* or a *pop* after almost each described event, creating a zigzagging temporal thread, though two major layers can be distinguished and thus the narrator appears to have a double-*stack*. Theoretically her stack information should enable her to pop back up to the present of her thirty-one year old self, yet there is an embedded stack connected to her adolescent self. She mostly pops back to that stage of her life, making it, strangely enough, the primary layer, and her present only secondary. The pushes from the adult's time layer, however, create an interesting connection with the other layer (I will call it 'A' and 'B', respectively). The narrator's partners in the two discussions recalled are the same persons mentioned in the Hailsham incident. However, recounting the two conversations at this point does not really fit into the sequence of the narrative. Why mention some fragments of memory from many years later in connection with a typical teenager school story?

When discussing prolepsis, Genette characterizes repeating prolepses as "advance notices" that are traditionally a "notice apropos of the scene"(73). This notice can have a shorter or longer reach, but it is generally clear and straightforward. Based on this, the narrator's inclusion of time layer 'A' can be interpreted as a sort of indirect advance notice in the narrative. Though the narrator does not explicitly state what would happen, by placing that time layer between the memory from time 'B' and her present she foreshadows their enduring friendship in the future. Moreover, Ruth and Tommy reflect on the Hailsham years, creating a circle or spiral, as I will suggest later. On the other hand, as the story slowly unfolds, the reader later comes to know that neither of the friends is alive any more, it is only Kathy remembering, thus adding a further ring to the spiral structure.

Even though the temporal horizon of this single chapter arches over decades, the organizing principle is undoubtedly Tommy and the start of their friendship<sup>21</sup>. Genette establishes the "narrative's capacity for temporal autonomy" (85) when he claims that the narrator can group certain events together "in defiance of all chronology" based on, for instance, their "thematic kinship" or emotional logic as suggested previously. Due to the thematic unity, the narrator does not need to rely that heavily on her *stack* because she always returns, *pops* (or actually *pushes*) to Tommy's story. This, however, may be a deceptive sense of order.

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<sup>21</sup> More precisely, this is only a fragment of that story, the first encounter is told in Chapter 1. As already noted I find the chapter divisions somewhat arbitrary since they do not seem to coincide with the structure of the memories.

The scattered temporal locators give some sense of time, but they also confuse the reader by the lack of unity. Here, in Chapter 2 the orientation starts from the smallest possible unit, “that afternoon” with the additional challenge of referring back to the previous chapter. The next hint is hidden in a critical remark about Tommy’s grin how teenagers are not supposed to show excitement or joy. Then following several *pushes* to the past, the class is identified, Senior 2, but without the age, making it difficult to connect the two pieces of information.

Throughout the narrative when Kathy refers to a particular event in the past for the first time, it is usually presented as if linked to another event, and already mentioned somewhere. Recollections beginning with phrases like “it was when” (17, 51, etc.) or this “reminds me of something” (51) are typical. Events are recounted neither in a chronological order, nor linked to a date or a period of time; they are mentioned in relation to other events, as Lewis puts it, “folded” (“The Concertina Effect: Unfolding Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go*” 203) into each other. The scattered temporal locators are referential and incomplete, further strengthening the sense of timelessness.

Besides the thematic organizing principle, another option to characterize the grouping of memories is the idea of the turning points. The stories Kathy relates to are often organized around a concept or an object, such as her cassette, which becomes significant in the course of her life. The first tape invokes the story of finding it, the incident with Madam seeing Kathy’s solitary dance, which is then revoked repeatedly when searching for meaning and finally with Madam’s interpretation of the little girl’s dancing in explanation to larger changes in society’s attitude towards clones and their education. But the original tape is an important object in the history of Ruth and Kathy’s friendship, giving Ruth the opportunity to prove her caring for Kathy when she loses the tape, which in turn inspires Kathy’s demonstration of loyalty towards Ruth. The second tape’s value would not be clear without the original’s story, but it has a history and significance of its own. The visit to Norfolk, already mentioned earlier as a special place, “England’s lost corner” (*Never Let Me Go* 60) and its significance in Kathy’s life is alluded to (because of the tape and because of the closing scene of her fantasy of seeing Tommy again); the couple of hours Tommy and Kathy spend together looking for a copy, and finally the conflict with Ruth and her revenge in the churchyard that leads to Kathy’s drifting apart and starting her training as a carer. This network of stories is centred on that single object (two pieces with a unique continuity of history). At the same time, Norfolk has its own sphere of explanation and a story, which then has a connection to possibles and

deferrals – and the chain could go on. Lewis describes this phenomenon as the foldings of the concertina, when the thread of the story passes through layers of time.

The interconnectedness of memories and stories of places and people creates its own layer of web within this complex system. In the representation of the time structure in Chapter 2 of *Never Let Me Go*, I mentioned the names and concepts (marked with bold letters) that later gain significance in the narrative. Though the phenomenon is more prominent in *Never Let Me Go*, the same type of casual remark of important persons can be found in *When We Were Orphans*, for instance, about Akira.

Akira is a key character in Christopher's childhood. The hide-and-seek manner he is introduced in the narrative is typical for the narration technique. Akira is first mentioned almost at the very beginning of the narrative, at the bottom of manifold embedded recollections. The narrator starts reminiscing about his 1923 debut in London, when he meets a school friend, Osbourne, who brings up a school-time incident about being 'well-connected;' this is already an analepsis in the recollections dating from 1930. That remark opens a lengthy discussion concerning his schooldays and Osbourne's '*faux pas*,' leading on to other recollections of his first period at the boarding school, how perfectly he blended into English school life – and with that memory he jumps back to his early teens. These memories dovetail into others about the leakage of his not so secret ambition of becoming a detective, dating from his fourteenth birthday with the magnifying glass, and then a few years later when he was pronounced "too short to be a Sherlock" (10). The reader, and possibly the narrator as well, is now perfectly lost in the maze of associations he was led unnoticed into. Then a sudden flashback follows Christopher's first period in England, which he recounts as follows.

I had spent much of my first few weeks in England wandering about the common near my aunt's cottage in Shropshire, performing amidst the damp ferns the various detective scenarios Akira and I had evolved together in Shanghai. . . . in marked contrast to the uninhibited manner in which Akira and I had been accustomed to carry on. (*When We Were Orphans* 10)

Finally that important name from the childhood is presented, though shyly yet, just in passing, to be properly introduced no sooner than in Part Two dating from 1931, after a

futile attempt to hide<sup>22</sup> the memory of Akira from Sarah Hemmings. But in Part One, only the aunt's disapproving comment on Christopher's "brooding" is left to report, then finally the narrative can return to the original recollection, to Osbourne's visit. It is really a wonder that the narrator finds his way back to his original thread that is already a memory from before the start of the story line. Altogether eight incidents from different periods are mentioned, and not even in a chronological order but jumping back and forth, associating from one to the other.

Advance notices, even these indirect ones, prepare the reader (and the narrator) for what is to come. Advance mentions, on the other hand, are of a more elusive nature. These are

simple markers without anticipation, even an allusive anticipation, which will acquire their significance only later on and which belong to the completely classic art of "preparation" . . . the advance mention is thus in general, at its place in the text, only an "insignificant seed" and even an imperceptible one, whose importance as a seed will not be recognized until later, and retrospectively.<sup>23</sup> (Genette 75–76)

Both narratives are loaded with advance mentions. In *When We Were Orphans*, true to his profession, the narrator places a number of advance mentions that are explained in their full significance only later. Ironically, Christopher plants many seeds when he reminisces about the past, however, he does not recognize the pattern until it is brought to his attention by Uncle Philip. A tell-tale sign of the strained relationship of the parents is, for example, the day-long silences, presumably imposed by the wife as some kind of passive punishment.

For instance, my father might appear at breakfast with a cheerful: 'Good morning, everyone!' and slap his hands together, only to be met by my mother's frosty glare. On such occasions, my father might try to cover his embarrassment by turning to me and, still in the same cheery tone, asking: 'And what about you, Puffin? Any interesting dreams last night?' (*When We Were Orphans* 71)

The adult, with the compulsory understatement, can recall that as a boy he was pondering on these incidents, "I suppose I must, at least sometimes, have given thought to these matters" (71), and even sought advice from Akira, who explained the silences as the

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<sup>22</sup> Though the question arises how well or rather whether Christopher is able to hide anything of his personal history or ambitions; when already his secret aspiration of becoming a detective is discussed by a dozen of his classmates.

<sup>23</sup> The idea is based on "An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative" by Roland Barthes, 1966

parents' disappointment in their son. According to Akira, children are "like the twine that kept the slats held together" (73), and not coming up to expectations causes severe disappointment in parents. Christopher is haunted by this idea for decades.

And all the rest of it, all my trying to find her, trying to save the world from ruin, that wouldn't have made any difference either way. Her feelings for me, they were always just there, they didn't depend on anything. I suppose that might not seem so very surprising. But it took me all that time to realise it.

Not only this took him a long time to realise. As with the parents' marital problems, the adult fails to critically examine the child's idea and to become suspicious. The detective spectacularly misses the clues.

Advance mentions seem to be more subtly positioned in *Never Let Me Go*. As already noted (and represented in the table in bold characters), the narrator refers to a number of concepts, like the Exchanges, the guardians, the recovery centres, that prepare the way for Kathy's personal story and for the bigger picture, the institution of cloning. Among the highlighted expressions, 'creating' is the first and perhaps the most charged one in relation to Kathy's life. During the course of her narrative the reader step by step learns how Hailsham students are encouraged to create art and how seriously they take it. It could make a child popular and beloved, or the target of constant teasing, as in Tommy's case. Then as adults, when Kathy and Tommy contemplate the idea of deferrals they give a new significance to the act of creating art, namely evidence of being truly in love that should buy them very precious time together. Finally, 'creating' is revealed to have an even larger, and more sinister, significance, as means of proof that clones have souls. Additionally, the concept of creating becomes further burdened in relation to the clones: the ones who are created, i.e. brought to life, i.e. produced, are expected to create, make something as original and indefinable as art. The evolution of the word and the concept is gradual and not easily detectable, but very powerful; it clearly shows the strength of advance mentions in this narrative.

Other advance mentions have perhaps less grave indications, but reach distant parts of the narrative by their interconnectedness. Miss Geraldine, everyone's favourite guardian, first appears in Chapter 2; by encouragingly talking about Tommy's mock painting she inadvertently causes a lot of trouble to him. Unwittingly her figure becomes the bond in Ruth's circle when the girls make up the story of protecting her from possible kidnappers. Later yet, in the Cottages, Ruth infuriates Kathy by claiming that she forgot

about Miss Geraldine. The subject is especially painful to Kathy since in her mind the shared memories connect them the strongest. This way the figure of Miss Geraldine receives significance beyond her character, she comes to stand for ‘the good old days’ and more importantly, lasting friendship.

Due to the advance mentions there are no dramatic and unexpected revelations. Several reviewers reassured readers that it is no spoiler to tell about the true nature of Hailsham students. The children, and readers alike, are gradually given pieces of information so that the fact of cloning is no surprise<sup>24</sup>. Even the conversation with Miss Emily and Madame contains no game changer information. By the time Kathy and Tommy arrive there, the reader already knows that there is no hope of life awaiting the lovers.

Genette concludes his discussion about prolepsis by claiming, “[r]etrospective advance notices? Anticipatory recalls? When later is earlier, and earlier later, defining the direction of movement becomes a delicate task.” (83) Lewis sums up the options for the temporal linking of elements in the narrative.

Events can be linked horizontally, as they occur in chronological sequence; or in a vertical fashion, when memory associates the present with the past through flashback and recall. The third option is prolepsis, when the present foreshadows the future. (Lewis, *Kazuo Ishiguro* 204)

In his earlier works Ishiguro has already demonstrated his skill in placing seeds in the form of side remarks, background information to memories. These small clues enable the structure that I call spiral-like, when a concept is revisited time and time again and it frequently receives new details, a new context, a new owner, and altogether a new meaning.

### **Visual memory**

Previously I mentioned St Augustine’s musings about forgetfulness. If forgetting occurs, the very existence of that memory is completely eliminated, therefore it cannot be recalled and it is lost forever. He concludes that to remember something forgotten is not possible. Then he offers a solution to the paradox by suggesting that an “image” of the person, object or event is retained in the mind.

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<sup>24</sup> Incidentally, the expression ‘clone’ comes up very late in the narrative in Chapter 14, in Ruth’s almost hysterical outburst after following her ‘possible’. This is the only time a clone uses the word, and another time it is used is by Miss Emily.

When these things were present, memory took images of them, images which I could contemplate when they were present and reconsider in mind when I recollected them even though absent from me. If, then, memory holds forgetfulness not through itself but through its image, forgetfulness must itself have been present for its image to be registered. But when it was present, how did it inscribe its image upon the memory, when, by its very presence, forgetfulness deletes whatever it finds already there? Yet in some way, though incomprehensible and inexplicable, I am certain that I remember forgetfulness itself, and yet forgetfulness destroys what we remember. (Augustine xvi)

According to his argumentation, the image is not obliterated; therefore one is able to recall apparently forgotten elements again. The concept of memory as a collection of images or the visual aid to memory are utilized and discussed through the ages by various thinkers.

*When We Were Orphans* and *Never Let Me Go* are rich in images; visual memory is strongly present in both narratives. For Christopher, the basis of his recollections and thus most of his investigation is the images of the child recalled and interpreted by the adult. Images or short flashbacks of his mother or father at crucial points of his life capture the essence of the event and are burnt in the child's mind. The last glimpse of the father on the day of his disappearance (elopement) and of the mother shortly before she was kidnapped are engraved in his memory.

As for Kathy, looking at vast forsaken lands is a recurring image throughout her narrative. The cinematic adaptation of *Never Let Me Go* (Romanek) captures this mood with the stillness of the images and the balanced pace of the movie. Additionally, the narrator often gives a description of the premises of Hailsham or the surroundings of the Cottages as explanations to certain events. Even though she claims the opposite, Kathy, driving across the country as a carer, is constantly in search for her *alma mater*.

Mind you, though I say I never go looking for Hailsham, what I find is that sometimes, when I'm driving around, I suddenly think I've spotted some bit of it. I see a sports pavilion in the distance and I'm sure it's ours. Or a row of poplars on the horizon next to a big woolly oak, and I'm convinced for a second I'm coming up to the South Playing Field from the other side. (*Never Let Me Go* 262)

A large proportion of her memories about the school is visual; she feels a deep connection to the buildings and the park of her old school, just as one would feel towards the parental home.

Seeing something with one's own eyes should theoretically be the ultimate proof of the reality of that event. However, the mind immediately interprets it and attempts to attribute meaning to the happenings; this process may affect the visual memory. Nicola King warns about the changeable nature even of visual memory. It is clear that even visual memory does not stay 'pure', that it can be painted and polished into a satisfying image which can then produce a story, turning visual memory into narrative (26).

In *When We Were Orphans* the incident with the health inspector is a good example for a visual memory turning into a story. The little boy witnesses with Akira his mother's moral outburst. First, he tries to interpret it with the child's mind, as an explanation to Akira's awe and admiration towards Christopher's mother. Second, the adult handles it as an evidence of his mother's commitment to the 'cause' that eventually leads to her kidnapping.

When revisiting childhood memories, however, the case is sometimes even more complicated and deceptive, as Freud points out.

'We must above all bear in mind that people's "childhood memories" are only consolidated at a later period . . . and that this involves a complicated process of remodelling, analogous in every way to the process by which a nation constructs legends about its own history' (1909: 87). (King 19)

Both narrators carry out something very close to what Freud calls constructing "legends about its own origins" as I will discuss later. But another good example of creating a legend is the concept of deferrals in *Never Let Me Go*. The rumour goes round that couples "truly in love" are given some time before they have to start their donations. Kathy and Tommy construct the details of this "fact", connecting elements of their past, the emphasis on art at Hailsham, Madam taking the best pieces to her Gallery, concluding that their works of art are the basis of making the decision about a couple. The idea is logically built up, and yet it proves to be nothing more than an elaborate delusion.

Interpreted correctly or not, the images are nevertheless essential parts of Christopher and Kathy's memories, as pictures of people and places dear to them. As a counterpoint to the images and remembering through and with images, it is interesting to note the presence of darkness as opposed to images and memories in both narratives. The revelation for both narrators comes from the darkness. When Christopher meets Uncle Philip and the elderly man sets out to recount the mother's true story, the narrator can no longer hold back the adults' world and its cruel reality.

As I leant towards him into the glare of the lamp, an odd feeling came over me that behind my back the darkness had grown and grown, so that now a vast black space had opened up there. (*When We Were Orphans* 290)

Darkness is clearly associated with Uncle Philip's story, the real story he avoided for so long by making up such an elaborate narrative about the courageous stand of the parents and the noble kidnappers, and not to forget, his own victorious quest finding the parents and slaying the serpent, thus saving the world at the same time.

Similarly, when Kathy and Tommy visit Madame, the unexpected agent of truth emerges out of the darkness.

I realised, with a little chill, that these questions had never been for me, or for Tommy, but for someone else – someone listening behind us in the darkened half of the room. I turned round quite slowly and looked into the darkness. I couldn't see anything, but I heard a sound, a mechanical one, surprisingly far away – the house seemed to go much further back into the dark than I'd guessed. Then I could make out a shape moving towards us, and a woman's voice said: "Yes, Marie-Claude. Let us carry on." (*Never Let Me Go* 233)

Darkness is what they are both fighting by remembering, constructing and manipulating memories. Christopher's darkness of the lost parents and the way of losing them is counterpointed with the neat detective story. Kathy's darkness of inevitable early death instead of a 'normal' life with her finally found love is counterpointed with her assurance of a life and friends it was worth living for.

### **Tangled hierarchies**

Examining the structure of memories sheds some light on the question of 'how'. How these intricate webs of memory are created, how they can be so elusive. Now I propose some ideas on the question of 'why' to further expand the possibilities of 'how'. Both narrators remember their past. Christopher describes his childhood and the events that lead to the disappearance of his parents in length that form the basis of his investigation work. Kathy records childhood memories shaping her relationship with Ruth and Tommy. Why do they do this?

There are various options. For Kathy, an important point may be to have, or, if necessary, create an origin, where she came from, where it all began; some kind of origo where she can return in her mind when things get rough. To belong somewhere. To have a

community that is as close as possible to a family. “Those who are alienated often fantasize about their origins” (Sawyer 242). Ishiguro comments on this atmosphere.

I wanted to express their longing for a parent. They know they don't have parents in a literal sense, so they can't miss individuals, but I wanted to show that in some way that need for a parent is there. Not just a need for parental love or the practicalities of parenting, which in some ways they get. At some deep human level they need to feel they belong to some sort of genetic line. They feel they belong in the tides of humanity's generations. In the strange world, they want to belong in a profound sense which mattered to them emotionally. (Groes 259–260)

Though McDonald points out that there is a “void of experience regarding infancy” (78); for whatever reason, Kathy still needs to refer to a past as a kind of origin that shaped, maybe also bruised, but eventually formed them into what they have become as persons. This role is taken by Hailsham, the isolated and artificial nest where the clones grow up. The boarding school is their “microcosm,” it functions as a family, even though they do not know this concept. Depicting their education is a powerful tool in the narrative; McDonald suggests that “novels which depict schooling provide a fruitful forum by which the narrator's agency in a complex power structure can be framed, questioned, and understood” (77). Along this process Kathy seems to be careful to protect her friendship with Ruth; letting it go, “beyond that line, there was something harder and darker and I didn't want that. Not for me, not for any of us” (*Never Let Me Go* 51). In the end she is, indeed, a secret guard, but not for the guardians but for them, her friends, but most importantly, herself. The narrator recalls events significant in the life of the Kathy-Tommy-Ruth triangle and milestones in their relationship with each other.

Moreover, the group's interest in ‘possibles’ is another aspect of this notion, to find where they come from, even if this occurred as a biochemical feat. The ‘possible’, the original ‘normal’ person appears in their thoughts as an alternative, how their lives could go, even like a dream. It never occurs to them to take that path, these clones are not rebellious, they passively accept their course of life, but they still hope to find a proper ‘possible’ to be able to dream up a nice and shiny alternative life. Ruth's hysterical outburst constitutes a heavy attack against this vital dream, and therefore it deeply upsets everyone.

We all know it. We're modelled from trash. Junkies, prostitutes, winos, tramps. Convicts, maybe, just so long as they aren't psychos. That's what we come from. We

all know it, so why don't we say it? . . . We know it, so we might as well just say it. If you want to look for possibles, if you want to do it properly, then you look in the gutter. You look in rubbish bins. Look down the toilet, that's where you'll find where we all came from. (*Never Let Me Go* 152)

Here I return to Harrison's question that I mentioned earlier in this chapter, what keeps a person always go on instead of collapsing under the burden of the what-could-have-been? The answer reaches back to Ono and Stevens: the faith in the value of what they are or were doing. Or if there is nothing to find, at least the intention of doing something good and valuable. In Kathy's case<sup>25</sup> the value is in human relationships, in friendship and love, both forged in a long and arduous process, and both her inalienable possessions. Their significance is twofold: they make the past worth having lived and her future of operations and pain bearable through remembering. It is therefore essential that those memories are good enough.

Both Christopher and Kathy remember people gone. Kathy's closest friends, Ruth and Tommy have already died; Christopher Banks insists that his parents are safe and sound even after decades of their disappearance, but they are not part of his life any more. Later it turns out that his father did, in fact, die long ago, shortly after leaving his family. Although Christopher's mother was alive all along, by the time he tracks her down, she is not the same person any more; she can no longer recognize her adult son due to her traumatic experiences. Therefore Christopher lost both his parents at an early age. But they all live in the narrator's memory and writing. The act of recording his recollections is of great significance; but the interpretation of events in accordance with the rules of the game is crucial.

The fact that both narrators are "sole survivors" is an interesting feature. They remember others; they are the last ones to tell the story and without contradiction from anyone. They decide what they report. It is not only their story, but their version of a story. Events filtered through their perceptions, intentions, interests, desires and last but not least, their memory.

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<sup>25</sup> It is interesting to note that saving other people's life with the clones' sacrifice is not even alluded here though this is their *raison d'être*. One could only speculate why this aspect is altogether omitted. Apart from shifting the narrative's emphasis to completely different territory, it is perhaps insignificant from the characters' point of view and is not even told them or understood by them.

### **The loops – tangled hierarchies**

I find this especially remarkable because Kathy mentions that occasionally there were some disagreements about how exactly a certain event occurred, and which version is more probable. This means that the stories have already been selected and maybe even edited by Ruth, Tommy and Kathy before they were finally recorded. Currie suggests that “there has often been a collective agreement on a particular version of events” (“Controlling Time: *Never Let Me Go*” 94) among the friends. If this is the case one may wonder how much the collective agreement shaped the story. Additionally, Kathy likes telling that her version is the “correct” version. Primo Levi remarks that repeated telling could influence stories.

It is also true that a memory evoked too often, and expressed in the form of a story, tends to become fixed in a stereotype, in a form tested by experience, crystallised, perfected, adorned, which installs itself in the place of raw memory and grows at its expense. (12)

Additionally, the question arises how far the narrator goes in shaping history, her own life events? By the end of the narrative, it transpires that she values her memories more than anything else, remaining the only thing worth living for. When they are at the Cottages and Ruth acts as if she had forgotten certain things about Hailsham, Kathy becomes furious and suggests that Ruth is only pretending for some reason because it was impossible that she cannot recall certain events. “And then there was the way Ruth kept pretending to forget things about Hailsham. Okay, these were mostly trivial things, but I got more and more irritated with her” (*Never Let Me Go* 262). The common reference point, Hailsham is a strong bond for the three of them. At the end of her recollections, which also signals the approaching end of her professional life, and her life altogether, and becoming a donor, she vows.

The memories I value most, I don’t see them ever fading. I lost Ruth, then I lost Tommy, but I won’t lose my memories of them. . . . Once I’m able to have a quieter life, in whichever centre they send me to, I’ll have Hailsham with me, safely in my head, and that’ll be something no one can take away. (*Never Let Me Go* 262)

But this can be reversed, if one has only the memories to live by, they need to be precious. They need to be valuable enough. One of the donors in Kathy’s care was desperate to listen to stories from Hailsham and to collect as much detailed information as possible.

At first I thought this was just the drugs, but then I realised his mind was clear enough. What he wanted was not just to hear about Hailsham, but to *remember* Hailsham, just like it had been his own childhood. He knew he was close to completing and so that's what he was doing: getting me to describe things to him, so they'd really sink in, so that maybe during those sleepless nights, with the drugs and the pain and the exhaustion, the line would blur between what were my memories and what were his. (*Never Let Me Go* 5)

The man actually creates memories for himself to remember when things turn bad, as the narrator realizes. Incidentally, he may not be the only one who craves for knowledge about Hailsham. Christie, one of the girls at the Cottages, does something similar.

And she was always asking us questions about Hailsham—about little details, much like my donors do now—and although she tried to make out these were very casual, I could see there was a whole other dimension to her interest. (*Never Let Me Go* 129)

But then again, Kathy may do the same. When she discusses the evolution of their friendship with Ruth and Tommy, they may well be doing something similar. They edit the stories, put emphasis on certain events, and could completely omit others. So that in the end an approved and valuable story remains. The adults may be in the process of (re)creating a childhood that is supposed to shape them. M.C. Escher's *Drawing Hands* illustrates my idea.

A piece of paper is fixed to a base with drawing pins. A right hand is busy sketching a shirt-cuff upon this drawing paper. At this point its work is incomplete, but a little further to the right it has already drawn a left hand emerging from a sleeve in such a detail that this hand has come right up out of the flat surface, and in its turn it is sketching the cuff from which the right hand is emerging, as though it were a living member. (Escher, *M.C. Escher: The Graphic Work* 15)

Of course, the idea is a paradox. However, the creation of memories is no less a paradox. Turning to Hofstadter's concepts again, something similar to a *strange loop* can be found here, the so called *tangled hierarchy*.

A Tangled Hierarchy occurs when what you presume are clean hierarchical levels take you by surprise and fold back in a hierarchy-violating way. The surprise element is important; it is the reason I call Strange Loops "strange". A simple tangle,

like feedback, doesn't involve violations of presumed level distinctions. (*Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid* 691)

When the adult Kathy H. writes her memoir, she also edits the memories that she claims to have formed her; she creates a tangled hierarchy of memories, of past and present.

A minor but curious thing is that the narrator never mentions what she does as art at Hailsham. Is it painting, sculpting or something different? Poems? Or maybe stories? This is, of course, only guessing, one of the countless questions about Kathy, her personality and thoughts she so skilfully manages to write out of her story. Even writing is an uncertain idea. Mullan analyzes the narrative voice in *Never Let Me Go*, and he finds that in many places it is rather colloquial and the reader is often reminded of speech rather than a written work, for instance, "as I say" (4, 19, 39, 49, 84, 86, 93, 121, etc.) or "like I say" (76, 116, 130), "What I'm saying" (120, 256) "the point is" (35, 56, 59, 116), "Anyway" (3, 17, 23, 42, 54, 63, 67, 82, 94, 101, 110, 115, 121, 131, 144, etc.). Additionally, she often loses the thread and returns to it after longish digressions, or conversely, she describes an event long after first mentioning it due to the digressions. These are all signs, Mullan argues, that "[t]he material of memory is being organized as we listen" (107). A technique that is not at all new in Ishiguro's oeuvre.

The tangled hierarchy concept is even more visible in *When We Were Orphans*. The narrator carefully goes through the memories of his younger self in order to unfold the events leading to the disappearance of his parents. However, instead of observing and deducing, he takes on a more active role, he creates the parents' narrative based on the selected scraps of memory. The construction, as already mentioned, is dominated by the child's faith, hope and sentiments; and has nothing to do with reality.

Currie pointed out the resemblance between *Never Let Me Go* and Kafka's characters. But this is similarly true for some parts of *When We Were Orphans*.

Kafka's narratives, in which characters accept the unacceptable, treat the grotesque as if it were normal, or confer a kind of homeliness on the most offensive of social injustices. (Currie, "Controlling Time: *Never Let Me Go*" 93)

The entire world seems to participate in Christopher Banks' delusion about his parents. The inhabitants of the International Settlement await the parents eagerly; the Chinese officer assists him in orientation despite his team being under attack. The situation reaches the height of incredibility when Christopher, like an angry child, demands that the Chinese

lieutenant immediately order his soldiers to accompany him in his search for the parents in the ruins of the warren.

I appreciate, Lieutenant, that you're in a demanding situation. But you have to understand, I'm not talking about just some casual enquiry I wish to make. When I say it's imperative I reach this house... Well, Lieutenant, I'll tell you, there's no need to keep it a secret. You and Captain Ma here can be the first to know. The house I wish to find, which I know is very near us now, is none other than the one in which my parents are being held. That's right, Lieutenant! I'm talking about nothing less than the solving of this case after all these years. You see now why I felt my request, even at this busy moment for you, quite warranted. (*When We Were Orphans* 232)

How come that this fantasy world was built up, in fact, constructed by the narrator? The answer is simple: he wanted this. He believed his parents loved each other, stood up for an honest goal, he wished that though they were removed, still, they were preserved and kept safe in civilized conditions, and he hoped that the little boy can prove he is worthy of his parents, be their hero and save them.

## **Conclusion**

After six novels and two and a half decades of writing career it can be concluded that Ishiguro's deep interest in memory, the shaping of the past and forgetting has not undergone any significant change, yet his technique of depicting the subtle mechanics of the mind and the manipulation of memories has certainly evolved. As demonstrated in this chapter, the layers of time in the two novels are intertwined; the links between them are even less governed by a temporal logic. As a result both narrator and reader lose themselves in the memories. Nevertheless, this seemingly chaotic structure tells even more of the narrators, not only by what they eliminate but by the order memories and the thread of associations.

The narrators' strategy is to concentrate on events, retell and lend them maybe disproportionately large significance. However, there is another notion in the narrators: by remembering they create a past that is worth remembering in Kathy's case, and that gives hope and a task to live for in Christopher's case. The adult in the present creates the narrative of childhood that makes up their self. This way they create themselves.

Action has become even scarcer with drama played out either in the past, as with Christopher, or in the absence of the narrator; Kathy's fate was decided well before she was born (or created or produced). Though their tragedy is by no means smaller or less devastating than the narrators' trauma in the earlier novels, due to the structure and the narrators' set of mind, supported by the narrative technique, becomes more subdued. Whereas in *When We Were Orphans* there is a moment of revelation, when both narrator and reader learn the solution to the case; this is missing from *Never Let Me Go*. The knowledge of the true nature of the characters is gradually unfolded; it is difficult to pin down an exact moment when the truth comes to light.

Finally, borrowing from other genres, distorting and using tropes has been present from an early stage, yet in these last two novels this tendency has become more prominent, and it continues with the subsequent novel, *The Buried Giant*. In the next part I will briefly turn to this work and examine whether and how the theme of memory and the depiction of its workings has changed. For reasons already mentioned, I excluded this novel from the main body of analysis; however, certain themes continue and might mark a new path in Ishiguro's writing.

## CHAPTER 5

### ON THE MARGIN OF *THE BURIED GIANT*

*Imagination, I should say, is  
made of memory and of  
oblivion. (Barnstone20)*

Ishiguro's latest novel to date, *The Buried Giant* was published in 2015, after exactly a decade long interval following the publication of *Never Let Me Go* in 2005. Similarly to *The Unconsoled*, Ishiguro yet again has taken another turn and moved on to other territories of narrative, but this last novel stands alone so far for various reasons. On first reading the book seemed to destroy, but at least challenge almost everything stated in this paper about Ishiguro's choice of topic, genre and memory writing. The fact that ogres are mentioned on the very first place is unexpected, but not that elemental, Ishiguro's wish, "I just wanted to have ogres in there!" (Gaiman and Ishiguro) is quite understandable; there are more striking differences. Yet a second look reveals the manifold structure and the intricate similarities this novel shows with the preceding works, creating an integral part of Ishiguro's oeuvre. Concentrating mainly on memory I highlight some of the key points.

*The Buried Giant* is the first in Ishiguro's line of novels not told by a first person narrator. He even abandons the viewpoint of a single narrator; there are narrators with various perception and knowledge. The first narrator is perhaps the most confusing with the opening sentence, "You would have searched a long time for the sort of winding lane or tranquil meadow for which England later became celebrated," which is then soon followed by "the ogres that were then still native to this land" (*The Buried Giant* 3). With this start it becomes clear that the time is not the 20<sup>th</sup> century any more; and though the location is England, the landscape is populated with strange creatures. This beginning provides various opportunities; it pushes the story into the past and also to the realms of the magical and legendary, and could be the memory or a region or a country, England. As remains of the early novels, the two protagonists are an elderly couple and it is sometimes their viewpoint that directs the narrative.

Memories and remembering form an integral part of the novel, in this respect *The Buried Giant* does not differ from the previous works. Here, however, memories are not presented as an integral part of a person, the narrator, who recounts and shapes them. Moreover, it is not the act of remembering, reliving and reshaping the past that takes a central role, but their absence, the lack of memories. Personal oblivion is expanded to a grander scale, when hazy and lost memories characterize not only the elderly, but an entire country. All the inhabitants of an a region have lost their memories, and even their recent past of some days or some hours are quickly forgotten. As this amnesia does not characterise a single person, but a territory; the individual's inner mindscape becomes the outer landscape, like Klein's bottle.

For the first time, forgetting has an agent, the old dragon Querig's breath creates the memory's mist and it descends on people, ensuring peaceful life of tribes previously entangled in bloody conflicts against each other. This way memory attains moral significance, when the ambiguous principle of "forget and forgive" ensures peace and prosperity for communities.

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For the first time, forgetting has an agent, the old dragon Querig's breath creates the memory's mist and it descends on people, ensuring peaceful life of tribes previously entangled in bloody conflicts against each other. This way memory attains moral significance, when the ambiguous principle of "forget and forgive" ensures peace and prosperity for communities.

The fact that the narrative is set in medieval times, ensures the lack of mementos or any written record of the world. It seems that without the only means to capture memories, fighting oblivion is impossible; and without memories even the most basic facts to define a person, a relationship or a community are missing.

The novel received varied response. The atmosphere of the fantasy genre was both welcomed and rejected by readers and critics. However, as a reviewer asserts, similarly to "so much of Ishiguro's work, the superficial wrapper is not the main attraction. Ishiguro doesn't deal with literal representations of life so much as allegory and allusion" (Sanai).

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

*the human mind is at its best  
when playing, I am myself  
playing, and that makes me feel  
that what I am saying may have  
in it an element of truth*

(Broos 36)

Memory has undoubtedly become Ishiguro's hallmark. In the three and a half decades of his writing career, his main interests underwent little change. However, the emphasis and tone of the novels exhibit certain differences and shifts. As a conclusion to my paper, I shall discuss the dynamic evolution of Ishiguro's novels from the aspect of the memory theme, and summarize my findings on the description of the functioning of memory and mind.

The first novel, *A Pale View of Hills* plays very explicitly with the characteristics of a traumatized person. *An Artist of the Floating World* picks a theme from the previous novel, that of the disgraced intellect, and builds up the search for a compromise between past and present. Undeniably a milestone, *The Remains of the Day* keeps the concept, but places the story in a slightly less charged atmosphere of England. Nevertheless, the perplexed narrator attempts to come to terms with himself, his values and his present situation by revisiting events of his life. Based on the similarities, Lewis even call the novels "an informal trilogy" (*Kazuo Ishiguro* 133); that is why I analyze them together. In the second chapter I set out to explore the layered structure of the three novels' memory narrative. On the first level the narrators give an account of their past, attempting to find meaning and explanation to events. On the next level the reader must realize that the narrators omit an excessive number of events or misremember them, thus manipulate the past. Finally, by concealing so much of their life, the narratives reveal a high amount of information about the narrators and their past. By identifying three concepts which describe the dynamics of the narrative, I examine the structure of the memories, how my initial assumption of the threefold technique of confessing, concealing and revealing works.

First I analyze the time layers of the three narratives, calling it an embedded structure. Starting with the surface I conclude that the formal features of the narratives, the rigid division into sections and diary entries not only contradicts the content, but also creates false expectations in the reader. Then I examine the narratives' switches between time layers, when and how it happens, whether the narrator is able to pick up the lost thread. Still focusing on the analepses, I investigate their nature relying on Genette's typology of narrative discourse. A typical feature of the narratives is the postponement of certain recollections (completing analepses of the internal homodiegetic category). The nature of the memories the narrators only reluctantly present after much delay and long detours is usually trying, painful or embarrassing for some reason. Additionally, the narrative frequently returns to certain memories (repeating analepses) to provide further details and an interpretation with hindsight, to add emphasis by calling them turning points, but also to correct and modify some characteristics that were misremembered previously, such as the date or the participants of an event. This leads to confusion, and the reader's suspicion of the narrator's memory and motivation. Furthermore, by returning the certain events, the narrator can distract attention from others, and leave some recollections unfinished or omit them completely. This naturally leads to the analysis of the gaps.

In the second part of the chapter I concentrate on the omissions of the narratives. Based on Escher's *Mosaic II*, I suggest that by examining the gaps of the narratives, new pieces of information, new stories and hints to the narrator's emotional status can be discovered. Analysing the absence of Etsuko's pre-war and wartime memories and using theories of trauma narrative, it can be concluded that experiencing the traumatic event does not result in comprehending, "knowing" it. This paradox creates a strong tension in the narrative, clearly discernible in the novels, especially in Etsuko's and Ono's stories. However, it cannot be concluded with certainty that they are unable to "know". The narrators make efforts to suppress certain memories, though these poignant avoidances are telling signs that raise suspicion. As an additional element to the analysis of trauma narratives, I examine the visual images in the narratives. Furthermore, I analyze the omissions from other aspects as well, concluding that the absence of certain characters (mainly family members) and life experiences, such as love or sexuality, also creates gaps, covering emotional turmoil. The gaps are so extensive that it is a logical step to take a closer look at the (very few) characters presented in the narratives whether they provide more information on the narrators.

Lastly, using Hofstadter's *Strange Loop* concept, I argue that the recollections take on a spiral-like structure that enables the narrators to express their deepest thoughts and anxieties. The idea can be visually represented by Escher's *Print Gallery*. The three novels are slightly different in respect of the focus on the spiral phenomenon. Etsuko ponders on the past, and creates or reshapes a character, Sachiko, to fit her needs. Ono, by repeating the father's and former teacher's oppressive behaviour, becomes an agent in the "transfer of violence" (Sim, *Kazuo Ishiguro* 37). After suffering the father's arrogance and the teacher's hostility, he readily takes up their role to exert the same behaviour on his own pupils and family. Thus he completes his own loop and his part in the spiral of the oppressive hierarchy system. For Stevens the loop is not quite complete yet, but he can already feel it looming in his near future. The figure of the father, as a role model has immense impact on him as a professional example to surpass. However, he also witnesses the humiliating fall of the perfect butler, described with the same language he uses to comment on his mistakes in the narrative present, thus forming part of the spiral. The uncertainty in the source of certain phrases is a recurring element in all three narratives. Shifting and interchangeability of situations and people create a sense of evasiveness, and strengthens the *Strange Loop* phenomenon. It is no longer important who said something. Life events, as history, repeat themselves in every generation.

Ishiguro complained in numerous interviews about his frustration at being categorized as the exotic Oriental writer or literary specialist of Japan. Even though *The Remains of the Day* was not set in Japan, but 20<sup>th</sup>-century England, reviewers and readers alike still searched for elements of Japanese culture and hints of samurai traditions. With his next novel he intended to take a sharp turn and to free himself of the stereotypes. *The Unconsoled* (1995) was undoubtedly a puzzling novel with ambiguous reception. Reactions varied from outcries such as "inventing its own category of badness" (Wood, "Ishiguro's Machine for Self-Humiliation") to enthusiastic applause.

Since this novel is so unique among Ishiguro's works, I focus only on *The Unconsoled* in the next chapter. Based on Hofstadter's *Strange Loop* idea I identify three areas to analyze, almost as the three dimensions of a story: space, time and characters. First I examine spatial loops, where distances shrink and lengthen according to Ryder, the narrator's needs, passages open up and lead back to the story's central location, the hotel, thus creating loops; and circular tracks the narrator seems to follow. I suggest that another spatial loop forms overarching time, when places from earlier and childhood memories seem to merge into the narrator's present location. Time shows a similar flexibility, usually

in Ryder's favour, allowing him to wander far and meet various people, unnoticed by others waiting for him. Additionally, vivid childhood memories intrude every now and then in his daily routine, forcing him to relive traumatic experiences with his parents. Finally, I examine the numerous characters, what role they play in the story and the narrator's life, and propose another, more intricate type of strange loops. Some male characters function as his doubles; the Ghosts of Ryder Past, a lonely little boy, a talented young man not recognized by his parents; the Present, a discredited musician; and the Future, an abandoned alcoholic conductor. The first two characters can be interpreted as embodiments of his memories, the latter two as his fears. Additionally, the narration depicts a number of dysfunctional relationships, parent-child and man-woman, all resembling some stages in the narrator's life. Finally, a group of characters I call shadow characters since their only *raison d'être* seems to be to encourage, sooth or punish and humiliate Ryder. As shown, the narrative is multilayered and highly complex, one struggles to interpret it in the framework of reality. Therefore a number of critics suggested a dream scenario and Freud's dream concept. Along this line yet taking a step further I propose that what one sees is in fact the depiction of a single mind and its workings. The characters, though seemingly numerous and different, are not individuals but composites of "real" images, memories, fears and possibilities. The location, time, characters form strange loops but the entire work can be interpreted as a highly complex strange loop: a human mind.

After the puzzlement around *The Unconsoled*, the next novel was eagerly awaited; and *When We Were Orphans* (2000) seems to return to calmer and less confusing territories, similarly to the following work, *Never Let Me Go* (2005). I started the analysis of the third group of novels and memory patterns with the examination of form and genre. The parallel presence of elements typical for various genres creates the possibility of a multilayered interpretation. However, the genre-based expectations are emptied and deformed, and I suggest that this is largely performed by the power of memory and its workings in both narrators' story. The thorough examination of these genres' appearance in the novels leads me to the question of the effect of memory and what role it plays in the narrators' life. The memories, and the fact that they are recorded are of crucial importance in their present life. Already knowing the habit of Ishiguro's narrators, and the normal working of the mind that it manipulates memories consciously and unconsciously, it is natural to ask the question how much retrograde these memories are. I identify the concept with Hofstadter's *Tangled Hierarchies* and illustrate the idea with Escher's *Drawing*

*Hands* when suggesting that the adult narrators might recreate or even create memories that meet their needs to provide consolation for their current situation. Therefore memory is a twofold power; first it destroys genre stereotypes and the narrators' expectations regarding their past and future, and second it creates a narrative. In this process the manipulation of time is a helpful tool, I examine the complicated time structure of both novels, suggesting that, in a way similar to *The Unconsoled*, time and the handling of time create Strange Loops that enable the narrators to hide and diminish events.

I set out to examine the structure of memories in Ishiguro's novels. By analysing them in great detail I noticed some traits and tendencies I would like to briefly turn to two of these before my closing remarks to this paper.

### **Overarching themes**

But for those like us, our fate is to face the world as orphans, chasing through long years the shadows of vanished parents. (*When We Were Orphans* 313)

The quotation is from the ending of *When We were Orphans*, Christopher Banks reflecting on Sarah Hemmings' letter. It also incorporates two critical themes that are present in all novels by Kazuo Ishiguro, and have close underlying connection with the act of remembering. The first is "the shadow of the missing parents," the void left by missing parents, and also children and family.

The parents are always problematic in Ishiguro's universe. Their loss is always traumatic, the narrators have never really managed to process the issue. Etsuko's parents probably became victims of the war or the atomic bomb. Ono abandoned the tyrannical father and the subversive mother and never even mentions them again. Despite his admiration Stevens is never at ease about his father as already discussed; and the absolute absence of the mother suggests a troubled family life. Ryder's parents never acknowledge him; and all parent-child relationships in the narrative are loaded with problems (Gustav and Sophie; Boris and Ryder; Hoffman and Stephan). Christopher lost his parents at an early age, and finding the mother decades later is a traumatic experience, as she does not recognise him. Kathy and her friends, being clones, do not have parents. At the end of his narrative, Christopher concludes about Sarah Hemmings and himself that they must go through life without their parents, "[t]here is nothing for it but to try and see through our missions to the end, as best we can, for until we do so, we will be permitted no calm" (*When We Were Orphans* 313).

But looking at Ishiguro's narrators, this is true for all of them. Parents abandon children both physically and emotionally. The offsprings either chase or flee the "shadows of vanished parents". The parents are either present in an extraordinary proportion in their memories (Ryder and Christopher), or are deleted almost entirely, but the gaps their absence leave behind in the narrators' life and narrative are even larger.

The second overarching theme is the act of travelling, being on a journey, "chasing" something. The majority of Ishiguro's characters, Ono of *The Artist of the Floating World* being the only exception, travel during the course of the narrative or have travelled and that shaped their life. Etsuko lives in England, but leaving Japan was a dramatic change; and in her memories she returns to her abandoned homeland. Stevens's narrative could seem to be a travel journal, similarly to Christopher Banks. Moreover, Christopher's memories are all connected to Shanghai, even when physically absent, his mind might have never left the city. Ryder's entire life is about travelling, not finding a home, as discussed, he probably does not want (or dare) to settle down. For Kathy life as a carer is about constant travelling, he never spends more than a few nights at the same place. Finally, Axl and Beatrice of *The Buried Giant* go on a journey because of some hazy, nagging feeling that they need to do it, "There's a journey we must go on, and no more delay" (*The Buried Giant* 19). Remembering, the backward movement in time, is usually accompanied by a movement in space. The act of travelling takes the narrators away from the well-known, and provides opportunity to turn inward and to memories, nostalgia. On the other hand, in a journey there is the sense of desire to get to somewhere. In an interview Ishiguro speaks about the Portuguese word 'saudade', an expression that does not really translate into any other language. It expresses home sickness, a deep longing, the feeling of melancholy; some say an inherent element of the Portuguese and Brazilian spirit. Ishiguro explains it as "a home sickness for a home you've never had" (Durand).

### **New horizons**

In the first chapter, I discussed Ishiguro's connection to Japan, the influence of his origins on his writing, especially at the early phase of his career. Now in the concluding chapter I would like to briefly reflect on his stance on the global stage. Ishiguro's works have been translated into several languages. Although they are not in the scope of this paper, it is worth mentioning that he published several short stories (six stories separately scattered throughout his writing career; and a collection of five short stories *Nocturnes: Five Stories of Music and Nightfall*, published in 2009), and four screenplays. He has a long standing

friendship with jazz singer, Stacey Kent whom he wrote lyrics to several songs<sup>26</sup>. Ishiguro's later novels, most notably *Never Let Me Go* and *The Buried Giant*, reached new audiences by borrowing tropes from popular genres like science fiction or fantasy. The echo of the discussions among fans reverberated in the sphere of critics and academia, and this can be expected to be a tendency. Ishiguro has long achieved his initial ambition to write for an international public about universal themes.

Before the closing remarks, I would like to close another loop and in doing so, open a new one. In the Introduction I threw a brief glimpse to memory research and ù sciences, placing literature among these. In this spirit, where it was relevant, and secondary literature or my own limited scientific knowledge alerted me of the possibility, I searched for a concept's equivalent in mathematics or physics, like the Riemann curvature or the Einstein–Rosen bridge, and included a definition or explanation in the text. The fact that there are connecting points demonstrates that there are overlapping territories in literature and science, as I already mentioned, and some call for more cooperation between literature and cognitive sciences. These explorations do not, by any means, substitute literary interpretation, but they open up new horizons in research and can help expanding our understanding of the mind. Ishiguro's works, due to their elusive structure, could serve as a basis of research. When I was working on and reviewing Chapter 3, I realized that *The Unconsoled* is perhaps the most complex and promising novel for analyzing from a cognitive aspect. My threefold system of the loops can be further developed and refined, and perhaps compared to findings about the working of memory.

### **Closing remarks – the triangle**

I read Cavell's sentence about the first-person narrative, confession and concealing relatively early in the research period; and I instantly decided to incorporate it as the motto of this paper since it stated one of the core concepts of my thesis so clearly and concisely. Later on I came across another quotation that fit one of the chapters, then I soon found myself consciously looking for phrases that could stand at the beginning of chapters. The mottos are essential parts of the paper, sometimes summarizing, sometimes complementing and reflecting on the content of the main text.

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<sup>26</sup> “The Ice Hotel”, “I Wish I Could Go Travelling Again”, “Breakfast on the Morning Tram” and “So Romantic” on the album *Breakfast on the Morning Tram* (2007); and “The Summer We Crossed Europe In the Rain”, “Waiter, Oh Waiter” and “The Changing Lights” on the album *The Changing Lights* (2013).

Finally, in the closing remarks I return to Escher. In Chapter 4 I illustrated a memory pattern with his lithograph *Drawing Hands*, which is described by the mathematician Bruno Ernst, Escher's contemporary and friend, as follows.

If a hand is drawing a hand and if, at the same time, this second hand is busy drawing the first hand also, and if this is illustrated on piece of paper fixed to a drawing board with thumb tacks . . . and if the whole thing is then drawn again, we may well describe it as a sort of superdeception.

Drawing is indeed deception. We are being persuaded that we are looking at a three-dimensional world, whereas the drawing paper is merely two-dimensional. Escher regarded this as a conflict situation and he tried to show this very closely in a number of prints (Ernst 30)

If exchanging the verb 'draw' for 'write', the short text about Escher may well become Ishiguro's *ars poetica*. If putting 'remember' instead of 'draw', the essence of the novels comes to light. Remembering is indeed deception. The novels closely follow the narrators' process of remembering. By analysing their complex structure I attempted to find order in chaos, and by linking them to Hofstadter's concepts I intended to show the fundamental connection between the process of thinking and the literary depiction of remembering. Escher's world may be impossible in the everyday physical reality, but it can be valid and real the intriguing world of abstract ideas and the human mind.

Hofstadter wrote in his introductory chapter that when writing *GEB* he soon realized that "Gödel, Escher and Bach were only shadows cast in different directions by some central solid essence" (Hofstadter, *Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid* 26). It is my belief that Ishiguro is another brilliant shadow cast in yet another direction.

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## APPENDIX 1

As I could not find any relevant source for the lyrics, and Ms Kent's agent has not answered my inquiry, this is my transcript of the lyrics.

### **Breakfast on the Morning Tram**

Stacey Kent, *Breakfast on the Morning Tram*, Blue Note Records, 2007

Lyrics by Kazuo Ishiguro

So here you are in this city  
With a shattered heart, it seems  
Though when you arrived you thought you'd have  
The holiday of your dreams  
You'd cry yourself to sleep if you could  
But you've been awake all night  
Well here's something that you need to do  
At the first hint of morning light  
Walk right across the deserted city  
To the Boulevard Amsterdam  
And wait there  
For what the citizens here  
Refer to as the Breakfast Tram  
Climb on board  
You'll soon manage  
To find at the far end of the carriage  
The most wonderful buffet  
There's everything you'd want to eat  
You can take a feast back to your seat  
Whatever you can fit onto your tray  
And the mist on the windows will start to fade  
As the sun climbs higher in the sky  
And you can sit back with your café au lait  
While outside the waking city clatters by  
So things didn't quite meet expectations  
But you're bound to conclude upon reflection  
There's no reason you should give a damn  
Just treat yourself  
To a cinnamon pancake  
Very soon you'll forget your heartache  
When you have breakfast on the morning tram  
It'll be quite quiet when you first get on

But as that tram keeps moving along  
It'll fill with people starting on their day  
They'll be laughing and joking as they eat  
They'll be passing plates along the seats  
Your night of heartache will soon seem far away  
And even though you're a stranger  
They'll make you feel  
Right at home  
They'll be offering to refill your coffee  
They won't have you sitting there alone  
They've seen many others just like you  
And each one of them has had it happen too  
So just enjoy your scrambled eggs and ham  
Treat yourself  
To a cinnamon pancake  
Very soon you'll forget your heartache  
When you have breakfast on the morning tram  
And even though you're a stranger  
They'll make you feel  
Right at home  
They'll be offering to refill your coffee  
They won't have you sitting there alone  
'Cause they've seen many others just like you  
And each one of them has had it happen too  
So just enjoy your fresh croissant and jam  
And don't neglect the Belgian waffles  
You'll soon forget your troubles  
When you have breakfast on the morning tram

## APPENDIX 2

The images are used with the kind permission of the M. C. Escher Foundation, correspondence and letter of permission attached before the images.

### **List of images:**

*Dream*, woodcut, 1935

*Drawing Hands*, lithograph, 1948

*Relativity*, lithograph, 1953

*Print Gallery*, lithograph, 1956

*Mosaic II*, 1957

*Belvedere*, lithograph, 1958

*Waterfall*, lithograph, 1961

*Sketch*, date unknown

Dabis Melinda <melinda@dabis.hu>

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## Request for using images in PhD paper

3 messages

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Dabis Melinda <melinda@dabis.hu>

Mon, Nov 21, 2016 at 9:59 AM

To: mark@mcescher.com

Dear Mr Veldhuijsen,

I'm a PhD student at PPCU, Hungary, specializing in contemporary English literature. In my dissertation I research memory patterns in contemporary British writer Ishiguro's works and use some Escher's pictures as illustrations (please see the list below). I would like to include these pictures in my dissertation paper, and I would like to obtain a permission to do so. I would be very glad if I could include them, as they are inherent part of my analysis. The paper will not be published or sold, the regulations on doctoral papers apply. Should you need any further details, please let me know.

Best regards,

Melinda Dabis

List of images:

Relativity

Print Gallery

Waterfall

Drawing hands

Belvedere

Dream

Mosaic II

Sketch (Escher's interpretation of Prof. Sparenberg's idea; IN: Bruno Ernst, The Magic Mirror of M. C. Escher, Taschen, 2007, page 83)

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Margareth Verbakel <margareth@mcescher.com>

Fri, Dec 2, 2016 at 12:13 PM

To: melinda@dabis.hu

Dear Melinda,

Thank you for your e-mail of the 21<sup>st</sup> of November.

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Sincerely,

Margareth Verbakel

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**Van:** Mark Veldhuysen [mailto:[mark@mcescher.com](mailto:mark@mcescher.com)]

**Verzonden:** maandag 21 november 2016 10:12

**Aan:** 'Margareth Verbakel'

**Onderwerp:** FW: Request for using images in PhD paper

**Van:** Dabis Melinda [mailto:[melinda@dabis.hu](mailto:melinda@dabis.hu)]

**Verzonden:** maandag 21 november 2016 09:59

**Aan:** [mark@mcescher.com](mailto:mark@mcescher.com)

**Onderwerp:** Request for using images in PhD paper

[Quoted text hidden]

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**Dabis Melinda** <[melinda@dabis.hu](mailto:melinda@dabis.hu)>

Fri, Dec 2, 2016 at 2:48 PM

To: Margareth Verbakel <[margareth@mcescher.com](mailto:margareth@mcescher.com)>

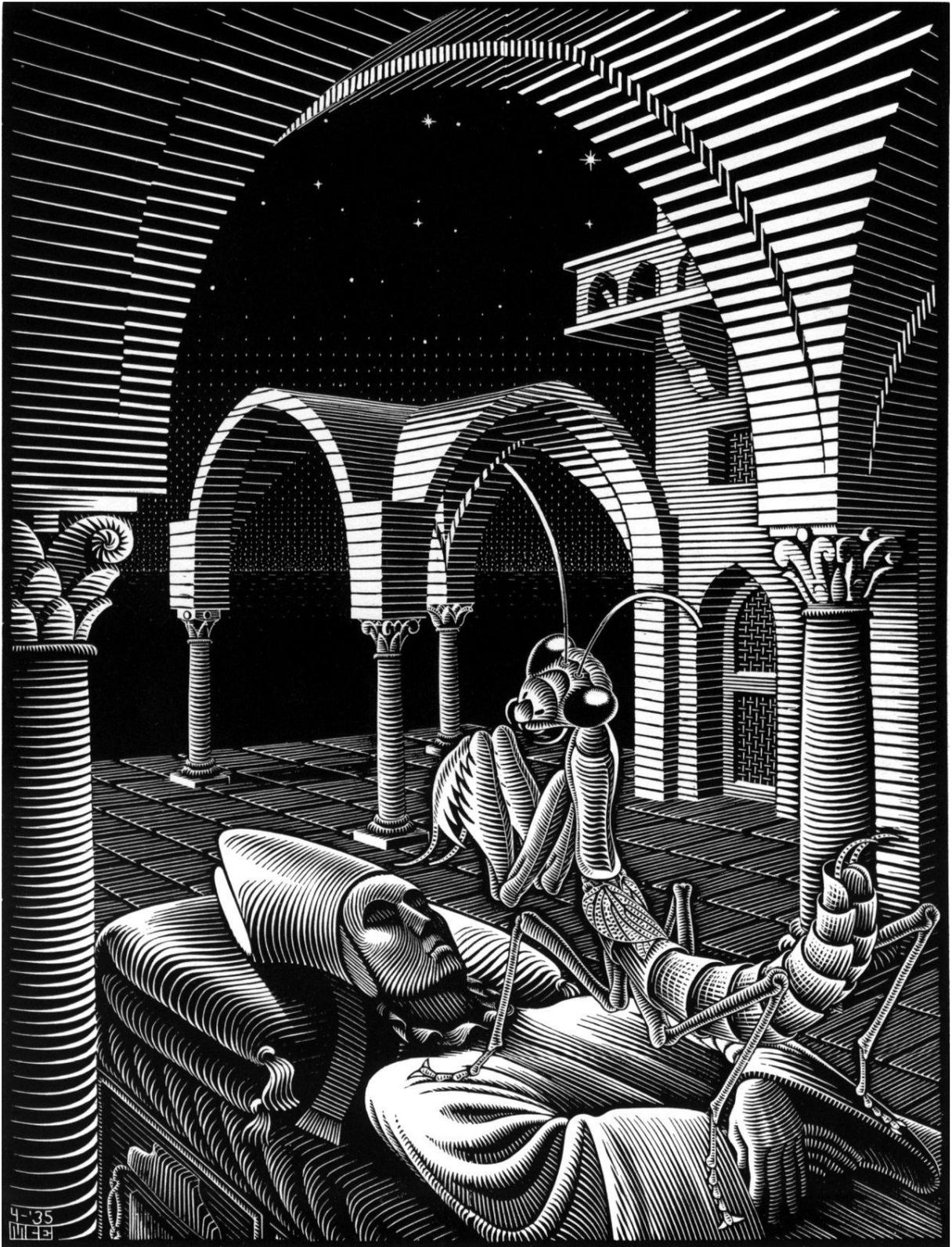
Dear Margareth,

thank you for your answer. Yes, I agree with the conditions and I will use the images in my dissertation accordingly.

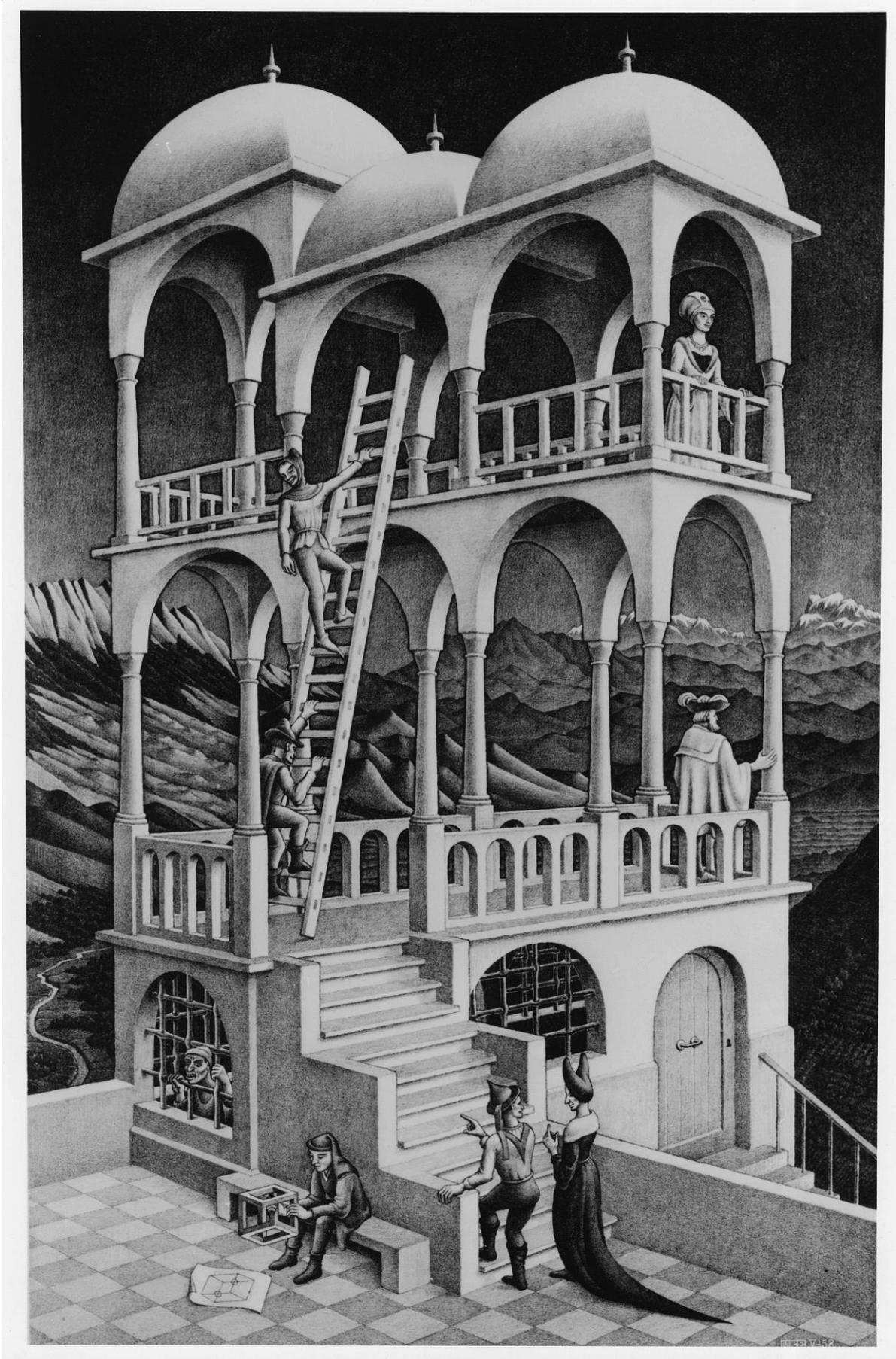
Kind regards,

Melinda Dabis

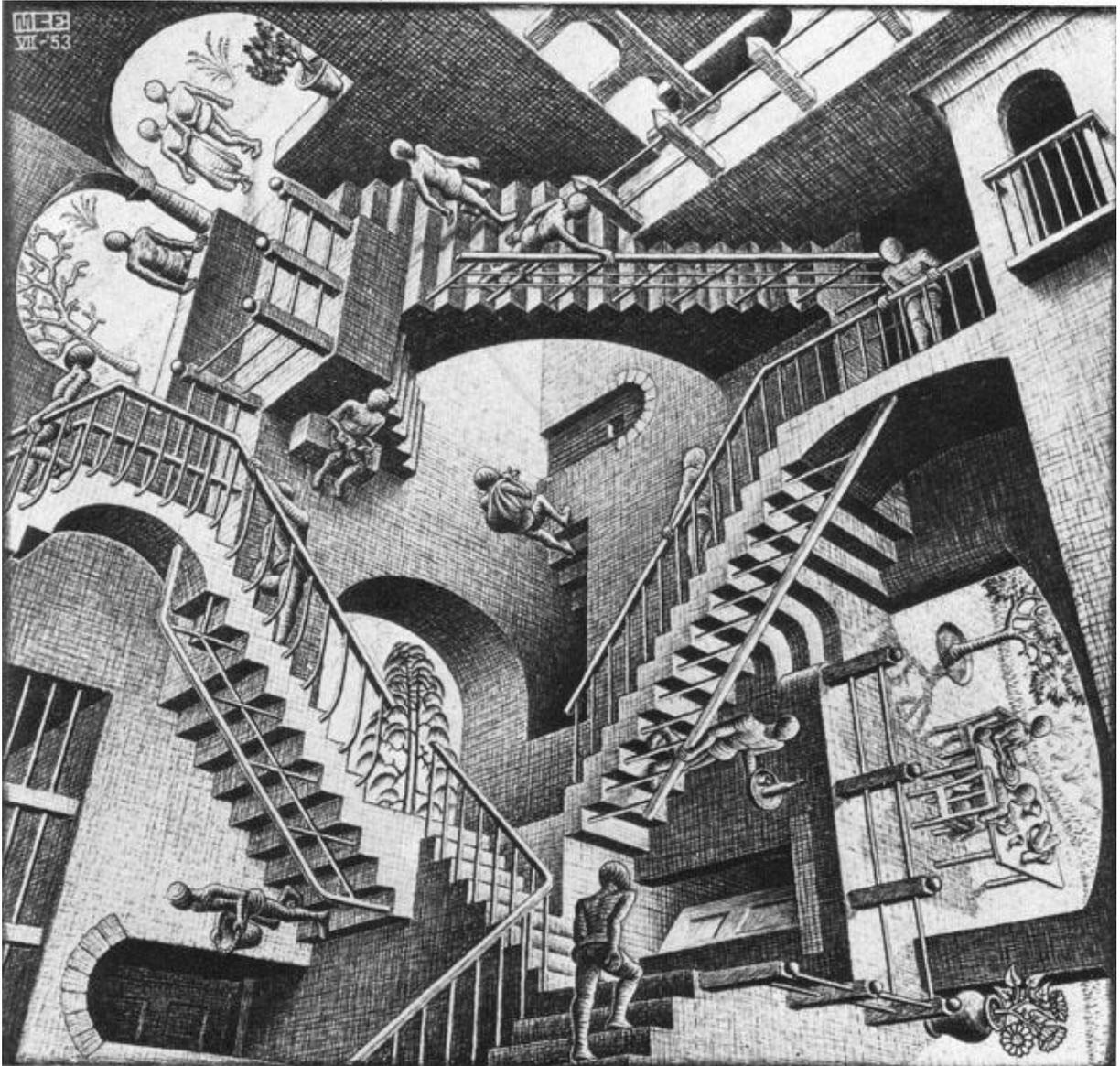
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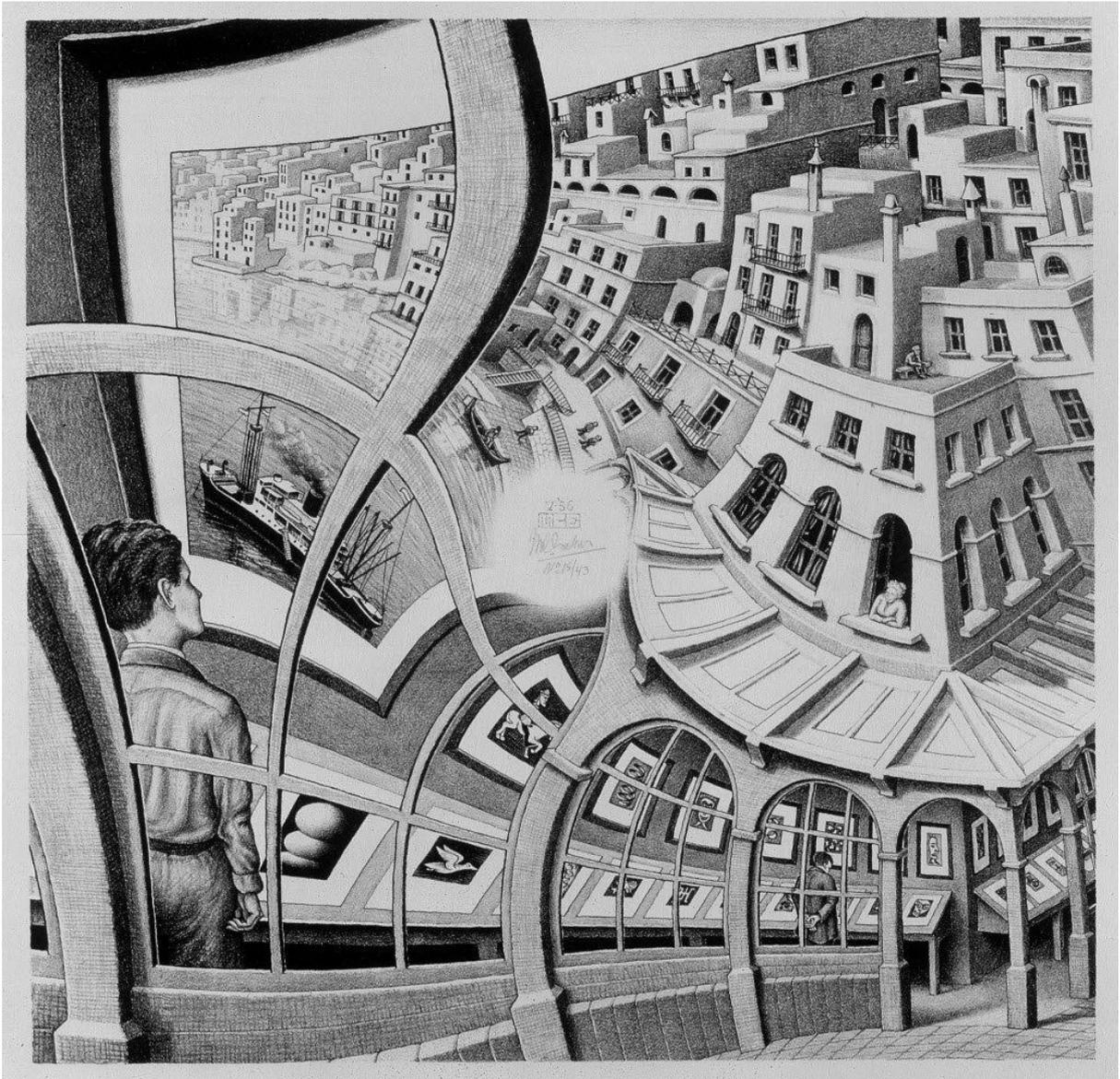
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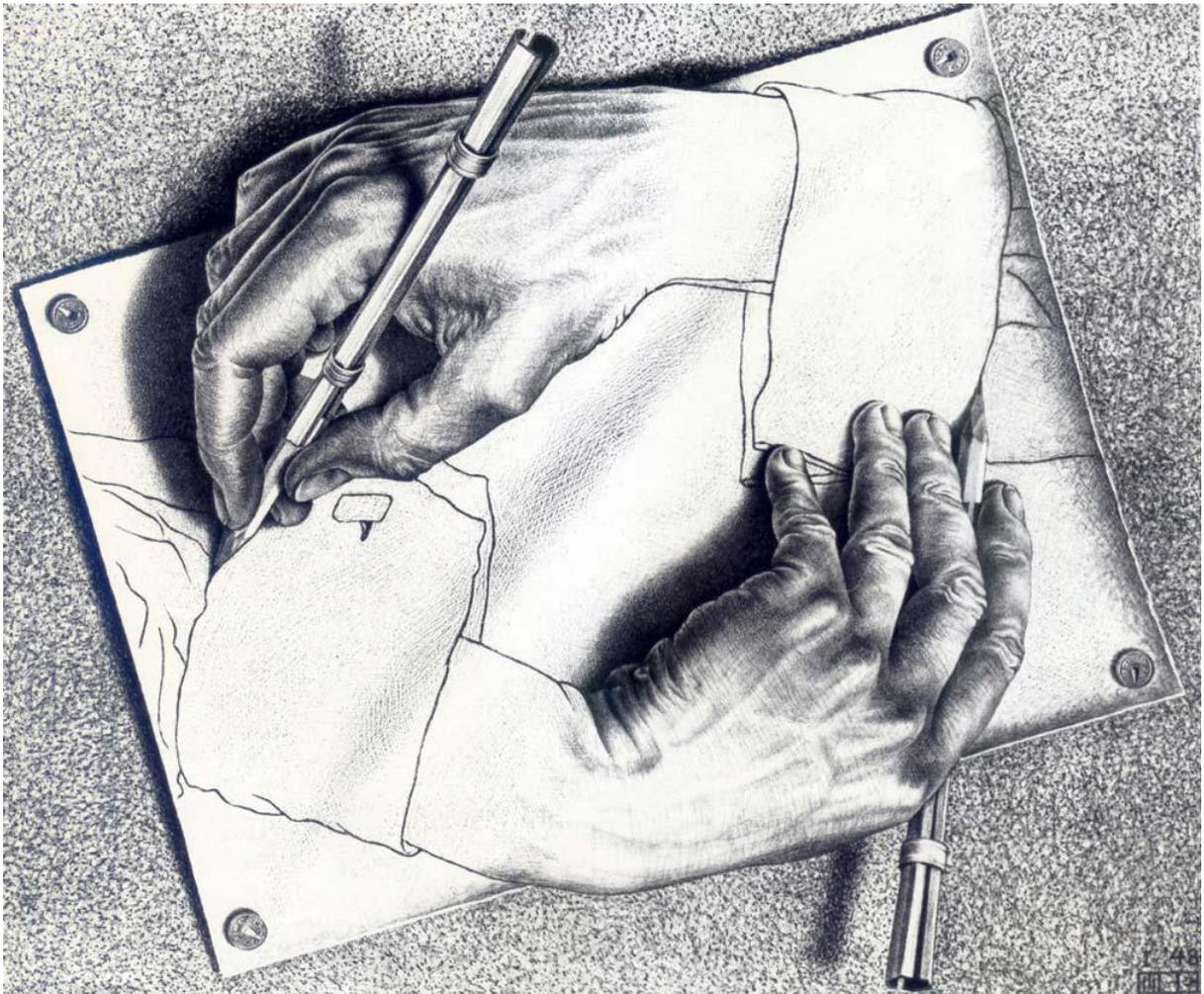
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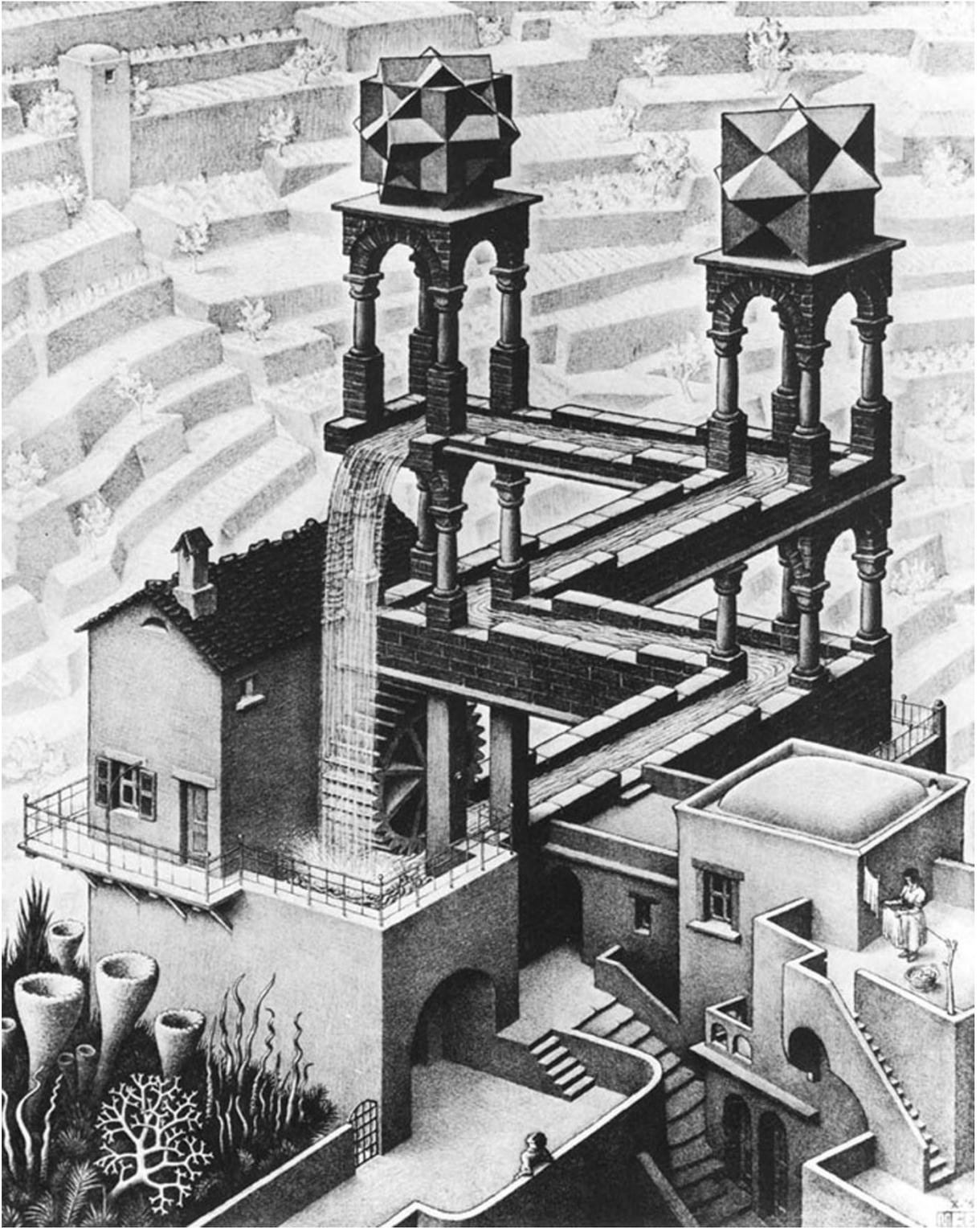
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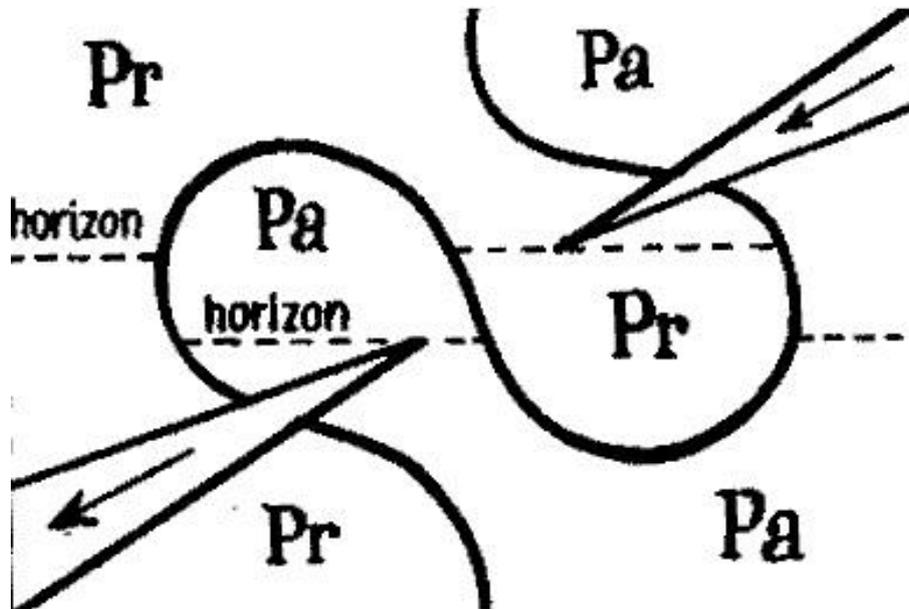
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## ÖSSZEFOGLALÓ

A japán származású brit kortárs író, Kazuo Ishiguro egyik fő témája az emlékezés. Doktori disszertációmban hat regényét vizsgálom a memória, az emlékezés és az emlékek manipulálhatóságának szempontjából. Kutatásaim során az emlékek kavalkádjában keresek rendszert, mikor és mi módon fedik el vagy módosítják a narrátorok történetük részleteit, és ezzel hogyan képesek manipulálni az események értelmezését.

Két másik alkotó művére támaszkodva, illetve illusztrációként használva őket mutatom be Ishiguro regényeiben az elbeszélők emlékezéseinek mintázatait: M. C. Escher és Douglas R. Hofstadter elképzelései megragadhatóvá teszik az emlékek törékeny szerkezetét. M. C. Escher (1898—1972) holland művész, elsősorban optikai illúziókat ábrázoló litográfiáiról ismert. Disszertációmban az emlékezési folyamatok bemutatására, illetve magyarázatára és alátámasztására választottam Escher-litográfiákat, amelyek szemmel is láthatóvá teszik az emlékek bonyolult hálójának szerkezetét és rendezőelvét. Douglas R. Hofstadter (1945–) kognitív tudományokkal foglalkozó amerikai professzor, *Gödel, Escher, Bach* című művében paradoxonokat, matematikai és rekurzív rendszereket elemezve vizsgálja az „Én” fogalmát, az önmagáról gondolkodni képes tudat működését. Bizonyos megfigyelései és törvényei, mint a furcsa hurok vagy a beágyazott történetek, jól alkalmazhatók Ishiguro elbeszélőinek emlékezésfolyamára, egy-egy mintázat jól leírható Hofstadter elméletei segítségével.

Központi kérdésem nem a miért, elsősorban nem az okát kutatom ennek a jelenségnek, hanem a folyamatok mikéntjére keresem a választ, hogyan tréfálhatja meg az elme és az emlékezet az embert, milyen szerkezeteket hozhat létre. Feltételezésem szerint az első három regényben a múlt igazolására szolgál, a *The Unconsoled* esetében helyszínné és valódi környezetté válik, az emlékek testet öltve önálló, vagy önállóknak tűnő életre kelnek, két következő művében pedig valóságos teremtményé válik.

## ABSTRACT

Memory is a major theme in contemporary British writer Kazuo Ishiguro's novels. In my doctoral dissertation I analyze six of his novels from the aspects of memory, remembering and shaping of memories and the past. I search for order in the chaos of memories, when and how the narrators conceal or modify parts of their history, and how the narrative technique enables the manipulation of interpreting events.

I utilize the concepts of the American cognitive theorist, Douglas R. Hofstadter as described in his work *Gödel, Escher, Bach*. A central concept that I apply in analysis is the strange loop, a recursive system. To illustrate and explain the memory patterns I also use works of M. C. Escher. His lithographs depict optical illusions and structures with impossible geometry.

My central question is how the first person narrators can manipulate the events when they build elaborate narrative structures and constantly move between time layers. I propose that in the first three novels the memories are manipulated to reshape and justify the past is just; whereas in *The Unconsoled* memory becomes external, the memories take shape, and in the subsequent two novels memory becomes a creating force for the person.