

Guilt and Responsibility in the Early Novels of Kazuo Ishiguro

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DECLARATION

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I hereby declare that the research embodied in the present dissertation titled, '**Guilt and Responsibility in the Early Novels of Kazuo Ishiguro**' is carried out under the supervision of **Prof. Saradindu Bhattacharya**, Department of English, School of Humanities, University of Hyderabad, Hyderabad, for the degree of Master of Philosophy. It is my original work and to the best of my knowledge no part of this dissertation has been submitted for the award of any research degree or diploma at any university.

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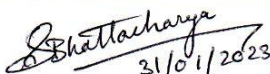
CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation titled '**Guilt and Responsibility in the Early Novels of Kazuo Ishiguro**', submitted by Snigdha Mishra bearing registration number 20HEHL02 for the degree of Master of Philosophy in Department of English, School of Humanities is a bona fide work carried out under the ordinances of University of Hyderabad. This thesis is free from plagiarism and has not been submitted previously in part or in full to this or any other university or institution for the award of any degree or diploma.

Parts of this dissertation have been presented as a paper titled "Ishiguro's 'Othered' Worlds: Guilt in the Diasporic Confessional" at the Annual Asian Literature in Motion Conference, "JAPANESE DIASPORIC WRITERS: STRADDLING HAIKU AND ZEN" organised by Rising Asia Foundation and Rising Asia Journal on 17th November 2022.

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Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction	7
Chapter 2 Guilt: Narration and Unreliability	34
I: Contrast and Contradiction: Functions of the Narrator	37
II: Explanation and Justification	49
Chapter 3 Responsibility: Character and Agency	69
Chapter 4 Conclusion	95
Bibliography	99

Chapter 1: Introduction

This thesis is a study of the related themes of “guilt” and “responsibility” in the first three novels of Kazuo Ishiguro via a close textual analysis of the narrative elements in the texts within the broader framework of confessional writing. This constitutes an examination of the plot for comparisons between the *story* and *discourse*, and what such an inquiry yields with respect to the construction of the aforementioned themes in/through the process of narration. Other narrative elements under scrutiny include, but are not limited to, narrative time, narratorial speech acts and dialogue; the autodiegetic narrators, and the aspects of voice, focalisation, distance and reliability that govern them. I will also attempt an in-depth analysis of how the themes become repetitive motifs in the texts and lend structural value in the formal framework of *telling* vis-a-vis their role as narrative cues and triggers.

In this introductory chapter, I offer a general overview of Kazuo Ishiguro’s works with particular emphasis on *A Pale View of Hills* (1982), *An Artist of the Floating World* (1986) and *The Remains of the Day* (1989), which function as my primary texts for this study. I also trace the trajectory of modern confessional writing and look into the characteristics that shape this genre as a narrative mode. Establishing why my chosen primary texts operate within this literary/generic framework, I provide a central argument for the project, followed by my research methodology and the rationale for this project. This leads to an extensive survey of the existing scholarship on the author and the primary texts. The last section is devoted to a brief outline of the chapters that constitute my thesis.

General Overview

Brian F. Shaffer speaks of Ishiguro's early novels as "each narrated in the first person by protagonists who have something to hide, from themselves no less than from their readers, yet who reconstruct their past failures and misplaced loyalties nostalgically, even elegiacally" (7). In his first three works, *A Pale View of Hills* (1982), *An Artist of the Floating World* (1986) and *The Remains of the Day* (1989), individuals past their prime reminisce about bygone events in their life and try to come to terms with the role they played in them. It is an attempt at assimilation that is narratively complex because it takes place during the course of the narration and in front of an audience. Despite the differences in action and setting, these novels share a common thematic concern with memory which also informs the formal narrative modes they employ. Recognising them as "novels written by a young person beginning in his mid-twenties who thought about how people retraced their lives as they faced its end looming", Ishiguro himself notes that his first three novels can be considered a trilogy (Wong, *Kazuo Ishiguro* vii.).

Born in Nagasaki in 1954, Ishiguro moved to Britain with his family in 1960 when he was six years old. In England, he attended the prestigious creative writing MA programme at the University of East Anglia with fellow writers Angela Carter and Malcolm Bradbury, and his thesis from the programme went on to become his first novel, *A Pale View of Hills* (1982). Although he left Japan at a very young age, Ishiguro attributes characteristics of his writing to growing up in a Japanese household, which helped distinguish his perspective from his British peers. The slightly detached nature of his narrators comes from "a long tradition in Japanese art towards a surface calm and surface restraint" – when tied down to an unassuming surface plane, feelings and emotions can often have a bigger impact, a more fervent effect (Gompertz 17). Although Japan ceases to be the setting of his novels after the first two books, the outward

sparsity of his language remains a prominent feature in his works. In his *The Modern British Novel*, Malcolm Bradbury notes that it is the details that are not revealed that matter in Ishiguro's works and defines this approach of indirection as "Ishiguro's aesthetic invention" (424). In his introduction to *The Remains of the Day*, Salman Rushdie writes, "Just below the understatement of the novel's surface is a turbulence as immense as it is slow" (viii). Published in 1989, it was *The Remains of the Day*, an aged butler's account of an expedition across the English countryside which won Ishiguro the Man Booker Prize (he has been nominated for four of his other works as well). The novel explores the memories of an unreliable narrator as he dwells on love, loss and what it means to have lived a dignified life while coping with the demands of his dying profession.

The trope of looking back and sifting through memories is a common narrative technique in Ishiguro, especially coupled with his use of character-narration (except *The Buried Giant* (2015), all of Ishiguro's novels are written in the first person by a character narrator) and this is continued in his next few novels *When We Were Orphans* (2000) and *Never Let Me Go* (2005) as well; both the novels see him experimenting with different genres adopted around this formal framework of remembrance. *When We Were Orphans* is Ishiguro's first foray into detective fiction and is the story of Christopher Banks, whose childhood in Beijing is brought to an abrupt halt when his parents suddenly go missing. The novel traverses Banks's memories of his childhood and his return to Beijing as an adult detective attempting to find answers to the long-standing enigma of his parents' abduction.

Childhood, guardianship and the fallible nature of memory continue to feature as prominent themes in his next novel, *Never Let Me Go*, despite the novel's significant shift in genre. Narrated by the protagonist Kathy H, *Never Let Me Go* is the story of Hailsham, a special

school for children who have been brought into the world for the purpose of donating their organs. Notwithstanding its speculative nature, there is little marked difference with Ishiguro's earlier works when it comes to the narrative mode— the story unfolds as an adult Kathy recounts her memories of growing up at Hailsham with fellow donors Tommy and Ruth. Ishiguro's latest novel *Klara and the Sun* (2021), is his second contribution to dystopian science fiction. Narrated by Klara, an Artificial Friend (AF), it tells the story of a future where children are genetically “lifted” and can choose humanoid androids as caretakers/companions. In both of his science fiction ventures, Ishiguro's focus is less on the impact of technological development on humankind and more on the ethical considerations of building something increasingly human in the name of advancement— one that can match humans in terms of emotions and intellect, and thus cater to human needs best, but this precise emotional and intellectual capacity is disregarded when it is self-serving. In other words, the perspective is that of the thinking-feeling *humanlike* and what it means for them when human emotions and human life are selfishly privileged over theirs. In her review of *Klara and the Sun* for *The New York Times*, Radhika Jones notes this point of similarity with Ishiguro's earlier works, “Ishiguro gives voice to: not the human, but the clone, not the lord, but the servant ... “when Klara says, “I have my memories to go through and place in the right order,” it strikes the quintessential Ishiguro chord. So what if a machine says it?”.

In addition to his eight novels, Ishiguro has also written multiple screenplays and songs, and his 2009 work *Nocturnes: Five Stories of Music and Nightfall* is his sole collection of short stories. The five stories in the collection are linked by themes of music and unfulfilled potential as signified by the end of the day. Ishiguro was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 2017,

where he was introduced as a writer "who, in novels of great emotional force, has uncovered the abyss beneath our illusory sense of connection with the world" ("The Nobel Prize").

Critical Overview of Primary Texts

In this section, I examine Ishiguro's first three novels in some depth with special attention given to recurrent themes and how the narrative modes employed by Ishiguro interact with these themes. I also analyse how confessional writing as a framework suggests itself for the purpose of this study and establish a central argument for the thesis.

In *A Pale View of Hills*, the narrator, Etsuko, reminisces of a summer in Nagasaki when she was pregnant with her first child. The novel traverses her memories of the summer and her present life in England. Through Etsuko's memories we are introduced to the mother-daughter duo of Sachiko and Mariko, whose story bears an uncanny resemblance to how things unfolded between Etsuko and her own daughter Keiko. In Etsuko's memories Mariko is a lonely troubled child who was heartbroken to leave Japan when her mother eloped with her lover to America. During Etsuko's narration, Keiko, the daughter she bore during the summer is conspicuous by her absence— snippets of Etsuko's memory inform the reader of the difficulties Keiko faced when Etsuko came to England with her second husband and how she ultimately took her own life. This parallel trajectory is suggestive of the unreliable nature of Etsuko's narration, and it is hinted that it stems from projecting her guilt regarding Keiko's fate onto the characters of Sachiko and Mariko.

In *An Artist of the Floating World*, the artist Masuji Ono, a disgraced painter in the post-war society of Japan, looks back on his memories from before the Second World War. His narration flits between his memories of the past, which chart his growth into a renowned painter, and his engagement with his present circumstances, where his attempts to find a husband for his youngest daughter are continually thwarted. Through this narrative contrast, the novel explores the consequences of Ono's fall from grace as he becomes marked as an imperialist warmonger in

the aftermath of the war. As he scrutinises his role in a historic event, the narration becomes Ono's means of reconciling with this new self-image.

In *The Remains of the Day*, Stevens, an elderly Butler, undertakes an expedition across the English countryside to recruit a former colleague back into the services of Darlington Hall. Stevens's narration during the span of this journey is interspersed with memories of his glory days at Darlington Hall when the estate was still presided over by Lord Darlington. In remembering the most significant professional achievements of his life, Stevens is also forced to take into account the sacrifices he had to make on a personal level. He also becomes concerned with the wider implications of his lifelong devotion to Lord Darlington, especially in the light of the latter's antisemitic associations. *The Remains of the Day* reads as an old man's attempt at self-assurance as he looks back and tries to give meaning to his life.

In all three novels, the narrators do not offer a mere chronological history of their past but present remembrance as a means to understand and introspect. They also address a hypothetical narratee throughout, making the narration a performance of private experience. However, the self-image these narrators portray is vastly different from their image built by the readers from reading the same narrative (explored in the next chapter). On the one hand, we encounter the narrators proclaiming to be telling the truth – even believing it to a certain extent – while another “truth” emerges from the reading, and on the other hand, we observe the narrators' unyielding desire to tell. The need to understand the self contends with the impulse to tweak their image in front of an audience as the reasoning behind this desire to bare it all. Peter Brooks notes the importance of the confessional novel's “revelatory quality which may be self-accusatory or self-exculpatory, and is usually both” (82). He distinguishes the confessional from the memoir

for the implication in the former that there is an innate desire to “reveal something that is hidden, possibly shameful, and difficult to articulate” (82).

The very act of confession is predicated on “self-awareness and the search for self-knowledge”, even though the real nature of the feelings and motives that drive the self is always difficult to ascertain (Brooks 82). In fact, it is this elusiveness – the acute lack of singularity that characterises selfhood – which functions as the primary subject matter of most confessional narratives. The confessional as a literary mode constitutes a “subgenre of the novel in which problems of truth-telling and self-recognition, deception and self-deception” form prominent themes of discussion (Coetzee 252). The three Ishiguro novels under scrutiny make use of an intricate amalgamation of elaborate narrative techniques in which the narrators “reveal their painful pasts yet manage to shroud the implications of these pasts” (Wong, Kazuo Ishiguro’s *The Remains* 494). Thus, the autodiegetic narration in these works is not an objective recounting but a subjective reconstruction in the making.

But Ishiguro’s confessional narrators are self-deceptive in ways quite detectable to the reader. On Ishiguro’s first-person unreliable narration, Shaffer contends that Ishiguro’s narrators insist that they be taken seriously while simultaneously conditioning readers to second-guess their perceptions by reading between the lines (7). The novels work predominantly through inference and indirection. Reading these novels as confessionals becomes imperative because the confessional narrative, as opposed to a memoir, makes use of the formal structure of remembering in conjunction with the strategies of telling and retelling. This reinforces the “rhetoric of the genre which involves a kind of hide-and-seek where the reader finds what is confessed by the narrator to not be the whole or pertinent truth” (Brooks 82). This incongruence aids the storytelling by bringing into play the dichotomy of disclosure and concealment. It also

causes tension at the level of reading by providing ground for compelling moral questions and complex judgements from the reader, especially when it comes to narratives like Ishiguro's that try to unravel and dwell upon ethical considerations faced by their narrators.

The confessional model can be traced back to *Confessions* of St Augustine (397-398 CE), a three-fold confession where Augustine takes account of the sins of his youth and questions his faith, self and God. Its structure is momentous as it provides an early instance of the growth and "representation of a unique, unified subject (the confessing 'I') in dialogue with an other" (Tambling 12). Despite the long-standing existence of religious confessional writing like St Augustine's, in literature, confessional narrative as a literary genre acquires its thrust from Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Confessions* (1782), coinciding with the rise of romanticism (Brooks 82). Jo Gill sees Rousseau's magnum opus as an "early exemplar of the strategies of evasion, denial and self-conscious artfulness", which go on to form a characteristic trait in confessional writing (5). The emergence of confessional poetry during the 1950s and 1960s in the United States marks another branch of the genre with its intense focus on the personal- the psyche, personal trauma, mental illness, and sexuality are some oft-repeated themes in this literary tradition. In recent years, "the emergence of the confessional television talk show has been seen as both source and product of contemporary confessional culture" (Gill 6).

The major traits of confessional writing can be charted along two antithetical courses. One is the religious confession, which entails baring one's soul in the presence of God as a means to unburden one's conscience. On the other hand, confession in the legal sphere is treated as evidence or proof of crime. The treatment of the former could not be more different from the latter- while one absolves the confessor of their sins, the other's sole purpose is to assign culpability to the confessor. Although problems of authenticity exist in confession of any kind,

the focus on authenticity is significantly higher in the case of the latter, as one of its primary concerns is to decide on a punishment befitting the crime. In literature as a narrative mode, however, factual accuracy takes a back seat— authenticity, or the lack of it, serves more than an evidentiary purpose. Even if the subject matter of the confession is untrue, as a narrative mode that very knowledge serves as a statement on the character; it speaks volumes about the narrator's motives and the inner-workings of their psyche. This makes the confession a crucial mode of self-examination— not merely the means of an outlet for “irrepressible truth of prior lived experience, but a ritualised technique for producing truth” (Gill 4).

It is important to note that while confessional writing is based on a model of communication, as a narrative mode, its intricacy lies in the fact that it provides space for the writing of evasion and deception within it (Foster 2). According to Foster, the confessor's words suffer the same limitation as other men's, but with this difference— “where the usual confession arouses little interest, the writer's narrative says the truth is hard to tell and you must work to understand” (3). The complexity of the mode of confession arises out of the language used; the confessor or the subject I is not an “autonomous, centered being that founds the individual, but the depiction of the self, through the filter of the objectification of language (Foster 3). This has also been addressed by Coetzee, who finds it logical to employ deconstruction as a mode of analysis of confession because “the problem of the self's residence within language is so visible” (Coetzee 245). Unlike legal literature, since the aspect of guilt and responsibility in Ishiguro is hardly about indictment or acquittal, but rather the emergence of a self and a narrative in/through the telling, I wish to closely examine the elements of language that form this narration.

Hypothesis

The primary concern of this study is to unravel how Ishiguro uses narrative strategies to convey the complexity and duality of his narrators and their narration, which leads to the production of various truths, and encourages not just tension at the level of storytelling but provides ground for important moral judgements and ethical conversations for the reader, in the process of reading the text.

This study proposes that Ishiguro's early novels can be read within the literary/generic and cultural framework of confessional writing, wherein guilt and responsibility emerge as significant themes and are established in the texts through the implementation of certain narrative techniques and manipulations of language. These strategies include, but are not limited to, telling distinctions between the story and discourse, manipulation of narrative time, narratorial speech acts and dialogue; the autodiegetic narrators of the novels, and the aspects of voice, focalisation, distance and reliability that govern them. By foregrounding the themes of guilt and responsibility as a part of his narrative strategies, Ishiguro assigns them structural value in addition to their thematic importance in the texts. These elements will be examined in depth in the Ishiguro novels that function as the primary texts for this study- *A Pale View of Hills*, *An Artist of the Floating World* and *The Remains of the Day*. Through close textual analysis, this study proposes to read these novels as confessionals and demonstrate how the themes of 'guilt' and 'responsibility' and their associated meanings form the central bipartite structure around which Ishiguro's rhetorical framework and storytelling is constructed.

Rationale

The rationale for the primary texts is based on the novels' thematic and structural similarities that make reading these texts as modern confessionals beneficial and lend themselves to an inquiry from a narrative studies standpoint. As discussed in the previous sections, all three novels employ an autodiegetic narrator as the confessing subject, using remembrance as their primary narrative mode. Since the novels depict the difficulties of a guilt-ridden subject's attempt at coming to terms with the mistakes of their past, as well as attempting to do so for an "other", there is a thematic concern with memory and strategies of telling and re-telling in these early novels. They share a common narrative perspective and voice for this purpose— a first-person account of the past in a guilt-ridden present. Thus, the conflicted language of their *telling* is a crucial element in these novels, and the relation of the confessional narrative with language and strategies of narration demands this framework for the purpose of analysing these Ishiguro texts.

The primary concern with reading these works as confessionals is not with the accuracy of the subject matter of the confession but how the utilised narrative mode serves as a statement on the narrator's motives and the inner-workings of their psyche. According to Foucault, "The confession is a ritual of discourse in which the speaking subject is also the subject of the statement" – it is not merely an outlet for "irrepressible truth of prior lived experience, but a ritualised technique for producing truth" (Gill 4). It is in this space that I situate Ishiguro's first three novels to study the associated themes of "guilt" and "responsibility" – confessional writing's preoccupation with these themes provides fertile ground for adequate interpretive work. In all three novels, the thematic concerns with guilt and responsibility also extend to a structural level insofar as the narrator's sense of guilt and responsibility dictate their actions as characters within the narrative universe, as well as storytellers performing for an audience. This makes

these themes an apt lens for examination of these novels within the paradigm of confessional narrative.

Methodology and Literature Review

The primary focus of this study is the narrative representation of the themes of guilt and responsibility in Ishiguro's first three novels. The methodology of this study shall therefore be anchored in the fields of narrative studies and the confessional mode of writing. The primary method will be a close textual analysis of the aforementioned themes in the primary texts to build thematic interpretive positions. For core theoretical concepts of the narrative, such as autodiegetic narration, story and discourse, unreliability, focalisation and perspective, I borrow from theories by Wayne C. Booth, James Phelan, Seymour Chatman and Gerard Genette. I use these theoretical frameworks to explore the narrative techniques and strategies utilised by the character-narrators of Ishiguro's works as the confessing subjects within the genre of modern confessional writing. I also utilise Phelan's rhetorical model for character narration to explore the ethical considerations raised for the readers through the strategies of evasion and re-telling employed within confessional literature. These frameworks are explored in detail in the sections where they inform my analysis.

The Literature Review is divided into two parts. In the first part, I offer a general map of the scholarship on Kazuo Ishiguro, indicating major trends in the critical response to Ishiguro's work. In the second part, I survey certain secondary texts that specifically relate to the themes within Ishiguro's work that I am interested in examining.

General scholarship on Ishiguro's fiction:

In *A Companion to the British and Irish Novel 1945-2000* (2007), edited by Brian Shaffer, Cynthia Wong emphasises how Kazuo Ishiguro marks a departure from the tropes of old

historical novels where history was made by great men by writing narratives about fully realised worlds in which unarticulated public history shapes human beings instead. The work also looks into Ishiguro's use of emotional restraint associated with the British in *The Remains of the Day* as suggestive of a national character that encourages people to edit out painful realities.

While Wong highlights the English-ness of Ishiguro's work, Malcolm Bradbury, in his *The Modern British Novel* (2001), brackets Ishiguro with Salman Rushdie and Timothy Mo for their contribution to the making of the "international novel". However, Bradbury differentiates Ishiguro's treatment of history from that of his contemporaries as being from the perspective of definite moments from very subjective depictions of person lives" (424). The exploration of how historical "truth" is constructed through perspective in Ishiguro's fiction is carried out further in *A Reader's Guide to the Twentieth-Century Novel in Britain* (1993), where Ishiguro's novels are discussed within the context of non-native English writing. The work discusses the benefits of analysing any society positioned at a certain distance from its subject (Stevenson 131). Speaking of how distance adds acuteness and clarity, it remarks on conditions of origin creating more complex cultural identities and deeper awareness of styles and possibilities.

Frederick Holmes takes a different direction in his *The Contemporary British Novel Since 1980* (2005) and remarks that the construction of reality in Ishiguro's novels is based on matters of speculation and debate. He focuses on Ishiguro's blending of realism with "surrealism, expressionism, fabulism and postmodernism" to adequately represent the complexities of contemporary life (Acheson and Ross 2). Ishiguro's speculative fiction is also given this kind of attention by Chris Holmes in his chapter "Kazuo Ishiguro's Thinking Novels" in *A Companion to World Literature* (2019), where he analyses Ishiguro's speculative fiction in terms of epistemological limits. Holmes contends that Ishiguro's meaning-making begins from the

limitations of his novel-world– a narrative universe where the systems crucial for meaning making have been brought down to the bare-bones components 4).

Ishiguro explores the genre of speculative fiction in his later writing. His early works, however, focus primarily on unreliable autodiegetic narration, facilitating a narrative framework based on inference and indirection. In *Understanding Kazuo Ishiguro* (1998), an in-depth analysis of the first five Ishiguro novels, Brian W. Shaffer tries to break down this form of narration. He also charts Ishiguro's literary and cinematic influences and analyses all five works in terms of how Ishiguro writes suppression of emotion, mapping out Freud's "anatomy of repression" for this purpose. It is also Shaffer's contention that the minor character of Ogata-San in Ishiguro's first novel anticipates the narrators in his next two books, namely Masuji Ono and Stevens. All three characters rationalise misgivings of the past "through the defence mechanisms of repression and projection" instead of accepting personal responsibility (Shaffer 15).

Cynthia F. Wong's *Kazuo Ishiguro* (2005) is a collection of interpretive essays. The author uses a reader-response paradigm to discuss the themes and techniques of the early Ishiguro novels, which entail narrative, memory, deflection of truth in memory, disclosure and "unconcealment". Wong also analyses Ishiguro's categorisation as an international writer and what goes into the process of reading an Ishiguro text. For the later novels, Wong contends that they do not depart from the trends of his earlier novels but depict the growth of "Ishiguro's vision" (viii). The last chapter explores this evolution of his fiction by looking into the failures of guardianship depicted in Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* (2005) and *When We Were Orphans* (2000).

Kazuo Ishiguro: Contemporary Critical Perspectives (2010), edited by Sean Matthews and Sebastian Groes, is a collection of essays which delves into Ishiguro's short fiction and screenwriting along with his novels. In a chapter titled "Strange Reads: Kazuo Ishiguro's *A Pale*

View of Hills and *An Artist of the Floating World* in Japan”, Motoyuki Shibata and Motoko Sugano look into the Japanese translations of Ishiguro’s books and note that the devices used in English do not serve the Japanese audience and leave them with an awkward portrayal. The work addresses Ishiguro’s concern with creating discursive platforms for class, ethics, ethnicity, nationhood, place and gender, and the problems surrounding artistic representation.

Looking into the cultural readership and reading practices for Ishiguro’s work, *Kazuo Ishiguro in a Global Context* (2015) is a collection of essays which provides diverse perspectives from various countries in which Ishiguro’s works have been read, shared and critiqued. The readings are predominantly formalistic, post-structuralist and humanist in nature and deal with themes of knowledge about the self, family, and community, narrative constructions of time and space, and the continuous and discontinuous forces of history, art, human psychology, and cultural values. The first part of the book ‘Crossing National and Aesthetic Borders’ deals with Ishiguro’s contribution to postcolonial and posthumanist studies against the backdrop of contemporary world literature.

Kazuo Ishiguro's Gestural Poetics (2021) by Peter Sloane is a study of Ishiguro’s poetics of obscurity and his preoccupation with the deficiency of language. Building on Heidegger’s work, Sloane claims that the essence of the world can only be gestured towards. Contending that Ishiguro’s texts demand such an approach because of their gestural poetics and their “effect on the text-space around them, Sloane’s work tries to locate and uncover the “ineffable essence” of the characters’ worlds (27). The book focuses on themes of realism, modernism, childhood imagination, arts and other forms within fiction, oneiric home and homelessness, and the use of landscapes in Ishiguro.

Rebecca Suter's *Two-World Literature: Kazuo Ishiguro's Early Novels* (2021) complicates our perception of world literature by an analysis of the critical perusal of cultural biases within Ishiguro's storyworlds. Comparing Ishiguro's narrative strategies with the West-centric perspective of "one-world vision", Suter looks into the ways through which Ishiguro has been able to create a "two-world literature" (3). The reading deals with themes of interrelation of individual and collective identity and personal and historical memory.

Yugin Teo's *Kazuo Ishiguro and Memory* (2014) borrows from Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic model of memory and forgetting. According to Ricoeur, the reluctance to revisit the past equates to an active act of forgetting, which can be at an individual level or at the level of a collective. He defines the act of giving testimony to significant events as a responsibility because, in its absence, certain historical narratives gain undue dominance over others. A forced forgetting can result in collective amnesia, and true forgiveness can be granted only by the victim through a process of mourning and release. This is the framework Teo applies to the work of memory in Ishiguro, where individuals come to terms with their past through a process of forgetting, remembering and catharsis to break the cycle of regret.

Both *A Pale View of Hills* and *The Remains of the Day* have been explored for their postcolonial themes of hybridity, trauma and cultural displacement. Susie O'Brien's "Serving a New World Order: Postcolonial Politics in Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*" looks at the Victorian nature of society and social stature in *The Remains of the Day* and how it contrasts with an idea of "America" which means freedom, liberty and newness. Erica Dillon shares this perspective in her essay "The Myth of the English Country House in Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*", where she remarks on Ishiguro's take on the authenticity of Englishness as perpetuated by the symbol of the English Country House. Within this framework, Randall Bass also explores

the notion of the Butler as a myth in *The Remains of the Day* by drawing on Roland Barthes's *Mythologies*.

Thematic Review of Literature:

The theme of unreliability has received substantial critical attention with respect to Ishiguro's narrators, and the critical insights help develop my arguments regarding the contribution of the unreliable narrator in the establishment of guilt in Ishiguro's early works in my first chapter. Responsibility, especially for historical catastrophe, is another significant theme in Ishiguro, and I borrow from the critical conversations around this thematic concern to look at Ishiguro's narrators as agents and human subjects within the narrative universe.

On History and Responsibility

In "Between Theory and History: *The Remains of the Day* in the International Relations Classroom" (1998), Anthony F. Lang, Jr. and James M. Lang use *The Remains of the Day* as a pedagogic text to explain the nature of history as an ongoing process. By focusing on the example of Stevens from *The Remains of the Day*, the article problematises the treatment of history as a repository of facts; instead, the student of history is encouraged to consider the national and subjective interests which propel the writing of history. Causality in a historical narrative is also shown to be often assumed, reflecting the interests of the teller. Cynthia F. Wong's "Deflecting Truth in Memory: *An Artist of the Floating World*" (1988) explores the subjective position of a person caught in the middle of history being made and who is limited by their lack of precognition. It focuses on the limitations of a person unaware of their role in history, and tries to approach the narrator Ono's self-deceptions in the light of his initial unawareness and subsequent confrontation with his mistakes. In "No Homelike Place: The Lesson of History in Kazuo Ishiguro's 'An Artist of the Floating World'" (2014), Timothy

Wright extends the idea of deceit and guilt to the stage of the nation. In his work, Wright perceives Ishiguro's Ono as a figure whose personal guilt is distinguishable from shame; the latter as being public and functioning under a set of values and power relations of a specific group. These values, as well as the power relations, are subject to change, thereby capable of shifting the object of shame. In this interpretation, the workings of history and the subsequent construction of the historical moral right take the central position rather than the mistakes of the narrator or their attempts at coping with them.

J. Peter Euben's "The Butler Did it" (2006) brings in Hannah Arendt's concept of "the banality of evil" by comparing the character of Stevens with that of Adolf Eichmann. It questions whether any other character placed in Stevens's or Eichmann's position would have acted differently. Euben examines the Arendtian notion that a lack of moral imagination to perceive the world from another person's vantage point causes people to partake in everyday evil; it is "thoughtlessness" that takes the form of evil because of its disastrous consequences (Euben 106). Euben's work explores societies which uphold such moral failings by not promoting this curiosity and imagination in their individuals. He tries to find the relations between "political institutions, cultural forms and the historical circumstances on one side and moral wrongs on the other" (105). In "SUFFICIENT UNTO THE DAY: Reflections on Evil and Responsibility Prompted by Hannah Arendt and Kazuo Ishiguro" (2008), John McGowan furthers this Arendtian interpretation by drawing attention to the contestable nature of ascriptions of responsibility and blame in an altercation between two parties. McGowan argues that agents do not have the kind of autonomy that would make ascriptions of responsibility straightforward; these ascriptions are "excessive, dependent on assigning an efficacy, clarity, autonomy and [false] univocality to human actions" (233). Responsibility is established primarily as a product

of speech acts– accusations, imputing blame, accepting blame etc. In “Escape from Responsibility: Ideology and Storytelling in Arendt's *The Origins of "Totalitarianism"* and Ishiguro's “*The Remains of the Day*”” (2011) by Graham MacPhee, another Arendtian notion is expounded– the power that narration has in reconciling people with their sense of responsibility. In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt argues that for accountability to be taken, a person needs to empathise with the narrator at a level which requires a certain fictionalisation and self-invention (MacPhee 178). In *The Remains of the Day*, this relation between storytelling and responsibility is reversed insofar as the narrative becomes a long attempt at shunning of accountability. MacPhee argues that this inversion is not a departure from Arendt's notion of storytelling; instead, it takes the shape of ideology and helps explain the distinctions Arendt draws between the two concepts.

On Unreliability

Kathleen Wall's seminal essay, “*The Remains of the Day And Its Challenges to Theories of Unreliable Narration*” (1994), takes up concepts of narrative unreliability theorised by Wayne C. Booth, Seymour Chatman and Gerald Prince and uses *The Remains of the Day* to challenge these notions. Primarily, Wall challenges the idea that unreliability becomes apparent to the reader when the “story undermines the discourse” by showing how the discourse of the narration and the verbal habits of the narrator provide us with patterns that help establish Stevens's unreliability in Ishiguro's text. Secondly, she challenges the idea that unreliability comes from the distance between “the norms and values” of the implied author and the narrator. Such a definition establishes an ironical value-based system as the crux of unreliable narration, whereas this is not the real focus in most postmodern works dealing with unreliability. Wall contends that in Ishiguro, unreliability as a means of exploring the split subjectivity of the narrator is more

vital. In "Unreliability between Mimesis and Metaphor: The works of Kazuo Ishiguro" (2008), Elke D'hoker expands on Wall's idea that the degree and nature of unreliability differ across texts by exploring Ishiguro's other texts. According to D'hoker, while *The Remains of the Day* adheres to a more traditional form of unreliability, where an unreliable narrator's account of events can be trusted, but not their interpretation or evaluation of those events, works like *An Artist of the Floating World* and *A Pale View of Hills* depart from that tradition because of their dubious scenic presentations. In "Is the Butler Home? Narrative and the Split Subject in 'The Remains of the Day'" (2004) Molly Westerman agrees with Wall that the issue of unreliability saturates both 'form' and 'content' in *The Remains of the Day* but argues that ambivalence and inconsistencies tell us what the narrator does not know. Using Homi Bhabha's notion of the "stereotype", Westerman argues that Stevens recognition with his inner self is done through a mirroring that others him, thus forcing him to stand up to himself. Renata Salecl's "I Can't Love You Unless I Give You Up" (1996) uses Freudian theory to analyse Stevens's evasions as the "obsessive's speech", which is always meaningful because he compulsively tries to cover his desire.

In "Evasion and the Unsaid in Kazuo Ishiguro's *A Pale View of Hills*" (2012), Ken Eckert explores Ishiguro's writing in the context of trauma by examining the role of repression and how it operates at the level of Etsuko's thoughts but also social interactions, and community relations. Eckert draws on Gerald Prince's concept of "nonnarration", where "what is left unsaid" is inferable from a significant lack in progression. Elisions are explicitly underlined by the narrator, giving them significance. However, more important are the underlying reasons that prevent them from talking about these gaps. In "The shame of memory: Blanchot's self-dispossession in Ishiguro's 'A Pale View of Hills.'" (1995), Cynthia F. Wong draws on Maurice Blanchot's self-dispossession theory that narrators reflect on past events and use narration to detach them

from themselves. According to Blanchot, the reconstruction helps in the detachment from these events.

Chapter Plan

The chapters will take into account the various narrative techniques employed around the themes of guilt and responsibility across the novels to foreground the different ways these themes play an active part in the novels' storytelling. In this section, I offer a brief outline of the chapters that follow this Introduction.

In the second chapter, titled "Guilt: Narration and Unreliability", I examine how the theme of guilt is established in my primary texts, insofar as what narrative elements used in the narration implicate the narrators. I closely examine the aspect of "unreliability" in the narrator. The strategy of unreliability undermines the narrator's integrity by forcing the reader to form opinions that differ from what the narrator often tries to persuade the reader through their narration. This incongruence depicts the narrator's guilt in my chosen Ishiguro texts. I argue that the lack of narrative credibility, propelled by the narration's unreliable nature, works in tandem with the mood of social blame that governs the narrative to establish guilt in the texts.

Guilt is also used as a narrative stimulus in the texts insofar as it forces the narrator to respond. It is this response which facilitates the act of storytelling in many places and characterizes how the narrator decides to tell the story. This leads to my third chapter, titled "Responsibility: Character and Agency", where I explore the different dimensions of responsibility manifested in the text. This looks at responsibility as the idea of personal duty, as well as duty accorded by societal expectations, which govern the narrators' decisions at the level of character-actions. Responsibility also entails accountability of the autodiegetic narrators towards other characters, as well as the mistakes of their past that form the subject matter of

their *telling*. I also examine the responsibilities of the narrator towards the task of narrating for an audience and scrutinise how this affects the remembrance, retention and retelling of the story. While the first chapter looks at the fragmentary nature of the confessional narration as a narrative device that complicates the reading and encourages the reader to question the motives of the confessing subject, thereby stumbling upon the narrator's guilt, in the second chapter, the fragmentary nature of the confessional is explored through the lens of the theme of responsibility, and treated as representative of the narrator's subjectivity in conflicted terms, constitutive of their identity and agency as human subjects within the narrative universe.

In the final chapter titled "Conclusion", I summarise the arguments put forward in the preceding chapters and propose that this bipartite structure around guilt and responsibility can be utilised in understanding and interpreting narratives of the confessional mode apart from the ones chosen as my primary texts. I also briefly review how themes other than *guilt* and *responsibility* in Ishiguro's early works can benefit from an inquiry from a narrative studies standpoint.

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Chapter 2 Guilt: Narration and Unreliability

Confessional writing as a narrative mode can be read as an interplay of concealment and disclosure employed within and through the text's narration. The "rhetoric of the genre involves a kind of hide-and-seek where the reader finds what is confessed by the narrator to not be the whole or pertinent truth" (Brooks 82). In his analysis of Tolstoy's *The Kreutzer Sonata* as a confessional, J.M. Coetzee deemed the narrator Pozdnyshev's confession an early instance of this "ironic" nature of confession, as the speaker's belief that he is saying one thing is undercut for the audience by a separate truth emerging out of his narration (Coetzee 257). The confessional text thus operates within an economy in which a second reading is possible, a reading that, according to Coetzee, "searches in the corners of Pozdnyshev's discourse for instances where the truth, the "unconscious" truth, slips out in strange associations, false rationalizations, gaps, contradictions" (257). Thus, the confessional model is based on a form of communication that provides purposeful space to the author for the writing of obfuscation and evasion within the text. As discussed in the introductory chapter, this can be observed in Ishiguro's novels, where all three texts utilise a complex narrative strategy to reveal the narrators' troubled pasts while managing to shroud for the reader the full implications of these pasts, as well as the narrators' role in them (Wong, Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains* 494).

As Ishiguro's novels, like most confessionals, are based on the primary narrative mode of remembrance, where the remembering subject is removed in time and space from the subject matter of the *telling*, and as memory structured as narrative is usually reported from a subjective point-of-view, the narrators do not merely recount things from the past but instead take part in a subjective reconstruction in/through the process of narration. The mode of confession, then, "is

not a means of expressing the irrepressible truth of prior lived experience, but a ritualized technique for producing truth ... it constructs rather than reflects some pre-textual truth" (Gill 4). Ishiguro's confessionals can be read as making use of the formal structure of remembrance in conjunction with strategies of telling and retelling so that the narrators' incriminating past events are related in a way that most warrant sympathy or exculpation. The narration engages in various means of narrative manipulation, appeasement, justification and misdirection. These obscure certain parts of the narration or foreground for the reader story tracks, which are either less important or of an exculpatory nature. In narratives such as Ishiguro's, which attempt to unravel and dwell upon ethical considerations faced by their narrators, this incongruence aids the storytelling by causing tension at the level of reading, which provides ground for compelling moral questions and complex judgements from the reader. This utilises the previously mentioned dichotomy of disclosure and concealment, where the conveying of information or its disambiguation is regulated and restricted for intervening in the reader's interpretation and formation of opinions. The narrator's guilt, while being a significant thematic and formal element throughout the texts – not only is it the running subject matter, it also acts as narrative stimulus and launches the narrators into defensive actions both as storytellers as well as characters within the narrative universe – thus takes a very covert stance. It emerges to the reader only through an engagement with the strategies of narration and language employed within the texts.

A significant trait of Ishiguro's rhetorical structure is the engagement it demands from its reader– his confessional narrators are designed to be misleading in ways quite detectable to the audience. Ishiguro's narrators insist that they be taken seriously while simultaneously conditioning readers to second-guess their perceptions by reading between the lines (Shaffer 7).

Thus, the same narration which engages in manipulative tactics provides not just the means of recognising these techniques, but also encourages a reading in that direction. Consequently, the self-image that Ishiguro's narrators try to portray differs significantly from the image and narrative that ultimately unfolds in front of the reader's eyes. In this chapter, I examine these strategies through which guilt as an overarching theme is established in the first three novels of Ishiguro. I propose that the reader's engagement with this precise dissonant nature of the narration establishes the narrator's guilt in the texts. This takes place in two ways: first, the reader is made privy to the building blocks of a differing set of events, a 'parallel' narrative which is accusatory in nature and provides ground for implicating the narrator; second, when the narrator seems to sell a version of events whose falsity becomes apparent to the reader through direct contradictions, as well as deductive inference on the part of the audience, it undermines the integrity of the narrator, encouraging a reading-between-the-lines approach and a suspicious gaze towards them, and thus prompts the reader to question the narrator's motives. Thus, guilt is an effect of the function of unreliability in these novels. The primary reason behind a rhetorical structure like this, which compels a certain readerly engagement through ambiguous textual communication and establishes an interpretive feedback loop, is best understood by thinking back to the confessional as a text which is a discourse in the production of truth (Phelan 18). The reader's recognition of the complexities of the multiple strands of the narrator's 'self' depicted in language through a singular 'I' provides ground for an ethical engagement with certain essential themes in the novel, and this engagement comes into being primarily through the reader's questioning of the narrator's motives and values in the first place. While in this chapter I examine how this narrative model is constructed, I explore the ethical engagement in more detail in the next chapter through the lens of "responsibility" as a theme in Ishiguro's novels.

In this chapter, I analyse how guilt as an overarching theme is established through the narrator's unreliability in Ishiguro's first three novels— the defensive motive behind the act of narration is undercut by signs of guilt despite the narrator's attempts to conceal the 'truth'. *I argue that Ishiguro's use of autodiegetic narrators gives rise to multiple channels of communication within the texts— along the narrator-narratee track and the implied author-authorial audience track. It is in the undermining of one communication track by the other, that the production of certain 'truths' that the implied author does not endorse is foregrounded in the narrative, thus establishing the narrator as unreliable. I also argue that the discourse of the narrative itself provides clues that incriminate the narrators of the novels, and this is done through over-justifications and contradictory language.*

I: Contrast and Contradiction: Functions of the Narrator

One of the major facets of a confessional narrative is the fragmentary 'I' – an 'I' that is often indecisive, stands for multiple traits of the self and communicates in more than one way. The 'I' of modern confessional writing has been defined as complex and fluid— a representation of the fragmentation of the self at the heart of the confessional endeavour (Gill 7). Its role as a device of evasion and self-invention is as important as its role in expressing personality (Gill 7). I first examine how the use of an autodiegetic narrator as the confessing 'I' serves various functions within Ishiguro's novels.

Autodiegetic narration/narrator is a term coined by Gerard Genette, and is one of his distinctions within *voice* theory ("who speaks?") – it distinguishes "narrators who do (or did) participate in the events of the story and those who do (or did) not participate" (Booth and Phelan 390). "Genette calls the first kind 'homodiegetic' and the second 'heterodiegetic'" (Genette, qtd in Booth and Phelan 390). Another phraseology for these varying modes is coined

by James Phelan who refers to homodiegetic narrators as ‘character narrators’ and heterodiegetic narrators as ‘non-character narrators’ (Booth and Phelan 390). This distinction is more appropriate than ‘first-person narrator’ and ‘third-person narrator’ according to Genette and Phelan because any character can technically say ‘I’. Homodiegetic narrators who are not just participants in their story but are also the protagonists are defined as autodiegetic narrators (Booth and Phelan 390). Etsuko, Masuji Ono and Stevens are all autodiegetic narrators who are active participants in the subject matter of their telling. In fact, they are also very proactive in their role as tellers, and this is exactly what lies at the heart of the dual communication channels in these narratives.

As the narrator actively participates in both the subject matter of the telling and the act of telling, in the process of relating it to an audience, there are multiple functions that the narrator performs. These are what James Phelan defines as the ‘telling functions’ of character narrators (12). These include the narrator’s ‘narrator functions’, which constitute the narrator’s role of reporting, interpreting and evaluating of the *narrated* within the narrative universe, and the narrator’s ‘disclosure functions’, which include the various kinds of information that a character-narrator unwittingly reveals to the authorial audience in the process of their narration (Phelan 12).

The narrator-narratee track can be distinguished from the authorial audience track by looking at the following textual instances from *An Artist of the Floating World* and *The Remains of the Day*. The “you” function in these instances help us in understanding how a) the narrator’s communication along the narratee track is not the same as the one along the authorial-audience track, meaning, the narrator’s narrator functions are distinct from the narrator’s disclosure functions in these novels, and b) the narrator has a narrative pact with the hypothetical narratee

where the “you” acts as a “justifying device” – it provides the most supportive environment for a confessing subject. They are imagined listeners who understand the logic of the narrator’s arguments, are aligned with their values and belief systems, and are well aware of the social world they inhabit and the demands of their profession. Here are the first two instances of the invocation of the narratee-function in the texts. *An Artist of the Floating World* begins thus:

If on a sunny day you climb the steep path leading up from the little wooden bridge still referred to around here as ‘the Bridge of Hesitation’, you will not have to walk far before the roof of my house becomes visible between the tops of two ginkgo trees. Even if it did not occupy such a commanding position on the hill, the house would still stand out from all others nearby, so that as you come up the path, you may find yourself wondering what sort of wealthy man owns it.

But then I am not, nor have I ever been, a wealthy man. *The imposing air of the house will be accounted for, perhaps, if I inform you that it was built by my predecessor, and that he was none other than Akira Sugimura.* (Ishiguro, *An Artist of the Floating World* 7; emphasis added)

The narratee-function is invoked in *The Remains of the Day* for the first time:

‘I mean it, Stevens. It’s wrong that a man can’t get to see his own country. Take my advice, get out of the house for a few days.’

As you might expect, I did not take Mr Farraday’s suggestion at all seriously that afternoon, regarding it as just another instance of an American gentleman’s unfamiliarity with what was and what was not commonly done in England. (Ishiguro, *Remains of the Day* 6; emphasis added)

In these instances, the supposed narratee is clearly someone whose awareness of the cultural codes of the society that the narrator resides in is higher than an unfamiliar reader being introduced to the text for the first time. It separates them from the authorial audience. This explains why Ono in the paragraph above alludes to the narratee while speaking of his home and its probable social reception. The unsaid belief that the “addressee will recognize it as a home signifying wealth, points to an understanding of the signs of wealth in Ono’s culture, revealing the cultural knowledge Ono desires in his narratee. A narratee possessing this cultural knowledge will understand the importance of honor and status in Ono’s society” (Harrell 12). We can note a similar instance of the opposite effect in another utterance from the same text. When a new artist joins Ono at Master Takeda’s firm, Ono refers the artist’s name for the narratee while mentioning in the same breath that it is “a name which I doubt will mean much to you” as the artist did not warrant renown or discovery, and had not really attained a status for the general public (Ishiguro, *Artist* 66). He reiterates “there is no reason why you should have come across it” (Ishiguro, *Artist* 67). Similarly, Stevens also places expectation on the part of the narratee, who he assumes understands his attitude toward his employer’s suggestion. In this scene, the narrator’s invocation of the narratee yields familiarity and silent validation for him. This expectation reflects Stevens’s belief that his narratee has some experience in his specialised position as a butler in a well-established English home and therefore understands why Stevens does not take the suggestion seriously (Hammond 97).

These instances clearly illustrate how the narrators have a specific audience in their minds, and their “you” does not denote the direct reader. However, in relating to the narratee the association with the renowned Sugimura, and Mr Farraday’s ignorance of the codes of a British butler’s profession, the narrators’ disclosure function provides the authorial-audience the first

glimpse into the workings of these narrators' minds. As the story progresses Ono's preoccupation with social prestige and Stevens's with the notions of professionalism become clear to the audience. Those discussions begin with dialogues such as these with the hypothetical "you" which create for these narrators a path of communication along the narrator-narratee track, while also establishing the character's central value systems for the implied audience. These narrators' reside in a society whose values have significantly changed – Ono's imperialist paintings are no longer held in high esteem, and Lord Darlington has gone down in history as a fascist and antisemitic diplomat. It is the shift in values that incriminates the narrator's past actions. Through the invocation of a narratee who represents the values of an older time, they are able to find a mediating agent for the reader. Purporting to be clarifying for their benefit, these narrators then also find an excuse to overly explicate, and seamlessly engage in their defensive strain of commentary. (The excess in justification is explored in the next section.) However, despite the narrative pact between the narrator and narratee, and the use of the narratee as a 'justifying device', communication along the narrator-authorial audience track often reveals incriminating information to the readers.

On the surface *A Pale View of Hills* has no direct invocation of the "you" function; it would seem the only communication channel happens to be the one between the narrator and the authorial audience, thus eliminating the scope for two sets of dissonant information to be revealed through the narration. However, unlike the other two works, in the case of *A Pale View of Hills*, the narrator Etsuko has a consistent textual narratee in the shape of her daughter Niki whose conversations with Etsuko, uninterested though she is in her mother's story, activates the narrator-narratee track in the novel. She performs a role similar to the hypothetical narratees of the other two novels as her values align with that of her mother. To understand the conditions of

the communication that takes place between them, it is important to understand how the plot of *A Pale View of Hills* progresses. The narrator Etsuko reminisces about a summer in Nagasaki when she was pregnant with her first child. The novel traverses between her memories of the summer and her present life in England where her younger daughter Niki has come to visit her. Through Etsuko's memories we are introduced to the mother-daughter duo of Sachiko and Mariko, whose story bears an uncanny resemblance to how things unfolded between Etsuko and her own daughter Keiko— Etsuko like Sachiko, left Japan with her child to elope with her lover. And the troubled lonely child Mariko acts as a literary precursor in the story to the character of Keiko who kills herself. There is a parallel trajectory and it is hinted that it stems from Etsuko's projection of her guilt concerning Keiko's fate onto the characters of Sachiko and Mariko.

Here is an example of a conversation between Etsuko and Niki that shows how the disclosure functions of the narrator depict the psychological doubling in the story, mirrored in the correspondences and echoes between the plot trajectories of the two characters. Etsuko tries to tell Niki about her memories of Mariko from Nagasaki. She is reminded of Mariko when she sees a little girl on a swing on an outing with Niki:

“I was telling you about it yesterday, but I don't suppose you were listening. I dreamt about that little girl again.”

“What little girl?”

“The one we saw playing on the swing the other day. When we were in the village having coffee.”

Niki shrugged. “Oh, that one,” she said, not looking up. “Well, actually, it isn't that little girl at all. That's what I realized this morning. It seemed to be that little girl, but it wasn't.” (Ishiguro, *A Pale View of Hills* 95)

Along the narrator-narratee track, this conversation comes across as an insignificant dialogue where Etsuko's nostalgic account clearly does not spark her daughter's interest or lead to an actual narrator-narratee discussion of any import. However, the fact that Etsuko still carries on this conversation indicates for the reader her preoccupation with the character of Mariko, and the end of this conversation marks a crucial end to Part 1 of the novel because of its significance in terms of the narrator's disclosure functions:

"In fact, I realized something else this morning," I said.

"Something else about the dream."

My daughter did not seem to hear.

"You see," I said, "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." Niki murmured something and carried on reading. (Ishiguro, *Pale View* 96)

This exchange, in addition to establishing a free-associative connection to justify the narrative time dedicated to the character of Mariko in the novel, covertly communicates for the authorial audience the macabre nature of Mariko's story. For the authorial audience who is introduced to the plight of Keiko during the course of the narration, the realisation that the child is not on a swing at all, connects this episode to Keiko's hanging herself, thus establishing the connection between Mariko and Keiko. It establishes Etsuko's innate sense of guilt through *absent* characters that recur/ haunt her narration. *A Pale View of Hills* banks largely on these recurrent poignant images which are for the benefit of the authorial audience, and clearly not the textual narratee, to carry out the narrator's disclosure functions.

Needless to say, in most works of autodiegetic narration, a major marker distinguishing narrator functions and disclosure functions is how the narrator's knowledge within the

storyworld is regulated when it comes to dictating their narration. Otherwise, important plot points would be revealed too soon or in ways which do nothing for the purpose of build-up in a story. Etsuko's realisation at the end of Part 1 is an important instance of the disclosure function played by the narrator within the interplay of concealment and disclosure that characterises confessional narrative— the form of the novel is aided by the narrator's disclosure functions along the narrator-authorial audience track. Similarly, in *The Remains of the Day*, in the final chapter of Weymouth, Stevens presents his usual defence that his visit to Ms Kenton (Mrs Benn in the narrative present) was solely on professional grounds. However, this is contrasted by his admission just a few pages later that “at that moment, my heart was breaking” (Ishiguro, *The Remains* 208) when Ms Kenton reveals she had gotten back with her husband. Thus, it is made clear to the reader that on some level Stevens is aware that he has feelings for Ms Kenton – a hunch the reader harbours long before this episode as Ms Kenton's letter is the primary stimulus that launches Stevens into action, both in terms of his physically taking the trip and his storytelling through remembrance. It is reflected also in his refusal to call Ms Kenton Mrs Benn. However, Ishiguro does not allow Stevens's narration to be informed by his knowledge. To do so would mean Stevens would reveal too much too soon, thus undercutting the difficulty and significance of his ultimate admission (Phelan 14). Not long after this episode, Stevens also notes that at least Lord Darlington had the privilege of making his own mistakes, “I can't even say I made my own mistakes. Really – one has to ask oneself – what dignity is there in that?” (217). Since Stevens's entire narration is marked by the discourse of professional merit equating dignity (“They wear their professionalism as a decent gentleman will wear his suit ... It is, as I say, a matter of ‘dignity’”, and “‘dignity’ has to do crucially with a butler's ability not to abandon the professional being he inhabits”), such incongruences destabilise the norms of the novels for the

reader, thus undermining the direct narration through conflicting signals of the disclosure functions (Ishiguro, *The Remains* 39). In undermining the professional ideals espoused by Stevens throughout his narration, the ideals which justified his association with the antisemitic Lord Darlington and his firing of two Jewish housemaids, Stevens's guilt, and his awareness of his culpability become clear to the audience. The ability of Stevens to 'truthfully' tell his story also becomes contested, and begs the reader to question his motives as a narrator.

In *An Artist of the Floating World*, during Noriko's Miai, Ono has an abrupt outburst in which he reveals to the Saito family that he is ashamed of his past as an imperialist painter:

My paintings. My teachings. As 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.

(Ishiguro, *An Artist* 123)

Ono finds Dr Saito's youngest son Mitsuo's behaviour towards him hostile. He also finds his daughter's reactions to be abrasive and anti-social towards the guests as she is reduced to monosyllabic answers out of nervousness. He cites these as the reasons behind this outburst to his narratee and claims there needed to be an intervention on his part to ward off Mitsuo's hostilities and for the ceremony to be conducted smoothly. Ono feels Mitsuo's judgement because he goes to the same college where his former pupil Kuroda teaches and Ono was responsible for turning Kuroda over to the police for anti-nationalist activities. However, this point is not revealed in the story during the Miai episode and the reader can only find Ono's notions of Mitsuo to be a defensive overreaction. Mitsuo's meek behaviour reflects in their exchange when Ono's continuous questioning makes him uncomfortable. Upon being repeatedly asked, almost proclaimed by Ono in certain terms that Kuroda must have mentioned him, Mitsuo

is left puzzled. Mitsuo tries to assure Ono that while Kuroda must remember him and speak highly of him, he himself did not really know Kuroda and thus had no interaction with him. This is followed by “he trailed off, and looked towards his parents for help. (Ishiguro, *An Artist* 122)

The reader is also able to witness in the exchanges between Ono and the Saito family that his concerns regarding his daughter’s behaviour actually reflect in his own dialogue. He is taciturn and unable to carry the conversation because of his innate sense of guilt, especially when the conversation turns towards student protests. When Dr Saito tries to engage in conversation with Ono regarding demonstrations in the city, Ono’s only answer is that it is distressing to know that – “people are getting hurt. No doubt feelings are running high” (Ishiguro, *An Artist* 120). When Mrs Saito tries to engage in this further, Ono’s response remains the same:

‘I’m sure you’re right, Mr Ono,’ Mrs Saito put in. ‘Feelings may well be running high, but people seem to be going too far now. So many getting injured. But my husband here claims it’s all for the good. I really don’t understand what he means.’

I expected Dr Saito to react to this, but instead there was another pause during which attention seemed once more to focus in my direction.

‘It is, as you say,’ I remarked, ‘a great pity so many have been injured.’ (Ishiguro, *An Artist* 120)

When Dr Saito continues this conversation further by proclaiming how he was far more liberal than his son and perhaps that was a wrong stance to take, Ono’s reaction is again – “‘Indeed,’ I said. ‘I hope no more people are injured’” (Ishiguro, *An Artist* 121).

The above-mentioned textual instances illustrate how the narrator serves different communicative functions within the novels. To understand the function of unreliability, it is also important to understand the significance of the implied author in Ishiguro’s novels, which

explains why the unravelling of the text is a central part of Ishiguro's rhetorical blueprint, and also how the unreliability of these narrators is specific for a certain cause. (In the case of these works, it is to establish the narrators' guilt.)

The concept of the implied author was first coined by Wayne C. Booth in *The Rhetoric of Fiction* as a "second self that a writer creates in the construction of a text" (Phelan 38). Booth's concept while agreeing with the anti-intentionalist stance of the New Critics, still "posits a clear continuity between the flesh-and-blood author and the author in the text, while also insisting that flesh-and-blood and textual authors are not identical" (Booth, qtd in Phelan 39). Seymour Chatman, in his *Story and Discourse*, equates the concept of the implied author to a reflection or a basic framework of the text's norms (Chatman, qtd in Phelan 40). Chatman's model further develops Booth's concept by distinguishing the implied author and the implied reader from the real author and the real reader by locating them both within the text. Rimmon-Kenan approves of the Chatman model where the implied author is located within the text as a voiceless "it" who communicates with the reader through mediation by other voices. Rimmon-Kenan distances the concept further from Booth's original view of a 'personified consciousness' or 'second self' by asserting that it "must be seen as a construct inferred and assembled by the reader from all the components of the text" (87). Building upon these perspectives, James Phelan's definition perhaps best elucidates the concept:

The implied author is a streamlined version of the real author, an actual or purported subset of the real author's capacities, traits, attitudes, beliefs, values, and other properties that play an active role in the construction of the particular text (45).

Phelan clarifies that “streamlined” indicates that the implied author is a partial representation of the real author, and “version” indicates that the implied author is a construction by the real author (45).

According to Booth, a narrator is reliable when “he speaks for or acts in accordance with the norms of the work (which is to say the implied author’s norms), unreliable when he does not’. According to the majority of critics who have followed in Booth’s footsteps, the distinction between reliable and unreliable narrators is based on the degree and kind of distance that separates the values, tastes, and moral judgements of a given narrator from the norms of the implied author” (Brooks 496).

Thus, Ishiguro’s novels have consistent norms set throughout the texts which inform the reader of the moral standards and conventions that dictate Ishiguro’s work. These qualify as the implied author’s established norms within the texts. And they are crucial because the incongruence between them and character actions at certain junctures in the narrative is what initiates the reader’s suspicion— unreliability of the narrator is achieved as a product of contradiction of these fundamental norms within the narration. Shaffer observes that unreliable narrators “fail to speak for or act in accordance with the norms of the work”, thereby representing for the audience a manner of ironic portrayal and should be interpreted accordingly (7). The distance may involve either “moral” or “intellectual” qualities of the narrator and therefore, can be discerned in a way where “the speaker is himself the butt of the ironic point” (D’hoker 149). This is caused on account of the the author and reader’s secret collaboration that the narrator is not privy to. It is a communication that causes them to decide and settle upon an order or benchmark, and the distance (and degree of distance) from that marks the narrator’s shortcoming or incongruence.

So, when Stevens as a narrator, spends a generous amount of time narrating what a privilege it has been to be in the service of Lord Darlington and how it has been worth sacrificing everything in his personal life for, because professionalism and service to a distinguished man/household is his biggest motivation in life, and yet as a character hides his association with Lord Darlington on multiple occasions, the reader is clearly faced with an inconsistency. The implied author's 'norms' as espoused and repeated by the character-narrator are undermined by Steven's role as commentator vis-à-vis his role as a participant in the events. This is similarly reflected in Ono's elaborate discussions on pride at his participation in Japan's imperialist movement and the prestige accorded to him by his peers, conveying a certain norm for the character that is destabilised by his attempts to dissuade characters from revealing his past to other people. And, even though Etsuko is constantly praised for having good maternal instincts in her memories, her narrative present is marked by the suicide of her elder daughter, which her younger daughter constantly tries to convince her as not being her doing. The recurrent structure is that "two sets of norms conflict, and the covert set, once recognized, must win" (Chatman 233). This leads to the recognition of the implied author of the narrative as a separate entity from the narrator and also establishes a secret communication of the implied author with the implied reader (Chatman 233). This is the nature of the relationship between the implied author and Ishiguro's implied reader— an engagement based on the text's deliberate inconsistencies, giving rise to interpretations along an intended path.

II: Explanation and Justification

In the previous section, I examined textual instances where the *story* and *discourse* of Ishiguro's first three novels are in conflict, thus, providing signals to the reader that help in undermining of the norms of the text along the narrator-authorial audience track, thus

establishing the narrator's unreliability, and subsequent guilt. In this section I analyse how the *discourse* itself provides clues indicative of the narrator's unreliability. For this purpose, I examine how in the process of establishing certain norms, the narrators go to a disproportionate extent at times, and this overindulgence becomes an important marker that renders the *telling* suspect. In other words, the defensive vein in which the narrators overly expound or justify certain aspects of their story insinuates for the authorial audience the narrator's hidden guilt. The justification is often not asked for, and is used as a pre-emptive strategy against the charge of inaccuracy. Factual information is also often accompanied by phrases of suspicion which cast a shadow on the narrator's account. Finally, certain words and oft-repeated mannerisms of the narrator form "psychological red herrings" that indicate that the narrator is relapsing into a guilt-ridden defensive account (Wall 29). Let us first look at the ways in which certain norms are established within the texts.

In *The Remains of the Day*, Stevens operates along strict ideals that prevent him from expressing judgement or emotion in his role as a butler at Darlington Hall. Befitting the confessional structure, the paradox here is that in refraining from expressing personal opinion and/or emotion, Stevens, the narrator *reveals* more about himself than Stevens, the character who was a witness/participant in the events being recounted. As explicated in the previous section, this gap exists not just in terms of spatio-temporal distance from the actions/events being narrated, but also in terms of norms and terms espoused and followed. The impact of Stevens's disclosure functions is designed to be far more active in this instance to his narrator functions, for the extensive purpose of contesting Stevens's dedication to his professional life as the main source of happiness and satisfaction in his life and being above everything.

Professionalism is synonymous in Stevens's mind with emotional abstinence. One of the first instances where the reader encounters this kind of self-imposition takes place when Stevens' father falls extremely sick during the important conference of 1923. Stevens prioritises his job as the butler over tending to his dying father. Once his father had been laid in bed, Stevens rushes back to his duties. He acknowledges that it was "undesirable" to not tend to his father but still chooses his professional commitments by citing "I did not really have a moment more to spare" (Ishiguro, *The Remains* 84). It is remarkable how little he tries to explain his position to anyone else. He does not even attempt to employ someone else to carry out his duties so he can look after his father. What is also noteworthy is that in the aftermath of his father's death, Stevens's narration expresses pride over his conduct:

If you consider the pressures contingent on me that night, you may not think I delude myself unduly if I go so far as to suggest that I did perhaps display, in the face of everything, at least in some modest degree a 'dignity' worthy of someone like Mr Marshall – or come to that, my father. Indeed, why should I deny it? For all its sad associations, whenever I recall that evening today, I find I do so with a large sense of triumph. (Ishiguro, *The Remains* 98).

The privileging of the professional over the personal is reflected in and achieved through the strategy of repetition and serves as a discursive framing for the subject of Stevens's remembrance. Thus, we come across multiple episodes in the novel where Stevens seemingly regards his professional duties over emotional/ethical considerations and prides himself on his ability to do so. Ms Kenton's engagement, as well as the firing of two Jewish housemaids, Ruth and Sarah, are two other instances in the novel. There is, of course, another dimension here: the conflict, while expressed in the narration as being between the emotive and the rational, also

exists between two ideological standpoints if we look at the narrator's *figurative* or *conceptual* point of view – one of Stevens' unquestioning service to Lord Darlington (the code of professionalism), the other of justice to those beneath him in the ranks of service (which is an element of the code of professionalism but also the subject of contemporary public/political discourse of race).

In Stevens's construction and perception of his memories, “professionalism” becomes an all-empowering ideal through which he conceals real emotional attachment. It is also the only way through which he seems to be able to come to terms with how he genuinely feels about the decisions that have shaped his life's trajectory. The mode of narration is such that the traces of concealment (of that which is consciously repressed/hidden) *supplement*, in the Derridean sense, the narrative of disclosure. Stevens's overzealous professional attitude completely takes over his personal feelings in the narration, but in dictating the mode of narration also reveals to us Steven's lacks in terms of his core values– his inability to engage with his feelings and values in a healthy manner, unrestricted by his commitment to his professional role as a butler.

While service at Darlington Hall is foregrounded as one of Stevens's norms in the novel, his use of "professional" also functions as a “tic” or “verbal behaviour” which he utilises in his capacity as the narrator when he wants to evade the extent to which he has "truncated his life to fit a professional mold" or when he wishes to disguise an emotional significance that he is not ready to grapple with (Wall 23). Kathleen Wall challenges the idea that unreliability becomes apparent to the reader only when the “story undermines the discourse” by examining how the discourse of the narration and the verbal habits of the narrator also provide us with patterns that help establish Stevens's unreliability in Ishiguro's text. Whenever Stevens's explanation of motives is excessively lengthy – the trip he undertakes is highly underreported compared with

the excessive time and attention he pays to past events— it becomes a marker for the readers to realise that Stevens has shifted to his defensive strain of justification, that the implied-author has established communication with the implied reader. Thus, by supplying a palpable excess in the establishment of the central norms of the story, the discourse gets imbued with a synthetic quality that at the same time draws significant suspicion upon the *telling*. In this context, the reasoning behind “the analepses as well as their order” divulges to the reader Stevens’s engagement with the specific distressing and unsettled affairs of his past (Wall 31). His inability to face the rational deduction that the reader has already been able to recognise, as well as his strategies to avoid the inferential outcome, indicates how painful it is for him to approach these circumstances and repercussions.

For instance, while talking of his father’s illness and his own behaviour, Steven remarks that it is foolish on his part to become so invested in his past memories while being on a trip that is a very out of ordinary experience for him (Ishiguro, *The Remains* 62). He also appreciates the remarkable opportunity the trip offers to him “to savour to the full the many splendours of the English countryside. (Ishiguro, *The Remains* 62). However, despite this admission, after only two pages devoted to the city of Salisbury that he is in the process of touring, he comes back to the topic of his father and notes:

But I feel I should return just a moment to the matter of my father; for it strikes me I may have given the impression earlier that I treated him rather bluntly over his declining abilities. (Ishiguro, *The Remains* 64)

The rest of the chapter is dedicated solely to describing for his narratee his dedication to his professional commitments at Darlington Hall during the conference of 1923. The vital role he played in the smooth functioning of the conference is used to justify not caring for his father in

his time of illness, and this privileging of the professional over personal is used as a marker of 'dignity'.

Like 'professional/professionalism', meditations on "dignity" is such a red flag which crops up in the narrative as an evasion of responsibility for past acts or to present a defence for obvious questions that might arise in situations where he has privileged the professional over the personal. In the above-mentioned textual instance where Stevens attributes dignity to his handling of his father's death, his narrator functions seemingly support the claim at the level of the form. "Dignity" not only becomes the subject matter of remembrance but also informs the formal mode in which Stevens tries to narrate what he remembers, as can be seen in this exchange with his dying father:

He went on looking at his hands for a moment. Then he said slowly: 'I hope I've been a good father to you.'

I laughed a little and said: 'I'm so glad you're feeling better now.'

'I'm proud of you. A good son. I hope I've been a good father to you. I suppose I haven't.'

'I'm afraid we're extremely busy now, but we can talk again in the morning.'
(Ishiguro, *The Remains* 87)

We also see Stevens' dialogue operating within this formal mode in his exchange with Ms Kenton after she informs him of his father's demise:

'Will you come up and see him?'

'I'm very busy just now, Miss Kenton. In a little while perhaps.'

'In that case, Mr Stevens, will you permit me to close his eyes?'

'I would be most grateful if you would, Miss Kenton.' (Ishiguro, *The Remains* 95)

But, along the implied author-implied reader track what Stevens conveys is contested simultaneously and the reader is informed of Stevens's raw state of mind through his exchanges with other characters like Lord Darlington and Mr Cardinal who play a mirror to his real feelings, and it is a subtle undermining of Stevens's narrator function. Even though Stevens assures Mr Cardinal that he is doing okay in response to the latter's expression of concern, Mr Cardinal breaks off from his comments on the beauty of Darlington Hall in spring and his desire to visit again by reiterating his question "I say, Stevens, are you sure you're all right there?" (Ishiguro, *The Remains* 96). Stevens again answers that he is absolutely okay, but the incident draws the attention of the reader as it is preceded by a similar exchange with Lord Darlington:

'Stevens, are you all right?'

'Yes, sir. Perfectly.'

'You look as though you're crying.'

I laughed and taking out a handkerchief, quickly wiped my face. 'I'm very sorry, sir. The strains of a hard day.' (Ishiguro, *The Remains* 94)

While in both exchanges Stevens's narration mentions him "smiling", Mr Cardinal and Lord Darlington's dialogue reveal for the audience that Stevens is teary-eyed. And even though Stevens mentions he is alright, it is clear that he is not able to focus on his conversation with Mr Cardinal. Stevens' narrator function underreports the true magnitude of the event, or at least tries to undermine one dimension of his feelings entirely. Even when he wipes his face, thus accepting for Lord Darlington and the reader that he is indeed crying, he cites the demands of his profession as the reason. It is only through the disclosure function in the narration which operates through dialogue between Stevens and other characters contextualised with his exchange with his father on the latter's deathbed, that precedes this scene that the reader realises that Stevens's

temperament is not as one-dimensional as it seems. It is the points at which this ‘dignified’ mode reveals his own (underlying) self-doubt/ guilt that the reader becomes most conscious of the conflict at the core of the confessional ‘self’.

A similar pattern can be seen in how Ono's narration makes use of “prestige”. In *An Artist of the Floating World*, Ono’s narration continuously tries to downplay his preoccupation with societal prestige:

Indeed, I have never at any point in my life been very aware of my own social standing, and even now, I am often surprised afresh when some event, or something someone may say, reminds me of the rather high esteem in which I am held. (Ishiguro, *An Artist* 19).

But, in a text set in a time period and a society where basic exchanges like buying a house or marrying off a child are governed by social standing— Ono buys his house through an “auction of prestige”, and his daughters’ marriages are governed by lengthy marriage negotiations where detectives are hired to verify the family’s status— it becomes difficult to disregard Ono’s commentary on prestige as of little importance to him. As the narration progresses, we also realise through the narrator’s disclosure functions that there are things Ono is not telling the reader. When we encounter junctures in the novel where Ono tells an old colleague to not talk about his past to the detectives hired by Dr Saito’s family for Noriko’s marriage negotiations, even though his own recollections of the past are of a very contrasting nature, the reading becomes complicated. An instance of this is Ono’s account of Kuroda’s sudden remarks in the *Migi-Hidari*:

I have suspected for some time that Sensei was unaware of the high regard in which he is held by people in this city. Indeed, as the instance he has just related amply illustrates, his

reputation has now spread beyond the world of art, to all walks of life. But how typical of Sensei's modest nature that he is unaware of this. (Ishiguro, *An Artist* 19)

The above dialogue by Kuroda, appears highly odd to the reader because in the narrative present, when Ono wishes Kuroda to act similarly to the detectives, Kuroda outright refuses to meet him. There is a questionable gap between the Kuroda we come across in Ono's memories and the Kuroda who refuses to have any relation with Ono in the narrative present, and even though Ono, the narrator, tries to downplay it to the best of his abilities, the entire dynamic becomes a source of covert communication between the text and the reader that undermines Ono's narrative integrity. In such a light, the oft-repeated claims of not caring where he stands in society's eyes come across as untrue:

It was, I suppose, another of those instances when one is struck by the realization that one is held in rather higher esteem than one supposed. But then I was never one to concern myself with matters of esteem, and this was not why the advent of the Migi-Hidari brought me so much personal satisfaction. (Ishiguro, *Artist* 64)

Again, the assertion, after it is made several times, becomes suspect. The excess, instead of making it convincing, makes it dubious. It is a way for the narrator function to deny certain things while the disclosure function shows the contrary for the authorial audience. Like Stevens, for the longest time, Ono does not take responsibility for the consequences of his actions and attributes the change in people's perception to a bitter younger generation. It somewhat explains why we see Ono react in an extremely defensive manner with Mitsuo during Noriko's *Miai* (explored in the previous section).

This makes Stevens and Ono active agents who are engaged in vigorous image management that operates at the level of character actions as well as storytelling. As characters,

they have not only made suspect choices in the narrative past, but in attempting to cover these up, they also make certain manipulative choices in the present moment of narration in terms of what they select to tell, when they decide to disclose it, the mood that sets the tone for a scene, the commentaries that accompany the events, the amount of time and emphasis that they dedicate to a certain episode, the gaps that they leave unattended, and finally what they select to relegate to the background. If these fabulists, in both senses of the term – as people who compose/relate stories as well as concoctors who lie through elaborately dishonest stories – have not held themselves accountable for past actions, they likewise attribute their lack of narrative credibility to the passage of time, lapses of memory and a reluctance to revisit certain occurrences or speak of them clearly.

After a particularly incriminating conversation with Miyake, a prospective groom for Noriko, who pulls out of the marriage on account of Ono's past activities – Miyake cites the likes of Ono as cowards responsible for having led the country astray – Ono remarks "Did Miyake really say all this to me that afternoon? Perhaps I am getting his words confused with the sort of thing Suichi will come out and say" (Ishiguro, *An Artist* 56). After this episode, Ono goes back to believing that the reason behind the unsuccessful marriage negotiation with the Miyakes did not have anything to do with him. Similarly, Stevens cites confusion and lapse of memory as a potential reason to dismiss a rare occasion of camaraderie with Ms Kenton that he lets slip in his narration– one that was not strictly professional and that marked a turning point in their relationship (Ishiguro, *The Remains* 145). Phrases such as "But I am digressing", "Perhaps I am getting his words confused", "I am certain enough", "To the best of my knowledge", "It is perhaps a sign of my advancing years", "Perhaps he wished to impress upon me", "Perhaps it was simply my imagination", "Perhaps I am being unfair", "It would seem", "I believe I uttered

some words, in a rather half-hearted way to that extent” are only too ubiquitous across these narrations. When important factual reflections are peppered with this kind of wording, it lends a degree of suspicion that colours the reading. It is especially relevant in the confessional mode, where the subject as well as the tone of events as they unravel serve an evidentiary purpose. The *discourse* of the novels also signal to the reader to give the narration the benefit of doubt through self-reflexive dialogues such as the following one by Etsuko in *A Pale View of Hills*:

Memory, I realize, can be an unreliable thing; often it is heavily coloured by the circumstances in which one remembers, and no doubt this applies to certain of the recollections I have gathered here. (Ishiguro, *A Pale View* 156)

A similar sentiment is conveyed by Ono as he remarks on the difficulties of painting a self-portrait as it is always affected by one’s subjective bias and position:

I cannot recall any colleague who could paint a self-portrait with absolute honesty; however accurately one may fill in the surface details of one’s mirror reflection, the personality represented rarely comes near the truth as others would see it. (Ishiguro, *An Artist* 67)

These textual instances point to the traits of the genre of confessional writing itself. The narrator, in attempting to present a case for himself in front of an audience, often resorts to a narration that becomes suspect through the very means of justification. Stevens’s untimely commentaries on the themes of “dignity”, “professionalism”, and “greatness” often take the form of persuasive essays, and while we can see fiction as something that merits commentary, we also see the opposite happen in *An Artist of the Floating World*, where the abstract notions of “prestige”, “honour” and “esteem” are thrown around casually but followed by long anecdotes and personal recollections which have a tone of self-justification. Ono’s tale of his artistic

greatness, which elucidates his sense of ambition, nationalism, loyalty and responsibility through various episodes of his past and which is clearly an elaborate explanation being put forth, comes in response to the supposed suspicions of his family. His placating narration is for the sake of both the reader and all the characters within the story who partake in this narrative trigger. In fact, in Ono's narration, the disdain towards him is so palpable that it emanates from every character that he comes across and every interaction that he is a part of, whether it be his daughters who seem to firmly believe that he is privy to more information on the non-fulfilment of Noriko's previous marriage negotiations than he lets on, the bitterness that colours his son-in-law's attitude towards him ever since he came back from the war, the questions his little grandson Ichiro asks him about his past as a painter and even his former peers and students who try to break off relations with him.

The over-justifications are often a pre-emptive and preparatory discursive strategy on the part of the narrator even though it has an effect quite opposite to what is intended, in that the reader may read such instances with suspicion. We see Stevens foreground his concept of "dignity" and service long before we encounter the particular Nazi or fascist associations of Lord Darlington. By the time we see Stevens presenting his usual defence of his employer's actions and by extension his own, we already know that his notion of professionalism dictated his behaviour— a notion that does not permit a butler to question the decisions or morality of his employer. Wall explains these mental digressions in Stevens' narrative as a strategy the implied author employs in order to evoke questions about the motive behind these digressions (25). Similarly, by the time it is actually revealed in the text that Ono handed over Kuroda to the police on account of his paintings being anti-nationalist, we are already told time and again that his motives come not from a bad place but a desire to do good for his country. By relating to the

reader the reasoning behind the narrators' incriminating acts, the text tries to make the reader relate to the conditions that governed the narrators' decisions and empathise with their situation. It also forms a mediating bridge between the value system of the characters and the readers.

It is the conditioning of something as "right", built over a period of narrative time to bring it into conformity with the readers' opinions and to provide it with a certain authentication. So, to use Wall's terms, "order" and "duration" shape the tone and become means of unreliability brought into the narrative (30). Such examples express how the narrator's reportage of a scene clashes with the nature of their reading of the scene, as expressed in their expositional commentaries. Their linguistic habits also act as textual signals reflective of how their interpretations might be biased. The working of these narrative elements in tandem then manifests and establishes the narrator's unreliability within the texts (Wall 20). It stands true for every occasion when Stevens injects his own narration with a phrase offering more explanation or commentary after the scene or incident has been described. While we see Stevens embark on the topic of his previous employer's anti-semitism through mere free association, the fact that even the next chapter begins with, and is devoted to a commentary on this subject becomes a clear marker of overcompensation-to-hide strategy that sets the tone for the novel:

I feel I should perhaps return a moment to the question of his lordship's attitude to Jewish persons, since this whole issue of anti-Semitism, I realize, has become a rather sensitive one these days. (Ishiguro, *Remains of the Day* 129).

Thus, the implied author employs strategies of concealment through a shift of focalisation from what is significant to something on the fringes, which is then foregrounded in the narrative. This misdirection is both justified by and in turn helps support the construction of memory. We see Stevens talk of the silver at Darlington Hall whose polishing he oversaw and which was done

so meticulously that it became a talking-point for guests (Ishiguro, *The Remains* 120). And it is only around this central theme of silver-polishing that he drops the names of the guests involved in this exchange who happen to be historical figures of import like Herr Ribbentrop, Lord Halifax and Oswald Mosely– this establishes for the reader Lord Darlington’s associations with fascist leaders. These instances within the storyworld demand the reader’s application of their own awareness of historical events and a familiarity with cultural knowledge thus providing them with the tools for an actual evaluation of Lord Darlington’s career “upon which Stevens’ sense of his own worth is precariously constructed“ (Wall 28).

In *A Pale View of Hills*, Etsuko’s narration is designed around the subject of her motherhood. In her memories she is pregnant with Keiko and involved in constant exchanges with Sachiko’s child Mariko, and in the moment of narration she is in an on-and-off conversation with her younger daughter Niki. Everything in her *telling* seems to suggest that she has really good maternal instincts. Like prestige with Ono, other characters such as Sachiko and Mrs Fujiwara constantly attribute the qualities of a good mother to Etsuko:

“It’s very kind of you to be so concerned, Etsuko,” she [Sachiko] said. “So very kind. I’m sure you’ll make a splendid mother.” (Ishiguro, *A Pale View* 14)

Another instance of similar behaviour can be noted in Mrs Fujiwara’s comment that the birth of the child will bring Etsuko immense happiness as she will “make a splendid mother” (Ishiguro, *Pale View* 15). When Etsuko still harbours doubts, Mrs Fujiwara reiterates, “Of course you will.” (Ishiguro, *A Pale View* 15). The care Etsuko exercises during the entire pregnancy is another factor that helps in the establishing of this norm. But, most importantly it is seen in the ways she interacts with Mariko in her memories of the past. During one of her first meetings with the child– she finds Mariko wandering around in the neighbourhood– she is extremely warm

towards the child and asks her why she was not in school. When Mariko answers that she does not go to a school, Etsuko is concerned and remarks that “all children must go to school” (Ishiguro, *Pale View* 16). She tries to engage with the child to understand if there was a reason she did not like school. She also takes it up later with Sachiko and tries to convince her that Mariko needed to be around other children in an environment that supported growth and education. During her interaction she also demonstrates to the reader small habits and actions of care such as “Careful,” I said. “You’ll fall into the water. It’s very slippery” (Ishiguro, *Pale View* 16).

Etsuko, on multiple occasions goes out of her way to take care of the child. She wonders about the child’s schooling, the fact that the child is always alone and even takes up babysitting responsibilities for her on her own on multiple occasions even though Sachiko is perfectly fine with leaving the child alone. And that’s another important factor in the text’s preoccupation with the theme of motherhood – all of Etsuko’s dealings as a would-be mother happen in direct contrast to Sachiko who depicts for the reader the character of a bad mother. The good/bad mother binary is established in the novel through the narrative contrast between Etsuko and Sachiko. While Etsuko takes time out to talk to Mariko about her interests like her pet kittens and discourages the child from doing things that might be harmful to her, Sachiko’s general attitude towards Mariko is dismissive. When Sachiko starts working at Mrs Fujiwara’s noodle shop, it is clear that Mariko is not happy there as is normal for a child her age who should be at school socialising with other children and learning. This is noted by both Etsuko and Mrs Fujiwara, and yet Sachiko’s response is not just opposing, it is dispassionate to the extent of being apathetic. When they ask if Mariko is well-settled and happy at the noodle shop, Sachiko dismisses it with a joke and does not give the thought any serious consideration:

“Oh, Mariko’s fine,” said Sachiko. “Of course, she’s rather restless at times. But then you’d hardly expect otherwise under the circumstances. It’s regrettable, Etsuko, but you see, my daughter doesn’t seem to share my sense of humour. She doesn’t find it quite so amusing here” (Ishiguro, *A Pale View* 27).

It is a striking juxtaposition of narrative contrast repeated over and over throughout the text that would perhaps have no reason to be suspect except, like in the case of Ono and Stevens, it comes across as excessive. For instance, the above-mentioned line where Sachiko tells Etsuko that she will make a “splendid mother” is their very first conversation. They are practically strangers at that point. While she is of course visibly pregnant and talking of Sachiko’s daughter, thereby perhaps warranting a response in that regard, Sachiko goes on to repeat herself after the initial exchange when Etsuko offers to babysit Mariko as she considers the child to be too young to left to her own devices. Sachiko appreciates Etsuko’s compassionate behaviour and remarks “Yes, I’m sure you’ll make a splendid mother.” (Ishiguro, *A Pale View* 16)

It becomes more suspect when Niki in the narrative present also constantly stresses to her mother that Keiko’s death was not her fault. Etsuko’s obsession with her daughter’s death should also not be suspicious given the trauma a child’s death causes a mother, but the fact that Niki tries so hard to convince her that it was not her fault when such a line of thought would not naturally come to an unfamiliar reader’s mind works in an opposite way; it makes the reader doubt the intentions behind such behavior and convinces them that something is being hidden from them. As in the case of Ono and Stevens, the ‘excess’ is what renders the narration suspect. Etsuko’s position as a good mother is contested in *A Pale View of the Hills* because the *story* undermines the *discourse* – it is hard to look at Etsuko’s situation as straightforward when Etsuko’s narrative present is marked by the loss of her child to suicide (the same child that

everyone prophesied she would be a good mother to throughout the narration). Also, the uncanny similarities between the trajectories of Sachiko and Etsuko already plant the seed of suspicion in the mind of the reader. However, like the ‘excess’ there are markers in the *discourse* that signal to the reader the unreliability of Etsuko’s narration

Another such instance is when towards the end of the novel Etsuko’s *voice* suddenly shifts into the voice and perspective of Sachiko. In a dramatic climax, all of a sudden Etsuko drops the act that Sachiko’s narrative differs from her own by juxtaposing her own *voice* in the final conversation between Sachiko and Mariko concerning leaving the country with Frank. It becomes a marker of her own elopement:

After a long silence, she said: “I don’t want to go away. I don’t want to go away tomorrow.”

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

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

“You’re not to speak like that,” I said, angrily. 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.”

In this conversation the truth “slips out” – Etsuko no longer bothers to project it onto the third person character of Sachiko. In effect, this dramatic scene between Etsuko and Mariko dissolves into one between Etsuko and Keiko– it depicts the tragic conversation between Etsuko and Keiko and Etsuko’s promise to her that they will come back if she is not happy. She becomes the negligent mother she tries to detach from her throughout the novel through the creation of the character of Sachiko. Her admission to Niki that she knew all along that Keiko "wouldn't be happy over here. But I decided to bring her just the same" (Ishiguro, *Pale View* 176) further connects the climax to her. But even though Etsuko’s incrimination is quite apparent, her insistence right afterwards that she and Niki "not discuss it any further," quickly shifts the reader to other story-tracks. When she says "there's no point in going over all that now", it seems less out of sadness and more strategic (Ishiguro, *Pale View* 176) Thus, even though the story undermines the discourse, the discourse itself gives prominent markers in the texts encouraging a suspicious reading.

This rhetorical structure of Ishiguro’s fiction which utilises the confessional mode to deliberately complicate the reading process will be explored further in the next chapter, where I look at the fragmentation of the confessing subject as an effect of their character functions – representative of the narrator’s subjectivity in conflicted terms, constitutive of their identity and agency as human subjects within the narrative universe. The associated theme of responsibility– as duty, as well as accountability will be used as the lens for this examination.

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Chapter 3 Responsibility: Character and Agency

Remembrance as the central narrative mode in confessional writing is predicated on the confessing subject's search for self-awareness and self-knowledge. However, the feelings, values, motivations and attributes that define the self and dictate one's actions can often be deceptive and difficult to ascertain. I discussed in the introductory chapter how this elusiveness – the acute lack of singularity that characterises selfhood – functions as the primary subject matter in most confessional narratives. The mode of confession navigates through the perplexities of the representation of the confessing self as objectified through language within the subject 'I', governed still by the awareness that it is not enough to think of the confessing 'I' as an "autonomous, centered being that founds the individual" (Foster 3). This marks confessional writing as an acutely self-reflexive genre, and modern confessional writing has been described as characterised by "fragmentation, diffusion and attenuation" privileged over "coherence, wholeness and closure" (Gill 7). The shift in confessional writing in the perceiving and designing of the confessor as a fragmentary 'I' in conversation with an 'other', is an evolution that marks the form's steady reflection of the subject matter. It depicts the difficulties of knowing and attempting to truthfully represent oneself in a unified 'I' in front of an audience.

In the previous chapter, I looked at this fragmentary nature of the confessing 'I' utilised in Ishiguro's novels as a narrative tool, which works by channelling two sets of communication from the text to the reader (information revealed along the narrator-narratee track and implied author-authorial audience track), thereby complicating the reading process. It is in the deliberate undermining of one set of communication within the narrative that the reader is able to read Ishiguro's narrators as unreliable – the narrative encourages the questioning of the narrator's

motives and the subsequent revelation of their guilt. For this purpose, the previous chapter focused largely on what James Phelan defines as the “telling functions” of character-narrators in the first three novels of Ishiguro (12). These include the narrator’s “narrator functions”, which constitute the narrator’s role of reporting, interpreting and evaluating of the *narrated* within the narrative universe, and the narrator’s “disclosure functions”, which include the various kinds of information that a character narrator unwittingly reveals to the authorial audience in the process of their narration (Phelan 12).

In this chapter, I look at the fragmentary “I” of the confessing narrator as a device that represents the narrator’s subjectivity in conflicted terms, constitutive of their identity and agency as human subjects within the narrative universe. It is essential to do so because, unlike in the case of mystery fiction, where the purpose of evasion in the text and its deliberate generation of suspicion in the reader is for audience anticipation for the *big reveal* at the end, Ishiguro’s rhetorical structure compels a readerly engagement based on ambiguous textual communication to make the reader recognise, if not the validity, at least the persuasiveness of the narrator’s argument based on their subject position vis-a-vis their own experiences, value systems and the gaps in their discursive learning within the narrative universe. This accords a crucial role to the reader’s own set of ethics to come into play regarding how they perceive or react to specific character actions. This chapter thus marks a shift from the examination of the narrator’s “teller functions” to a perusal of the autodiegetic narrator’s “character functions” within the novels. According to Phelan’s model for character narration, a character narrator’s “character functions” are composed of a) “the ways in which characters work as representations of possible people (mimetic functions)”, b) “as representative of larger groups or ideas (thematic functions)”, and c) “as artificial constructs within the larger construct of the work (synthetic functions)” (13). I look

at the fragmentary “I” in terms of the previously mentioned lack of singularity that characterises selfhood– the conflicting discourses that inform the character’s identity and agency in terms of their character actions as well as their role as storytellers within the texts. This chapter is an in-depth look at the character’s *figurative* or *conceptual* point of view and at how their narrative voice is shaped by their worldview in terms of their ideologies and conceptual systems (Chatman 151). I use the lens of “responsibility” and the varied meanings the word carries for this examination.

I argue that the fragmentary "I" of Ishiguro's narratives can be analysed as comprising a contestation between the various meanings of responsibility as duty that shapes the narrators' identity as characters, and subsequently informs their agency in terms of character actions. These conflicting discourses then become a means for the reader to engage with these novels on an ethical level. I also argue that the notion of responsibility as accountability contextualises the previously discussed narrative frameworks utilised by Ishiguro at the level of plot. That is to say, “guilt”, in Ishiguro’s plots, acts as a narrative stimulus, and the acceptance or denial of accountability launches these characters into patterns of defensive behaviour within the narrative universe, thereby determining their character actions. In Ishiguro's first three novels, the narrators’ decisions and actions can be seen as governed by two sets of responsibilities. The motive behind their exploits on a character level arises out of their conflicted notions of responsibility as duty– the various discourses they subscribe to, which inform their decisions, and by extension, their life's trajectory. At the same time, as the narrative mode of the confessional consists of looking back at past events of an incriminating nature and relating them to an ‘other’ in a way that most warrants sympathy or exculpation, it is the admission of

responsibility (as meaning accountability) or the shunning of it that defines character actions in terms of storytelling.

Acting within the paradigm of confessional narratives, the narration in Ishiguro's texts is primarily preoccupied with the confessing narrators' defence of their past actions. The narrators often prioritise certain forms of responsibilities over others, thereby making a case to the reader for their decisions, even though these past actions are judged unfavourably in the narrative present. In attempting to stay true to what they consider their higher calling, they cite these individual duties as an excuse to evade responsibility for certain actions. However, the texts complicate these responsibilities that drive the narrators by depicting how a) individual notions of duty are also socially-constructed and thus subject to change based on the society and time period one lives in, and b) one's notion of personal responsibility carries multiple significances, and these are not often compatible with one another. In the presence of conflictual relationality of responsibilities, the individual subject's self-definition through prioritisation of one form of duty over another also constitutes agency, and thus calls for accountability.

In *The Remains of the Day*, Stevens's notion of professionalism, which is used as a narrative tool of evasion in his narration, can be seen as informed by the various value systems he subscribes to in terms of character functions. Stevens considers the duties assigned to him in his role as the butler at Darlington Hall as his primary responsibility in life. As I examined in the previous chapter, he functions within a set of self-imposed parameters that define his sense of responsibility in this sphere. His strict code of conduct does not just entail the tasks he carries out at Darlington Hall but can also be measured in terms of what he does not do. This is reflected in his complete lack of a personal life – the sacrifice of the personal for the professional becomes a marker of the extent of his contribution to his profession. Stevens's sense of responsibility stems

from his belief that unconditional support to an employer at a distinguished household is the only way for a butler to “contribute to the creation of a better world” (Ishiguro, *Remains* 96). Stevens sees the world as not a ladder but a wheel which revolves around the central hub of esteemed and distinguished households, “their mighty decisions emanating out to all else, rich and poor” who formed the outer width of the circle around these influential homes (Ishiguro, *Remains* 94). He considers people like Lord Darlington to form the hub of the wheel of humanity– and he comes the closest to the wheel through unconditional service to his employer. Any responsibility he has towards other fellow men thus becomes associated in his mind as being also through his service to the employer; he serves the men who serve humanity at large. He does not think the onus is on him to form opinions or pass judgements on the employer’s decisions and actions.

But this can only be considered flawed because Lord Darlington is also human and thus subject to errors and mistakes, as we see in the story. It also prevents Stevens from seeing how a principle like this can have the opposite effect – his lack of a fully developed moral compass can cause harm to other human beings. There are conflicting discourses at work here: duty as the performance of class roles and duty as the individual questioning of the actions of others. In a way, the clauses of the former prevent Stevens from engaging in the latter. The paradox is that the choice to privilege one over the other is intended to constitute a ‘self’ that transfers accountability to an ‘other’. In other words, an unsustainable ethical gap is created between the human subject and his actions. These “ethical holidays” can be pitted against the acceptance of responsibility as binaries which define and dictate storytelling in confessionals as “each way of telling the story of an action, its origins and its consequences, is partial, and strives to blind itself to alternative ways to tell the tale” (McGowan 233). The confessing subject’s distance from the events of the *telling* gives them the space to assign, dependent on their own interests,

straightforward causality where it might not originally exist. There is always a more or less plausible cause or logic that an agent can attribute to past actions that displaces accountability. Ascriptions of responsibility are essentially contestable as these are “excessive, dependent on assigning an efficacy, clarity, autonomy and [false] univocality to human actions”, as is evident from the explanations, overjustifications and means of manipulation and evasion that Ishiguro’s narrators employ as well as their inability to have a complete comprehension of their selves and motives (Mc Gowan 233). This is reflected further in the willingness of the narrators to identify themselves as a subject within a particular discourse (of feudal loyalty to one’s employer, of militant commitment to the idea of wartime nationalism) through which individual transgressions (seen as transgressions only later) are legitimised. However, the confessing subject’s distance from the events of the *telling* also brings into effect the function of hindsight, and the retrospective condemnation of such acts becomes the ground for narrative as *response-ability* – the ability to respond. Stevens, through his devotion to the professionally-defined notion of responsibility, is complicit with his circumscribed agency even when it costs members of his staff their job or him a chance to have a fully-realised loving relationship with Ms Kenton and his father. However, the “ethical holiday” does not last when he is given a spatio-temporal gap from the events, and the only chance at an honest retrospection on his life so close to its end. He is unable to find solace in the sense of duty he did choose, and it reflects in the novel’s climax when he admits, “I can’t even say I made my own mistakes. Really – one has to ask oneself – what dignity is there in that?” (Ishiguro, *The Remains* 217). The reason why his stance as a narrator is so dissonant– constantly flitting between praise for Lord Darlington and pride over his conduct as a butler and the overabundance of defensive commentaries justifying his position – is because it depicts his inability to remain convinced of the ideals that have shaped his life,

contrasted with the extreme difficulty of finally accepting responsibility through the shift in perspective gifted to him by hindsight.

However, when we scrutinise Stevens's identification with the duties of butlership as an innate sense of personal responsibility that he has chosen to prioritise in life, we have to take into consideration the fact that how an individual reacts is also based on what is expected of them. Even though Ishiguro's narrators regard their personal sense of responsibility as of higher value than what they consider as societal responsibilities ascribed to them, it is important to note that what one considers as one's individual duty is also shaped by the institutional and familial forces that govern them. In other words, elements of personal duty are socially-constructed. While Stevens considers his notion of responsibility as a higher calling and a way to strive for greatness that is not achieved by most people— thus warranting the sacrifices that need to be made for such a purpose— through his narration, the reader realises how his ideals are tied in reality to the personal legacy of duty passed on to him from his father. Stevens, whose home is Darlington Hall, which is also his place of work, inherits from his butler father a personal life which is shadowed entirely by a professional code of service. The socially constructed class role that he is born into is a system where the personal/familial and the domestic are defined through the professional sphere. This is reflected in the fact that even though Stevens's father is his only family the audience encounters in Stevens's narration, they never share any relationship outside of their dynamic as – initially, butler and protégé, and later when Stevens's father is partially relieved of his duties on account of his old age, under-butler and butler. It is a reversal of roles that reflects old age as a second childhood within the structures of Stevens's and his father's world, since the entirety of this domain, childhood to adulthood, is defined by the professional code of conduct.

According to his inherited ideals, his responsibility lies in conducting himself with “dignity”. Through Stevens’s lengthy commentaries on dignity, we learn that a core part of this is the abstraction of the personal. The birth of this ideal can be traced to two anecdotes Stevens recounts during his narration. One anecdote his father was fond of retelling was that of a butler who had suddenly found a tiger in the dining room. He had informed his employer of this without any fuss and asked for permission to use the “twelve-bores” (Ishiguro, *Remains* 30). Upon the butler’s return, his employer had asked if everything was okay. The butler’s response, which Stevens’s father repeated with a laugh and much admiration, was: ‘Perfectly fine, thank you, sir,’ followed by ‘Dinner will be served at the usual time and I am pleased to say there will be no discernible traces left of the recent occurrence by that time’ (Ishiguro, *Remains* 30). Stevens takes the story to heart because he believes it gives an important hint to his father’s perspective with respect to his work: “I believe the telling and retelling of this story was as close as my father ever came to reflecting critically on the profession he practised” (Ishiguro, *Remains* 28).

The other story is that of his father when he was a butler at Loughborough house. Stevens’s father had chauffeured two guests on an outing, during the course of which they had both become increasingly rude towards him. His father’s demeanour had shown “no hint of discomfort or anger”, and he had continued driving “with an expression balanced perfectly between personal dignity and readiness to oblige” (Ishiguro, *Remains* 30). However, the guests had moved on to insulting Stevens’s father’s employer after a point, upon which Stevens’s father had brought the car to an abrupt halt. Without showing any obvious anger, Stevens’s father had opened the rear door and continued to stand in front of the guests for a long time till they finally commented:

‘I suppose we were talking a little out of turn there. It won’t happen again.’

A moment to consider this, then my father had closed the door gently, returned to the wheel and had proceeded to continue the tour of the three villages – a tour, Mr Charles assured me, that was completed thereafter in near-silence. (Ishiguro, *Remains* 32)

As evident from the above anecdotes, in Stevens’s code of conduct, the butler oversees everything and is everywhere but never draws attention to himself through loud displays of emotion. The butler also becomes akin to a machine devoid of feelings except when his employer is concerned. This constitutes an effacement of the emotive, critical self– we see this reflected in Stevens’s truncated agency as an adult who is not only unable to express feelings of love for another person (Ms Kenton and/or his father), but also in humdrum everyday things like his inability to engage in “banter” (Ishiguro, *The Remains* 15). His emotive abilities are so underdeveloped that he does not know how to indulge in spur-of-the-moment witticisms– when he realises his new employer expects him to participate in his jokes, he ironically tries to practise the art of being spontaneous in preparation. Since Mr Farraday does not belong to the old line of British lords, his expectation of a more *human* side of Stevens leaves Stevens at a loss as it strays from his carefully cultivated role of the traditional butler. The recounting of his father’s anecdotes is also a narrative assertion of individual pride through the means of a traditional code of duty and is mirrored in the relating of his own anecdotes throughout the course of his narration that depict “the dignity in keeping with his position” (Ishiguro, *The Remains* 39). The sense of responsibility that Stevens inherits is then skewed so far towards the professional, that Stevens completely lacks responsibility towards the self– the desire to think for one’s happiness or to defend oneself against injustice. We get a glimpse of this conduct during the great conference of 1923 when his father is on his deathbed. Stevens continues with his professional

commitments despite this knowledge and says to Ms Kenton “You see, I know my father would have wished me to carry on just now” (Ishiguro, *Remains* 90)

The reason why the reader has to rely on the disclosure functions in the narrative to understand the real emotions behind Stevens’s facade during this episode (as elaborated in the previous chapter) is that for Stevens to let go of the demeanour means straying from his responsibility, even though in general a facet of personal responsibility entails tending to and caring for one's loved ones. The self that is consciously cultivated and remembered here is a *sacrificial* self: it relies not on stating that the personal/ emotive is value-less but on the opposite – that the performance of professional duty can be measured precisely in terms of the nature of sacrifice it entails. It is this ironic distance that Ishiguro’s text wishes the reader to note and engage with. In trying to understand the sometimes conflicted, and occasionally strangely rigid or one-dimensional nature of the autodiegetic narrators, the text raises questions that encourage the reader to see the conflicted views of the narrator in terms of their specific condition as well as the conditions of the worlds they inhabit.

We see Stevens's father’s legacy at work till his dying moment in the exchange between the two, where even in his last moments, Stevens’s father derives comfort from the orderliness of the conference proceedings. When Stevens asks about his father’s well-being, Stevens’s father ignores the question and his only response is “Everything in hand downstairs?” (Ishiguro, *Remains* 80). When Stevens tries to explain the volatile nature of the events and the rather frantic atmosphere in the kitchen on account of it being time for dinner, his father reiterates the basic question– “An impatient look crossed my father’s face. ‘But is everything in hand?’” (Ishiguro, *Remains* 80).

It is only at the end that Stevens's father finally acts like a father to Stevens, but because Stevens has known only one kind of relationship with him, he does not know how to shed the formal code that dictates his speech or let his vulnerability be shown:

‘I’m proud of you. A good son. I hope I’ve been a good father to you. I suppose I haven’t.’

‘I’m afraid we’re extremely busy now, but we can talk again in the morning.’
(Ishiguro, *The Remains* 87)

It is ironic because Stevens clearly loves his father a lot, enough to hold him as an idol and emulate him throughout his life. Yet their perennially stunted emotional dynamic does not reflect this love. In Stevens's and his father's world, responsibility towards family members ranks much lower than their professional responsibilities. We also see this when Lord Darlington tells Stevens that his father had gotten too old to carry out certain important functions in the household. Despite knowing his father's lifelong devotion to his calling, Stevens does not defend his father in any way to Lord Darlington. Neither does he offer a single word of comfort when he releases his father of said duties. When his father remarks “I have waited at table every day for the last fifty-four years”, Stevens ignores it to continue reading out from a list his father's new minor duties, after which he takes his father's leave with a bare “Well, Father, good morning” (Ishiguro, *The Remains* 61). We witness the privileging of the professional over the familial/personal also when Mr John Silvers, at whose house Stevens's father worked, is visited upon by the General whose careless commanding caused Stevens's brother's death. Knowing this, Mr Silvers offers Stevens's father leave for the days the General was staying. But Stevens's father considers the situation's enormity for his employer and replies “to the effect that while he was most grateful that his feelings had been taken into account, Mr Silvers could be assured that

service would be provided to the usual standards” (Ishiguro, *Remains* 34). Stevens’s father had to spend four days listening to the General’s military exploits, but he does not betray his real feelings:

So well did my father hide his feelings, so professionally did he carry out his duties, that on his departure the General had actually complimented Mr John Silvers on the excellence of his butler and had left an unusually large tip in appreciation – which my father without hesitation asked his employer to donate to a charity. (Ishiguro, *Remains* 34)

This is followed by another one of Stevens’s commentaries on dignity, and he says, “And let me now posit this: ‘dignity’ has to do crucially with a butler’s ability not to abandon the professional being he inhabits” (Ishiguro, *Remains* 35). It is crucial to note that a word like dignity can be equated to/located in not defending one’s dead child in a certain scenario. But, such is the conditioning within the value system that Stevens subscribes to, that familial duty is always secondary to one’s responsibilities in the professional sphere. Even the fact that his father donates the tip to charity suggests a form of personal dignity that maintains the professional status quo. This sense of dignity is so opposed to any loud display of the emotive or critical self that it is difficult to distinguish it from mere docility– which is why Stevens’s entire narration reads like a long justification. He is aware that outside the structures that he inhabits, the logic of his reasoning is elusive and requires extreme convincing and mediation for his audience to be sympathetic to his cause. This can also be seen as the reason why he mentions that his father gives the tip away– it is to distinguish his silence in keeping with the dignity of his position from subservience. Hannah Arendt’s concept of “the banality of evil” has often been employed to compare the character of Stevens with that of Adolf Eichmann. It questions Stevens’s agency

within his social and familial conditioning and questions whether any other character placed in Stevens's or Eichmann's position would have acted differently. J. Peter Euben examines the Arendtian notion that a "lack of moral imagination to see the world from another's point of view" causes people to partake in everyday evil; it is "thoughtlessness" that takes the form of evil because of its disastrous consequences (106). Stevens's and his father's actions can then be attributed to societies and structures within which their class roles operate, and which uphold moral failings by not promoting this curiosity and imagination in the individuals.

The sense of responsibility as duty then comes into conflict when faced with the other meaning the word responsibility carries— the responsibility of Stevens, Ono and Etsuko towards people they are 'responsible for'; insofar as they have a moral as well as a professional obligation to protect and nurture those beneath them in the ranks of service or those in their care who cannot defend themselves. Stevens does not protest against the unjust expulsion of two Jewish maids in his care, even though the only reason for their expulsion is that they are Jewish. This inability to exercise his agency arises from both fronts— he cannot let his feelings come in the way because that is what he inherits, and because he does not have the moral imagination to understand the magnitude of his actions, he cannot question Lord Darlington's judgement either. Such is the irony that he abides by the request because not doing so would be to fail at his responsibility towards other human beings, even though the firing of the housemaids can only be seen as an injustice to people in his care. This is contrasted with Ms Kenton's reaction, who confronts Stevens regarding this unfair conduct. But Ms Kenton's professionalism becomes inadequate in Steven's perception— despite being excellent at her job, she carries the caveat of being "emotional" or "sentimental". This is not surprising considering the gendered notions of

“rational” or “impersonal” conduct, but in Stevens’s world, one form of responsibility is always at a higher hierarchical rung.

We also examined in the previous chapter how Ono handed over his student Kuroda to the police for his so-called anti-national sentiments (because Kuroda’s paintings opposed the imperialist regime of Japan). Ono’s sense of responsibility in *An Artist of the Floating World* differs greatly from the younger generation of post-war Japan. It complicates the idea of duty further by demonstrating how personal responsibility, since it has an element of social conditioning, is also subject to change based on the time period to which one belongs and the society in which one resides. Personal responsibility is shaped by the dominant ideas and ideals of the time. Ono pronounces the climate of post-war Japan “bitter”, but the “strain of bitterness” that Ono finds directed at the likes of himself by the younger generation is not merely a passive component of the age divide; it is a direct condemnation of the generation that “led Japan astray” (Ishiguro, *Artist* 56). The aftermath of historical catastrophe is an essential theme in Ishiguro’s works, and the narrators are not known to simply take the blame (Wright 58). What ensues is a journey of active disavowal through defensive speech acts, both as characters in the fictional world as well as narrators who build that world for the readers. These narrators’ reluctance to come to terms with historical guilt is also tied to the separate understanding of what their personal responsibility entails. Because they privilege that over social blame, they are able to derive a certain fulfilment or pride even when society views them as direct or indirect participants of historical catastrophe. This can be noted in Ono’s feelings towards his and Matsuda’s role during the imperialist expansion of Japan. He believes he and Matsuda had every right to look back with satisfaction because their actions and undertakings were always “in the best of faith” (Ishiguro, *An Artist* 201). Even if their actions were marked with a

“single-mindedness”, and lacked perspective, and despite the fact that they took what could only be defined as bold obstinate steps, he notes that it is still a step above “never putting one’s convictions to the test, for lack of will or courage” (Ishiguro, *An Artist* 201).

For Ono, his sense of responsibility towards his nation is shaped largely by his desire to strive for something great. Ono feels a responsibility to rise above others and achieve greatness even if that leads him to make decisions which bear disastrous consequences. It is something he shares with Stevens – a desire to position oneself as above ordinary human beings who go about their lives without achieving “greatness” in any form. This is a discourse of exceptionalism, in that the narrators seek to validate their actions in terms of an ideal set by/within specific norms and power structures, but also seek to disavow ethical responsibility for the consequence of those *exceptional* acts. But despite their belief that what they do separates them from others who do not have the resilience or aptitude to do the same, since their notion of responsibility is governed by the dominant ideals of their society and time, these people end up playing the role of pawns in historical events. In working for Lord Darlington, which is his way of striving for greatness, Stevens ends up upholding Lord Darlington’s antisemitic views. Lord Darlington’s prejudice and fascist tendencies in turn can be tracked down to the larger discussion among diplomats at that time in history concerning the poor conditions of Germany after World War II (Ishiguro, *The Remains* 89). But, Lord Darlington at least possesses the intellectual acumen necessary to understand what he believes in, whereas when Stevens fires Ruth and Sarah, he is merely a means to an end for the execution of Lord Darlington’s ideals. Yet, his deluded notion of greatness provides him with a reason to feel pride over his conduct. He adduces his thirty-five years of service to Lord Darlington as the truest depiction of attachment to an eminent household. He also maintains that his biggest sense of contentment if life stems from what he

achieved during those years. Looking back, he asserts, he is “nothing but proud and grateful to have been given such a privilege. (Ishiguro, *The Remains* 112)

This discourse of *exceptionalism* is reflected in Ono’s departure from his teacher Mori-san’s studio. Mori-san is engaged in merging traditional ukiyo-e with some of the features of European art: subdued colours, night scenes, a mood that aims to capture the melancholia of city life as seen in the lives of the women who work in the pleasure district (Ishiguro, *An Artist* 141). However, Ono comes to the conclusion that this style of painting has taken him away from the real problems prevalent in his society, and it is his responsibility to do something about it. In what he deems as a courageous break from his Sensei, Ono begins a career as a propaganda artist departing from the technique of Mori-san to one that involved hard lines and bright colours:

Sensei, it is my belief that in such troubled times as these, artists must learn to value something more tangible than those pleasurable things that disappear with the morning light ... My conscience, Sensei, tells me I cannot remain forever an artist of the floating world. (Ishiguro, *An Artist* 180)

However, Ono’s sense of individual pride can be seen as misplaced as he is influenced by Matsuda’s ideas of “restoration” and a desire to use art as a means of support to ‘His Imperialist Majesty the Emperor’. In his first conversation with Matsuda it is clear that Ono lacks political awareness and understanding:

‘Why, I’m sorry, Ono. Perhaps I did underestimate you. Please, tell me about Marx.’

I shrugged and said: ‘I believe he led the Russian revolution.’

‘Then what about Lenin, Ono? Was he perhaps Marx’s second-in-command?’

‘A colleague of some kind.’ (Ishiguro, *An Artist* 171)

What Ono considers individualism actually owes itself to the dominant conversation around Japan's 'decay' at that time, and how it needed a restoration through "forging of an empire as powerful and wealthy as those of the British and the French" (Ishiguro, *An Artist* 173). Ono's misguided sense of nationalism makes him participate in the Imperialist movement, yet he shifts accountability for it by subscribing to his discourse of *exceptionalism*. This is also depicted in his anger towards his daughter when she says Dr Saito was probably unaware of Ono's stature as an artist. He finds it less demeaning to accept that his paintings stood for a wrong ideal than to think that they had no impact. A similar sentiment is reflected in the parallel stories Ono's narration makes use of as a means to substantiate his ideal. For instance, the anecdotes of people like Akira Sugimura and a former colleague— tales of non-conformity that lead to failure:

I start to think of Sugimura and his schemes, and I confess I am beginning to feel a certain admiration for the man. For indeed, a man who aspires to rise above the mediocre, to be something more than ordinary, surely deserves admiration, even if in the end he fails and loses a fortune on account of his ambitions. It is my belief, furthermore, that Sugimura did not die an unhappy man. For his failure was quite unlike the undignified failures of most ordinary lives. (Ishiguro, *An Artist* 134)

Even the label of "war criminal" that the younger generation accords people like Ono, as a concept, is embedded in individual responsibility. It denotes people who are perpetrators of unacceptable criminal acts that cannot be absolved just because they were carried out in the name of war; the blame for such acts rests squarely on the individual's shoulders. For Ono, even if he has come out on the wrong side of history, according to him it has been through serving the national interest. This reflects in Ono's remark to Miyake, "if your country is at war, you do all you can in support", followed by a "there's no shame in that" (Ishiguro, *An Artist* 55). We see the

varying notions of personal responsibility in the different generations also reflected in what is deemed worthy of the sacrifice of one's life and, conversely, situations where it is a mere "waste". There are varying discourses at work here— patriotic duty vs. human rights. Defence of "wars of crime" or the moral-legal accounting of guilt both occur within these discursive contexts. Ono is troubled by the honour suicide of the president of Miyake's company as an apology for the company's associations during the war. While Miyake and his colleagues take this in their stride and are even relieved to an extent by this "acknowledgement" of long overdue responsibility, Ono can look at it in no other way than as "a great waste" (Ishiguro *An Artist* 55). Conversely, Ono associates honour and martyrdom with his son Kenji's death in the war as it came in the process of fulfilling his national duty. But, for his son-in-law Suichi, who fought beside Kenji, it is not a "courageous death", but "a waste for a stupid cause" that is not even their own (Ishiguro, *An Artist* 58). Thus, the bitterness Ono feels directed towards him from the younger generation and which soaks his narration is a reminder of his agency as a character as well as a trigger for his narration. It reminds him that there are people who he has indirectly sent to fight his war and forces him to respond to that accusation. The stark difference in values across generations also provides the narrator with a reason to invoke the narratee function that serves the role of sole companion to the narrator's ideals (examined in the previous chapter). But, these narratees in providing space for the narrators' opinions also act as narrative stimuli. Purporting to be clarifying for their benefit, these narrators then find an excuse to overly explicate, and effortlessly fall into their defensive strain of commentary. For instance:

Of course, there are many people these days who have a lot of foolish things to say about Lord Darlington, and *it may be that you are under the impression I am somehow embarrassed or ashamed of my association with his lordship*, and it is this that lies

behind such conduct. *Then let me make it clear* that nothing could be further from the truth. (Ishiguro, *The Remains* 111; emphasis added)

Sentences like the one above then set the stage for their defensive commentaries (the rest of the chapter is then devoted to Stevens's defence of Lord Darlington). As agents and narrators, Stevens's and Ono's 'ability to respond' is closely tied to such narrative triggers that facilitate their remembering. On the one hand, these triggers are often self-imposed and imaginary, a reaction to their own guilt-ridden conscience, but on the other hand, their response to these shed light on their innate sense of answerability. In an unsolicited attempt at responding, often to hypothetical questions that they themselves come up with to build an irrefutable defence that no one asked for, they end up exposing their hidden knowledge of their accountability. In fact, for Ono the disdain towards him is such a trigger. It is so palpable that it seems to emanate from every character that he comes across and every interaction that he is a part of, especially from his daughters who seem to firmly believe that he is privy to more information on the non-fulfilment of Noriko's previous marriage negotiations. In a conversation about the Miyakes with Setsuko, Ono is frustrated by the relentless questioning of his eldest daughter on the topic. Even when he says "I have no idea. It hardly matters now, does it?", Setsuko apologises and lets it go, only to reinstate the conversation after a moment's thought by citing her husband's curiosity (Ishiguro, *Artist* 18). She mentions that Suichi wonders about it often, "why the Miyakes should have pulled out like that" (Ishiguro, *Artist* 18).

Ono is convinced his daughters consider him to be the reason behind the failure of the marriage negotiations. Yet, towards the end of the novel when he directly confronts his daughter, she says that she never believed his infamy to be the cause of their troubles, and merely asked him a throwaway question. While there runs in Ono the anxiety of revealing too much, the

desperation in his response is what ties him to the responsibility he is trying to shirk. Much like the *miai* episode, where Ono's guilt-ridden conscience makes him misread the situation with the Saito family and their youngest son, Ono's guilt acts as a narrative trigger that compels him to respond, thereby dictating the storytelling. Likewise, it is hard to accept that Stevens is apathetic towards Ms Kenton when her letter launches him into movement, both physically in the form of his expedition and mentally into his remembrance of the past; incidentally the two major structural elements that drive the plot of the story. Acceptance or shunning of responsibility not only contextualises narrative frameworks such as unreliability or the narratee function in the novels, it also depicts responsibility in morphological terms, as in the narrators' ability and willingness to respond (*response-ability*), shedding a light on their agency as characters as well as storytellers.

In *A Pale View of Hills*, unlike Stevens, Etsuko prioritises her responsibility towards herself over the other notions of responsibility that define her and this is the catalyst that brings her out of her first marriage. "The end of the plot clues the reader into one of the novel's primary intertexts, James Joyce's "Eveline" from *Dubliners*— Joyce's short story concerns the escape fantasy of Eveline Hill, a young woman who dreams of transcending her dreary, impoverished, stultifying Dublin existence, with its imprisoning family obligations, in order to set sail with Frank, a sailor who has known "distant countries,"" (Shaffer 19). This is alluded to through the elopement of Sachiko with a foreigner named Frank. Sachiko is a character whose trajectory bears an uncanny resemblance to that of Etsuko, and through various means of conflation within the narrative, she exhibits for the reader a psychological double of Etsuko. Her migration thus represents an act of escape for Etsuko from her responsibilities as a wife and it connects her to Etsuko of the narrative present who resides alone in England and whose elder daughter Keiko

(the person Mariko seemingly grows into in the narrative present) has died of suicide. Even though Etsuko the narrator never remarks on her first marriage in clear terms, it becomes apparent from her exchanges with her husband Jiro in the narration that it was an unhappy marriage— an acutely patriarchal setup where she was fettered by a traditional gender role. Jiro's actions make it abundantly clear that she was not an actual partner to him, not an equal half of the household. It is also hinted that she married Jiro not out of love but because she was left without a family after the war. Her father-in-law Ogata San's values also align with Jiro— though he is loving towards Etsuko, he considers her responsibilities as a wife as her primary role in life. This patriarchal mindset that shapes his views is on full display when we see how affronted he feels by the story of a wife who voted for a party different from her husband's choice. Ogata-San equates this exertion of the wife's agency to a "whim", typical of the many transgressions he believes people commit in the new age of democracy in Japan (Ishiguro, *Pale View* 65). "All in the name of democracy people abandon obligations." (Ishiguro, *Pale View* 65). Because Ogata-San views the wife as an extension of her husband and not her own person, this move appears to him a disloyalty towards the household. By using notions like reliance ("a wife can't be relied on in such matters any more"), "loyalty" and "obligations", Ogata-San turns the situation from the simple matter of a woman's basic right to choose to an act of familial betrayal (Ishiguro, *Pale View* 65). It is also an inverted equivalent of the *sacrificial self* we encounter in Stevens's conditioning— it states that the performance of familial duty can be measured precisely in terms of the nature of sacrifice a woman makes for her family and/or children.

However, Etsuko's refusal to hold herself to the consistent standards of judgement accorded to women, through an escape from her responsibilities as a wife are perceived differently in the narrative present, again reflecting how one's sense of responsibility is defined

by the time period one belongs to. Etsuko's daughter Niki, and Niki's friends who belong to a different generation from Ogata San and Jiro admire Etsuko for leaving her marriage. Niki also realises and appreciates the immense difficulty of Etsuko's action for the symbol of resistance it stands for in terms of her subject position as a traditional wife figure— "You ought to be proud of what you did with your life" (Ishiguro, *Pale View* 90). Niki, who does not believe in the institution of marriage, and has friends who have children outside of marriage, perceives Etsuko's actions as an exercise in self-reliance and empowerment. She applauds Etsuko for acting differently from the many women who "get stuck with kids and lousy husbands and they're just miserable", yet who are unable or unwilling to muster the courage to proactively rebel against it and take charge of their destiny (Ishiguro, *Pale View* 90). "They'll just go on like that for the rest of their lives" (Ishiguro, *Pale View* 90).

However, the narration complicates the discourse of empowerment as a function of responsibility for the self, by bringing in the dimension of responsibility as duty towards a child— can Etsuko's actions of self-empowerment be held in the same light when one considers the fate it brought Keiko, who was a child she was responsible for but whose happiness she sacrificed for the sake of her own. By bringing in the discourse of motherhood, the novel seems to reinforce conventional gender roles while purportedly challenging them – Etsuko's identification with a version of motherhood that does not conform to the society's conventions of being nurturing, dependable and unconditionally loving (to the point where the mother is expected to sacrifice everything for her child's happiness) casts a shadow over her self-empowering move. The binary of the good versus bad mother that lies at the heart of the novel raises for the ethical reader the question of what must be privileged, one's duty towards someone who is helpless or one's own happiness. While the answer to that might edge towards the former, given a child has no agency,

both in terms of the decision behind their conception as well as their self-preservation and protection, it is again essential to note that the novel further complicates this ethical consideration by bringing into focus Etsuko's own truncated agency. It speaks to the deeper discontent that might have plagued Etsuko in her narrative past and made her ill-equipped for or unfulfilled by traditional motherhood. Etsuko's agency is highly restricted by the patriarchal structure she inhabits as Jiro's wife. Her pregnancy is never attributed to her own desire. On the contrary, her backstory (being orphaned in the war) is suggestive of the fact that motherhood was a presupposed societal role she had to take on once she had been married off to Jiro. Her unhappiness can be noted in multiple instances during her narration. In her conversation with Mrs Fujiwara during her pregnancy she comes across as "miserable" and is told by the old lady that a mother needs to have a positive outlook. She is also against Niki's friend's decision to have a baby at a very young age and refuses to believe that a wish like that could be the girl's own desire – it seems indicative of her own feelings towards having become a mother at a young age.

Even though the discourse of motherhood does not bear similarities with Ono's and Stevens's sense of responsibility, a similar discord between two ideological standpoints can be noted here – one of the protagonist's unquestioning devotions to their higher calling (master, nation and self-empowerment), the other of liability to those beneath them in the ranks of authority (inferior, pupil and child). While Ono and Stevens try to negotiate the conflicting discourses that inform their subjectivity, Etsuko's narrative completely otherises the bad mother binary from herself through the invention of the characters of Sachiko and Mariko. Sachiko as a bad mother is marked by an excess that verges on cruelty – this is reflected in her extraordinary negligence towards Mariko and acts of unwarranted barbarity like the drowning of Mariko's kittens. The extremity of the binary plays to the traditional idea of femininity by creating a

character for whom motherhood defines her (Etsuko in the narrative past), and a cruel mother who derives no pleasure from her role as a mother and is capable of causing irrevocable harm to her child through her abusive ways. The extremity of the binary makes Sachiko almost a liberating exaggerated response to the trope of perfect motherhood that raises the mother figure to an above-human characterisation held to impossible standards by the society. The complete othering of the bad mother seems to be a strategic move to provide space for the reader's engagement with the conversations around maternal responsibility. By separating the bad mother from her completely, Etsuko is able to ward off judgement long enough for the reader to appreciate and empathise with the complexity of her position. By the time the audience is faced with the uncanny similarities between Sachiko and Etsuko that makes them realise she might be the bad mother herself, they are aware of her restricted agency. It is unclear if like Ono her guilty conscience or social conditioning makes her misread her action of leaving Japan as the reason behind her daughter's suicide – whether the survivor's guilt makes her magnify her one move of straying from her preconceived responsibility and equate her to actual cruelty as reflected in Sachiko's actions, or if she really represents an abusive mother.

But most importantly, by revealing conflicting discourses that inform ingrained notions such as one's responsibility and agency, as in the case of the other two works, the novel demonstrates the character as a product of her time whose agency is circumscribed by the limitations of her subject-position. The twin concepts of responsibility and agency define the character actions within the narrative universe in these novels. Through countless subtle manipulations of the narrator's account of the past, we are given a glimpse into the psyche of an individual at the junction of immense historical change. The novels discussed here are the attempts by such narrators to come to terms with their departure from their old worlds, the

substantial baggage they carry into the new one and their lack of ability to create meaningful difference anymore.

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Chapter 4 Conclusion

This thesis has explored the associated themes of *guilt* and *responsibility* in the first three novels of Kazuo Ishiguro *A Pale View of Hills* (1982), *An Artist of the Floating World* (1986) and *The Remains of the Day* (1989) via a close textual analysis of the narrative elements in the texts within the broader framework of confessional writing. For this purpose, I have examined various narrative elements within the novels, such as differences between the *story* and *discourse*, narratorial speech acts and dialogue, the autodiegetic narrators of the texts, and the aspects of voice, focalisation, distance and reliability that govern them. I have also analysed how the themes of guilt and responsibility gain structural value in the formal framework of *telling* vis-a-vis their role as narrative cues and triggers in the novels.

The traits of confessional writing that have functioned as the generic/literary framework within which my analysis of Ishiguro's novels is based include the fragmentary nature of the confessing subject, the space the confessional mode provides for the writing of evasion and deception, the manipulations of language that govern the confessional, and the trope of the confessional subject's search for self-awareness and self-knowledge. I have also looked at the self-reflexivity that marks the genre of confessional— how the mode depicts the difficulties of knowing and attempting to truthfully represent oneself in a unified 'I' in front of an audience/witness.

In the first core chapter, I have analysed how guilt as an overarching theme is established in Ishiguro's novels through the narrators' unreliability— the defensive motive behind the act of narration is undercut by signs of guilt despite the narrator's attempts to conceal the 'truth'. I have argued that Ishiguro's use of autodiegetic narrators gives rise to multiple channels of

communication within the texts— along the narrator-narratee track and the implied author-authorial audience track. It is in the undermining of one communication track by the other, that the narrator's guilt gets established in the text. I have also argued that while unreliability is an effect of the undermining of the discourse by the story, the discourse of the narrative itself provides clues that incriminate the narrators of the novels. I have analysed the various functions of the autodiegetic narrators within the narrative, ranging from their role as reporter and interpreter in the narrative universe, as well as mediator and informant to the authorial audience. I have demonstrated the ways in which the narrators' disproportionate explanation of the norms of the story renders their *telling* suspect. I have also analysed the narrators' defensive speech acts, mannerisms and verbal tics as textual symptoms of their guilt.

In the second core chapter, I have argued that the fragmentary "I" of Ishiguro's narratives can be analysed as comprising a contestation between the various meanings of responsibility as duty that shape the narrators' identity as characters, and subsequently inform their agency in terms of character actions. I have also demonstrated how the notion of responsibility as accountability contextualises, at the level of plot, the narrative frameworks I have explored in the first chapter. I have shown that the theme of guilt also has a structural value in these texts, as the acceptance or denial of accountability launches these characters into patterns of defensive behaviour within the narrative universe which dictates the storytelling. I have examined the various ways in which the novels complicate the responsibilities that drive the narrators by depicting how a) individual notions of duty are also socially-constructed and thus subject to change based on the society and time period one lives in, and b) one's notion of personal responsibility carries multiple significances, and these are not often compatible with one another. I have also argued that in the presence of conflictual relationality of responsibilities, the

individual subject's self-definition through prioritisation of one form of duty over another constitutes their agency in Ishiguro novels, thus calling for accountability.

The major limitation of this research project is the necessity of restricting the number of Ishiguro novels selected for this investigation. My perusal of Ishiguro's treatment of narrative is confined to his early works and thus does not chart his trajectory in entirety. Also, though I have focused on themes of guilt and responsibility in Ishiguro's confessional novels through an exclusively narrative studies standpoint, these themes lend themselves to enquiry from various other theoretical paradigms such as psychoanalytic theory and memory studies— the dynamic of a confessing subject 'I' in conversation with an 'other', prone to evasion and manipulation of language due to their repression/reconstruction of memories (caused by trauma and/or shame) deserves a reading in that direction. However, due to the constraints of time, I have not been able to explore these viable analytical frameworks.

As I have based my bipartite structure of the analysis of confessional narrative on Phelan's concept of narrative as rhetoric, where the first part is dedicated to the disambiguation of text signals, and the second part depicts the ways in which an interpretive feedback loop is generated through readerly engagement and ethical considerations, the thematic lens of "guilt" and "responsibility" can be replaced by other themes such as the writing of socially induced shame, treatment of memory and history, penitence and absolvment within a similar framework which could provide fertile ground for adequate interpretive work in confessionals. Also, as my examination is done through an analysis of the various functions served by a character-narrator within a literary work, other novels such as Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981) (autodiegetic narration within the realm of magic realism), *Gone Girl* (2012) (confession through two autodiegetic narrators, thus providing dual focalisation) *The Cat's Table* (2011) by Michael

Ondaatje, or even Ian McEwan's *Atonement* (2001) which follows a similar strategy of confessional unravelling without a first-person narrator can be scrutinised based on a study of narrative functions. Ishiguro's later novels also make use of autodiegetic narrators. Novels like *Never Let Me Go* (2005) and *Klara and the Sun* (2021) have non-human *human-like* autodiegetic narrators operating within the genre of speculative fiction. Reading these autodiegetic narrators as confessing subjects would also provide an interesting lens of examination for non-human relationships and storyworlds within the genre of sci-fi. Similarly, a scrutiny of the autodiegetic narration in Ishiguro's *When We Were Orphans* (2000) would also provide interesting insights and points of divergence in terms of the narrator's position as a detective trying to unravel other people's stories instead of weaving one around themselves.

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