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Kazuo Ishiguro's *PaleView of Hills*: An Epitome of Hypermnesia

Jadeeda Saleem
Assistant Professor of English
M.S.S. Wakf Board College
K.K. Nagar, Madurai- 20

ABSTRACT

Kazuo Ishiguro is one of the British writers. Ishiguro was born in Nagasaki, and settled in United Kingdom. *A Pale View of Hills,* Ishiguro's first novel is A Pale View of Hills. This novel presents view of the Japanese and British ideas. In 1982, the novel won the prominent Winifred Holtby Prize of the Royal Society of Literature, and *Times Literary Supplement* praise it as 'a first novel of uncommon delicacy' and 'an extremely quiet study of extreme emotional turbulence.' Mary J. Mayeropines this novel, 'skilfully interweaving past with present, unfolds a poignant haunting tale that moves the reader as much by what is left unsaid as by what is told'. Many critics accept that the general themes developed in Ishiguro's novels, including *A Pale View of Hills,* portrays the issues of memory, self-deception, and codes of good manners, leading his characters to a re-evaluation or understanding about the victory or failure of their lives. The novel is a moderate meditation on memory and solemnizing the pain, which uses fantasy and displacement to reveal indirectly the distress of a woman who has lost her homeland, her husbands, and her elder daughter.

Introduction

The association between memory and personality is a very famous theme in current British fictions and the importance of recollection is talked in many fictional works. Ishiguro's first novel *A Pale View of Hills*, is a tender meditation on reminiscence and sublimated ache, which uses imagination and disarticulation to expose circuitously the suffering of a woman who has lost her homeland, husband, and elder daughter. In this novel, Kazuo Ishiguro apprehension with reminiscence and their difficulties in the practice of shaping one's identity. The novels so far he has published discuss with individuals reminiscence their past for evidence to their identity, failure, or rejection.

A Pale View of Hills: An Epitome of Hypermnesia

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Kazuo Ishiguro's debut novel, *A Pale View of Hills,* is told in the first-person point of view of Etsuko, a Japanese woman living in the English countryside. It opens with her recalling a visit from her youngest daughter, Niki. During the course of Niki's visit, we learn Etsuko's eldest daughter, Keiko, had committed suicide. The conversation between mother and daughter is strained, the tension palpable as each tries to avoid discussing Keiko's suicide. Niki's visit prompts Etsuko to recall Sachiko and Mariko, a mother and daughter she befriended while living with her first husband in Nagasaki shortly after the end of the war. The narrative subsequently unfolds in two separate threads Etsuko's conversations with Niki during her visit at her home in England and her bourgeoning friendship with Sachiko and Mariko in Nagasaki. Etsuko alternates between the two threads, moving backward and forward in time and location as she does so. But the thrust of her narrative takes place in Nagasaki. As she gets deeper and deeper recalling her life in Nagasaki, the reader sense something sinister is happening.

Etsuko and Niki round each other and they are afraid of moving too close or of saying too much. The two are affected by Keiko's suicide. And both experiences there are a troubling incidence in her empty bedroom. But neither of them is willing to discuss the issue openly. They talk in superficialities and avoid meaningful dialogue. The air between them bristles with tension by what is left unsaid. Similarly, Etsuko's relationship with Sachiko and Mariko is fraught with tension by what remains unspoken. Sachiko is a dysfunctional and irresponsible mother who fails to provide a stable environment for her daughter. And Mariko is a disturbed child who behaves erratically, enclosed in her own little world. Etsuko shows greater concern for the child's well-being and safety than her own mother, but she never confronts Sachiko about her parental neglect. Instead of that, she agrees with every fragment of rubbish Sachiko says, express her answer with respectively. The situation is unsettling as the child clearly manifests problematic behaviours. The novel itself opens with Etsuko's recollection of the compromise she has reached with her second husband, Sheringham, over the naming of their daughter:

> Niki, the name we finally gave my younger daughter, is not an abbreviation; it was a compromise I reached with her father. For paradoxically it was he who wanted to give her a Japanese name, and I - perhaps out of some selfish desire not to be reminded of

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> the past - insisted on an English one. He finally agreed to Niki, thinking it had some vague echo of the East about it. (9)

Etsuko does not want to be reminded of the past and the reason for this is given shortly afterwards: Her elder daughter has committed suicide. This visit functions as the frame story for Etsuko's memories and is set in the early 1980s. Etsuko's memories go back to one summer in post-war Japan before she has come to England some two decades earlier. "I was thinking about someone I knew once. A woman I knew once... when I was living in Nagasaki. A long time ago"(10). In those flashbacks, Etsuko's narrative focuses on two aspects that have taken place in the early 1950s in a suburb of Nagasaki: the visit of her father-in-law Seiji Ogata, known as Ogata-San, and her relationship to Sachiko and Mariko.

From her recollection of Ogata San's visit, the readers understand that Etsuko's marriage to her husband Jiro is unhappy. He is an electronics worker and only interested in his career. More significant however, is her story about Sachiko and her ten-year old daughter Mariko. Etsuko admits that she never knew Sachiko well. In fact, friendship was no more than a matter of some several weeks one summer many years ago"(11). Still, Etsuko and Sachiko "were to become friends that summer and for a short time at least" Etsuko "was to be admitted into her confidence" (13). When Etsuko first meets Sachiko and Mariko, she is in her third or fourth month of pregnancy. Sachiko is a woman in her thirties. She has a boyfriend named Frank, an American soldier, with whom she plans to go to America. She is a very neglectful mother and not interested in her daughter whatsoever, even though she continually insists that her "daughter comes first" (86). Her abuse of Mariko takes many forms: She leaves her unattended, even in a period of mysterious child murders, she strikes her, and she entrusts her daughter to Etsuko, a woman she then barely knows: "If you have nothing else to concern you with, Etsuko… then perhaps you'd care to look after my daughter for the day. I'll be back sometime in the afternoon" (15). And rather provocative, she adds: "I'm sure you'll make a splendid mother" (15).

Sachiko justifies herself by saying that "Mariko should be capable of being left alone on her own by then. Sachiko's neglect of Mariko shows itself in her behaviour towards the pet kittens of her daughter. Even at the beginning, Sachiko is not so optimistic about these kittens and the reader learns that one cat has already disappeared before Sachiko and Mariko

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have moved from Sachiko's uncle to the cottage in Nagasaki The problematic relationship between Sachiko and Mariko reaches its climax when Sachiko drowns the kittens of her daughter. This scene is important in two ways: First of all, these kittens - Atsu and Mee-Chan - are the most important thing for Mariko and she is very protective of them. When they are killed, her world is destroyed and everything she has is taken from her. Second, when Mariko sees her own mother drowning her pets in a river, her worst nightmare comes true. To understand this, we have to go back in time: Before coming to Nagasaki, Mariko has been traumatized by witnessing a woman drowning her baby in a Tokyo canal. This incident has troubled Mariko's mind ever since, as she is repeatedly speaking of a "woman from across the river" (18). Sachiko turns out to be that woman from the river and the drowning of the cats can be thus interpreted as a symbolic murder of Mariko.

After the above mentioned scene, the inner story of Sachiko, Mariko and Ogata-San comes to an abruptly end. It is not said whether Sachiko and Mariko leave for America as planned, but it is hinted that chances are high that Frank abandons them: "I realize we may never see America."(170) The tale turn to England, where Niki very soon come to London. The novel ends with Etsuko ideas to sale the house and tries to make a new life.

Thus the whole novel deals a lot with memory, with repression and confusion of events, becoming quite deliberately unstuck by the end. The narrative takes the form of the recollections of Etsuko, a Japanese woman who moved to the UK for a second marriage, with a child from the first. The text flits between her living alone, middle-aged, and receiving her youngest daughter as a visitor, and the description of a Summer twenty-something years ago when she had a brief friendship with a single mother who is convinced she will escape to foreign shores with the assistance of her American lover, Frank. The young Etsuko believed her friend was being strung along, and the narrative is framed in a way that very much implies this is the case. Etsuko never meets Frank, and very little is learnt about him. The men in Etsuko's life, however, are explored in quite some detail: her husband, Jiro, and her father-in-law, both of whom represent old-fashioned ideas, though do not seem to get on. They are both advocates of hard work, silence, emotional repression and the importance of correct behaviour at all times. Although this is a novel that talks about the ideology behind shame it is not one that explores it.

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Conclusion

A Pale View of Hills is a testament to Ishiguro's consummate skill as a writer that he produced a seemingly straightforward novel in language that is deceptively simple but rich in an ambiguity that becomes fully apparent only in its conclusion. With a few choice words strategically located at the end, he turns the entire narrative on its head, opening it up to a variety of interpretations. It opinions that Ishiguro's fascinated in reminiscence because it's a sort out during that we see our lives, and because it's misty and ambiguous, the chance for self-deception. The author concluded that 'what people tell themselves happened than in what actually happened'.

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