Sailing through the Mists of Memory: The Journey of a Japanese Boy

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Abstract

A haunting feeling of loss lingers within our souls after reading Kazuo Ishiguro's works, memorable books about irreplaceable past and irretrievable fulfilment, isolation and hopelessness, offering but a painful catharsis of emotion and sadness. *The Remains of the Day*, *When We Were Orphans*, and *Never Let Me Go* deal with "universal themes", as Kazuo Ishiguro himself declared in one of his interviews, touching the soft spots of the self, in search of a way to deal with the sad reality check. Although Ishiguro's books are deliberately set in different settings and literary genres, one can perceive a common lingering of some sort, an elusive "figure in the carpet". There will always be an island, a journey and a belated coming back, lost identity and forced upon oblivion. Kazuo Ishiguro left Japan for England when he was five, which was to be a geographical and cultural rupture that he never managed to totally surpass. He deemed himself captive in England as, for many years, his family thought they would go back, then he became captive in his own Japan, the imaginary one made up from second-hand memories. He finally grew to resignedly accept his belonging to his adoptive island. The cycle captivity – dream of deliverance – acceptance is a trait that cannot escape the psychoanalytical mind of the contemporary reader.

This article will attempt to sail through the recurring visual and lexical patterns which disclose the trauma that brought about the wonderful works of the Noble Prize - winning novelist.

Key words: trauma, complex of insularity, journey, identity, oblivion.

Since then, at an uncertain hour,
That agony returns:
And till my ghastly tale is told,
This heart within me burns.

Kazuo Ishiguro has not been scanned, analysed and classified to a large extent yet, as he is still alive and many of the references to his books are his own. There are many interviews on the Internet and he never seems to get tired talking about his books and what inspired him to write them. Even to the anglophile readers well-aware of the cosmopolite collection of names in Britain, Kazuo Ishiguro's name sounds a bit unusual. As he confessed in his Nobel Lecture in 2017, anybody who would have met him when he was 24 would have encountered difficulty to place him "socially or even racially"[1]. He was born in Nagasaki, Japan, on 8 November 1954. At the age of five, he moved to Surrey, England, with his parents and sister, when his father started working at the National Institute of Oceanography as a research scientist, in 1960. His schooling was in English, yet, at the same time, he was given strict Japanese education as his parents always believed they would return home, a dream which was never fulfilled. Still, the fact that it took so long for them to give up their hope led Ishiguro to live on the brink of uncertainty. He nurtured his home country longing with vivid fantasies of what he called "my Japan", "an emotional construct put together by a child out of memory, imagination and speculation"[2]. He continued his studies by enrolling at the University of Kent, Canterbury, to read English and Philosophy. When he won a one-year Creative Writing scholarship at the University of East Anglia, he embarked

[1] Ishiguro, Kazuo (2017). "My Twentieth Century Evening – and Other Small Breakthroughs", Nobel Lecture, https://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/2017/ishiguro-lecture_en.pdf

[2] Ibid.

on a new professional adventure. He had never, up to that point, ever set foot in Japan since the day he had left it with his family. He confessed, in the same Nobel Lecture, his "ignorance on the grounds", which gave him a certain feeling of restlessness. The literary ambitions were new to him, as he put it, and he wrote his two pieces of writing, short stories, "in something of a panic, in response to the news that I'd been accepted on the university course. They were not so good."[3] He found himself writing about Japan and Nagasaki, the place of his birth, with "a new and urgent intensity."[4] That's when he completed the first part of his novel *A Pale View of Hills* (1982). *An Artist of the Floating World* (1986) is also set in Japan. Both books are projections of what Kazuo Ishiguro thought Japan looked like, based on his parents 'stories but also on his readings. His Japan was for him

> …a place to which I in some way belonged, and from which I drew a certain sense of my identity and my confidence […] a need for preservation. […] It was my wish to re-build my Japan in fiction, to make it safe, so that I could thereafter point to a book and say: 'Yes, there's my Japan, inside there.'[5]

Writing about Japan soon became a label though, so it became imperious for Ishiguro to find new settings. The moment Kazuo Ishiguro realised he was taken for granted as being "the writer who wrote about Japan", he decided to find quintessentially English settings with typical British characters, in which to weave his "universal" themes. His undecided belonging as a child,

[3] Ishiguro, Kazuo (2017). "My Twentieth Century Evening – and Other Small Breakthroughs", Nobel Lecture, https://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/2017/ishiguro-lecture_en.pdf

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

translated later in his difficulty, as a writer, to find his perfect setting for his books. "Part of the reason it takes me so long sometimes to write a book is I don't have the setting" [6] His universal themes, as he called them, in all his interviews and speeches, are but inner projections of his frustrating limitations.

1. The Journey

Although Ishiguro exchanged his Japan for the upmost English residence, Darlington Hall, there is a pattern that cannot escape the psychoanalytical mind of the contemporary over-psychoanalysed reader: that of *insularity* and *isolation*. Kazuo Ishiguro swapped islands when he was five: Japan for England. He deemed himself captive in England for the many years his family thought they would go back, then captive in his own Japan, the imaginary one, then finally resignedly acceptant of his adoptive island. The cycle captivity – dream of deliverance – acceptance is a recurrent one in his novels even though the settings are so deliberately different; Ishiguro actually rewrites his Robinson Crusoe-like childhood in every book he writes.

Darlington Hall, the (in)famous mansion in *The Remains of the Day*, is but a small England, an island within an island, a small universe, oversaturated with the very essence of what it represents. Stevens, whose childhood and roots cannot be retraced, "must have been born a butler"[7] spends his whole life on this "island". Later in his life, when circumstances change, he tries to escape his confined space starting on a personal quest to retrieve the irretrievable: love and past, the same way Ishiguro

[6] Kazuo Ishiguro, On Writing and Literature, found at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DoGtQPks3qs

[7] Vianu, Lidia, Irony and the Compulsion of Reading Morally – Kazuo Ishiguro (born 1954), *British Literary Desperadoes at the Turn of the Millennium*, ALL Publishing House, Bucharest, 1999.

returned to Japan later in his life, to find that he was only "an Englishman".

In the evening of Day One of his journey, Stevens recalls the places seen and, most importantly, his feelings, as there seem to be two overlapping dimensions on which the travelling takes place: the spatial one, following the roads throughout the enchanting English scenery, and the emotional one, directed to the hidden abyss of the human heart. The more Stevens distances himself from the familiar surroundings, the more anxious he gets about the separation, the same way the bird won't leave the cage. By physically distancing himself from his dear Darlington Hall Island, Stevens pictures himself sailing:

> …eventually the surroundings grew unrecognizable and I knew I had gone beyond all previous boundaries. I have heard people describe the moment, when setting sail in a ship, when one finally loses sight of the land. I imagine the experience of unease mixed with exhilaration often described in connection with this moment is very similar to what I felt in the Ford as the surroundings grew strange around me. […] The feeling swept over me that I had truly left Darlington Hall behind, and I must confess I did feel a slight sense of alarm […] I felt compelled to stop the car a moment, to take stock, as it were.[8]

The "sea quest" or the plunging into the "abyss of existence"[9] is not to be a successful one as the many years spent

[8] Ishiguro, Kazuo, *The Remains of the Day*, Faber and Faber limited. London, 1989, p.18. All further quotations from this novel are referred to this edition and will be marked in the text as (RD page no.)

[9] Danius, Sara, Professor, Permanent Secretary of the Swedish Academy, Award Ceremony Speech for the Nobel Prize in Literature, 10 December 2017. https://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/2017/presentation-speech.html

in the secluded Darlington Hall make impossible the return to the birth place, the other world. Stevens is an alien and cannot identify himself with or be identified as anything except the butler from Darlington Hall, the same way Ishiguro could never connect to his roots in Japan and had to remain an Englishman, when he finally got to Japan. The insularity complex defines itself as the insularity curse, as isolation means definitive rapture.

When We Were Orphans is an archipelago of little islands, some of them islands within islands, metaphors of isolation and impossibility of reattaching to the once amputated roots.

Christopher Banks, the Sherlock Holmes-like character (yet another typical English icon), was violently removed from the "island" of his childhood, The Shanghai International Settlement, an enclave built by the British after the First Opium War (1839–1842), alongside with American, French and Japanese ones, all but small islands isolated by interdiction of trespassing. Banks spends here a careless childhood together with Akira, his Japanese friend. They spend their days on a mound, which may be seen as the equivalent of an island

> At the rear of our house in Shanghai, there was a grass mound with a single maple tree rising out of its summit. From the time Akira and I were around six years old, we enjoyed playing on and around the mound, and […] I tend to remember the two of us running up and down its slopes […] when we had worn ourselves out, we would sit panting at the top of the mound with our backs against the trunk of the maple tree. From this vantage point we had a clear view over my garden and of the big white house standing at the end of it.[10] (When We Were Orphans 51)

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[10] Ishiguro, Kazuo, *When We Were Orphans*, Faber and Faber limited. London, 2000, p. 51. All further quotations from this novel are referred to this edition and will be marked in the text as (WWWO page no.)

The sailing connotations are again present, that mound was not only a safe, protective island, symbolic of childhood, but also the sailing ship from where both Christopher and Akira would start their life journey. The maple tree they rest their backs on is nothing but the mast from where they contemplate the sea.

Akira himself is an estranged alien. He lives with his family and sister (the same way Ishiguro did) in the International Settlement. His parents offer him a traditional Japanese upbringing, yet, when Akira is sent to school in Japan, he cannot adapt any longer to his original environment. Again, the rupture is irreversible.

Christopher Banks, in his turn, sets on a long journey across the sea after their parents go missing one by one. He is sent to England, a temporary arrangement, as he spends years becoming one of the best detectives and researching into his parents' disappearance with the secret hope of going back and finding them. Of course, when he goes back, in his adult years, things are not the same. The house he grew in is totally altered by the family that occupies it. He can barely recognize the rooms of the house and has to sentimentally let go of it.

He tries to find Akira, hoping perhaps that at least one connection can be restored. They meet, paradoxically, on another "island", the "warren", that is the ghetto, officially known as the "Restricted Sector for Stateless Refugees", once again an enclave with extremely strict regulation as to who was allowed to go in or go out. A Chinese police lieutenant introduces Banks to this unbelievable place. It seems that Banks has to go through this hellish "island" to find his parents. It may be considered a real initiating journey in the world beyond to emerge to light anew. As

in the case of the mound, there is a double sidedness, the island is also a ship with a mast, from where one can "see" their way:

> I am sure in all the time you were a child here, you never visited the warren. […] Foreigners rarely see such places. I am Chinese, but I too, like many of my peers, was never permitted to go near such places. […] It is like an ants' nest. Those houses, they were intended for the poorest people. Houses with tiny rooms, row after row, back to back. A warren. […]
> Do you see, Mr. Banks, the remains of that tower standing to the left? It looks like one of those Easter Island figures. […] If „you draw a line from that over to the remains of that large black building to the right […] The house where your parents are being held is roughly level with that tall chimney on your left. (WWWO 234–237)

Christopher manages to go through the warren and, while doing that, meets Akira, who is now a Japanese soldier, on the brink of losing his life, as he is wounded. They emerge to the tower and find the house, but his parents are not there. It would have been absurd to believe that they would have still been held hostages there after so many years, this seems to be an implicit license in the text. The ordeal helps redeeming the past and the truth concerning his parents emerges to the surface in the most unexpected and unsuspected form. Christopher meets his mother, who is old and mentally unwell, yet he painfully finds out that that connection is lost forever, too. He can only go back to England, as that is his home now.

Never Let Me Go is also set in the beautiful rural England. The reader who hasn't been warned might even think this is a novel about a boarding school or at least an orphanage, that if they manage to ignore the very first pages about carers and donors. Hailsham, the place mentioned above, is set

> in a smooth hollow with fields rising on all sides. That meant that from almost any of the classroom windows in the main house – and even from the pavilion -you had a good view of the long narrow road that came down across the fields and arrived at the main gate. The gate itself was still a fair distance off, and any vehicle would then have to take the gravelled drive going past shrubs and flowerbeds, before at last reaching the courtyard in front of the main house.[11]

The insular character of the domain is obvious once again, the mast is the residence itself, Hailsham, a prison and a surveillance spot at the same time. No one can escape it without the proper means of transport and no one can approach it without being noticed. The car is one of the main symbols in the book, the passport to freedom, within the given limits. Whether the "clones" learn how to drive or not is translated into getting to be a carer and be given time or becoming a donor.

The sailing motif is again present. There is a rumour that passes among donors that there would be somewhere a "boat stranded in the marshes". The trip to see it becomes a must for all the donors, a pilgrimage to the decaying ruin of what could have taken them away, to another life/island than the one they are stuck on. As usual Kazuo Ishiguro does not infer anything of what we are supposed to think or feel but merely depicts the setting. Ruth, Kathy's friend, encounters difficulty in passing a barbed wire fence to get to the boat. It upsets her, probably because it reminds her of the fence surrounding Hailsham. It seems to be a "confidence thing" (NLMG 219) but then, with the help of her friend she lost "her fear of the fence". Upon arrival to the boat

[11] Ishiguro, Kazuo, *Never Let Me Go*, Faber and Faber limited. London,2005, p. 34. All further quotations from this novel are referred to this edition and will be marked in the text as (NLMG page no.)

she is overwhelmed: “Oh, it’s just like my friend said it was. […] It’s really beautiful” (ibid.220).

Kathy H.is a skilful driver and has functioned as a carer for almost twelve years. In her perpetual ramblings through the English countryside, she never manages to retrace Hailsham, her home. Once she was sent to the Cottages with her mates she could no longer go back. Nobody could. None of the former Hailsham students could find it, it was a “my Japan” land, a landscape of fantasy.

> I suppose I lost Hailsham too. You still hear stories about some ex-Hailsham student trying to find it, or rather the place where it used to be. […] Once I’m able to lead a quieter life, in whichever centre they send me to, I’ll have Hailsham with me, safely in my head, and that will be something no one can take away. (Ibid.281)

It seems it is not Hailsham that she is actually looking for, but the memory of it, something that would remind her of it, a portion of a fence, the wind, Proustian catalysts of memory. Kazuo Ishiguro tells us of the revelation he had when he read Proust for the first time and how much it influenced him, as for example in the tendency to use a broken time linearity in his novels. The Proustian sensory recalls of memory are employed in Never Let Me Go, too.

Never Let Me Go might be Kazuo most painful catharsis of the loss of his Japan. The clones at Hailsham leave with the illusion that if they fall in love for real and thus prove they have a soul, they might be given a “deferral”. They all fail to do so, and there is no such thing after all, as Kathy manages to find out towards the end. *Searching love and failing to find it* bring us to another of Kazuo’s obsessions, that streaks through his novels.

Ishiguro employs a particular personal style of understating things. There is no way he would describe in plain sentences what any of his characters feel. One reads unaware and then has the revelation of romance when turning the page. "When did that happen?", "How come it was there all the time and I didn't notice it?" are fair enough questions. The thing is the characters themselves are surprised too by the sudden realisation of what they have always felt. All of them are never to live happily together ever after as the enlightening moment comes too late and anyway, the universe "works" to prevent them from any hope of eternal bliss. The reader is made to hope, to the last chapters, and then let down. Since the lifelong trauma Ishiguro seems to have experienced was his painful inability to reconnect with his roots, his never-to-be love stories are in fact projections of "my Japan", and the fact that by the time he was able to finally return to Japan, it was too late for him to fit in anymore.

2. Failed Emotions

The Remains of the Day has been the bread and butter of many of the interviews Ishiguro gave after publishing it. One of the spotlighted aspects was the fact that the novel was not "a quintessential British novel but […] a study of the failure of emotions"[12]. Ishiguro prefers to think of it as "fear of emotion, fear of the arena of emotions"[13] and also a political metaphor as to the majority of us being butlers, pawns in the greater game.

Beyond that, there seems to be a familiar pattern though, the one identified in the first chapter: captivity – dream of

[12] Kazuo Ishiguro on *The Remains of the Day* | Books on Film | TIFF 2017 found at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g1P6c3yomp0 on 13/02/2018 at 11.13 pm, min. 0:10.

[13] Ibid.

deliverance – acceptance. Stevens tends to stay within his comfort zone not only when it comes to geographical spaces but also when it comes to exploring love. Yet once he starts travelling outside his usual boundaries, he dreams of finding his lost/failed love too. Miss Kenton has been in his fantasy for many years, in the same way his Japan did:

> with the bleak light falling on her face, I could hardly help but notice the lines that had appeared here and there. But by and large the miss Kenton I saw before me looked surprisingly similar to the person who had inhabited my memory over these years (RD 168)

Again, establishing the old connection is impossible, as Miss Kenton is no longer available. Unlike him, she has resolved her inner conflicts. By deciding to go back to her husband and give their relationship a new chance, she leaves gives up her Japan too, and returns to her familiar emotional landscape. The separation is irrevocable.

When We Were Orphans is so much like *The Remains of the Day* if we think of the character, Christopher Banks, the celebrated detective, very much resembling Sherlock Holmes. He, too, is a British icon. We read half a book to find out, again upon turning the page that he and his lady friend are passionately in love. They decide to elope on the spot as if it had been something unuttered for ages. Fate thinks differently, and they are never reunited again. The fact that he could not, more than he would not, run away with Sarah, is finally accepted on the last page of the book:

> This city (London), in other words, has come to be my home, and I should not mind if I had to live out the rest of my days here. (WWWO 313).

Emotions are the key that unlock the soul in *Never Let Me Go*. There is a rumour among the clones that should they be able to prove they are capable of falling in love, they could obtain a "deferral" from donating and "completing". So, they make efforts to produce art in order to "display" their "souls" (NLMG, 248). Tommy, one of the clones, has this theory that the reason they were asked to produce art was to find out, from their works, which students were really in love. Ruth, another Hailsham student, finds her "possible" that is the person she had been cloned after. Not her original but her "possible" that is her might have been, had she not been a clone, had she been allowed to have a life, and, should we extrapolate Ishiguro's lifetime obsession: had she lived on a different island. She watches her "possible" from outside the street window and pictures herself working in the office her "possible" works in.

> There was a big glass front at street-level, so anyone going by could see right into it: a large open-plan room with maybe a dozen desks, arranged in irregular L-patterns. […].
> We kept on staring, and it looked like a smart, cosy, self-contained world. (NLMG 156)

Their fate though, if we can call it that way, or rather intended use, is inescapable. Hailsham, or the memory of it, was the only "human" concession that humans could make to their clones. Resignation and completion are the only choices, Kathy concludes crying, her first open hint of human emotion:

> The fantasy never got behind that – I didn't let it – and though the tears rolled down my face, I wasn't sobbing or out of control. I just waited a bit, then turned back to the car, to drive off to wherever it was I was supposed to be. (NLMG 282)

3. Lost Identity

Kazuo Ishiguro's characters seem to be travelling to a certain destination all the time. In the three books dealt with (and not only) the characters are always on the verge of starting a trip to a new landscape, a lifelong nurtured fantasy, a landscape of secret wishes yet to be fulfilled.

Stevens embarks upon a motoring trip to retrieve his past, Christopher Banks travels back to China to retrieve his lost family, and Kathy C is looking for the memory of Hailsham. All of them are trying to find their dreamed-of land, the "island" of one's hope.

Another common "issue" all of Kazuo Ishiguro's characters have is their *identity*. Ishiguro himself had this uncertain double image he presented to the world. He was the Japanese boy in a typical English setting, he became the first Japanese chorister in an Anglican church (according to his personal, unofficial statistics), he won the Nobel Prize as a British writer, yet the Japanese acclaimed his being born in Nagasaki. He confessed in his interviews that he was always perceived as an Englishman despite the fact that the Japanese managed to find his ninety something years old former teacher who recalled him perfectly. This uncertain identity emerges more strongly in the case of Ishiguro's characters, as they have to permanently adjust the way they regard themselves, based on the way they are perceived.

Stevens (*The Remains of the Day*) thinks of himself as being the butler of a noble Englishman who played a crucial role in the history of England. When Lord Darlington's benign role is beginning to be questioned, Stevens experiences uncertainty for the first time in his life, as he can no longer rely on his rock. On preparing to leave this small world for a motoring trip to the West Country, Stevens revises his collection of "splendid suits" passed on to him over the years by Lord Darlington and his distinguished

guests. These suits acquire the value of distinctive mark of the butler's belonging to that group once inhabiting Darlington Hall.

> ...one never knows when one might be obliged to give out that one is from Darlington Hall, and it is important to be attired at such times in a manner worthy of one's position.

The attires also have a functional role, that of projecting a certain image. Clothes enhance personality, as Marshall McLuhan stated when defining the laws of the media. By trying to render an impeccable flawless impression, Stevens accounts for what/who he wants to be perceived as, a highly respectable man, a professional who had had the honour of contributing, even with his humble services, to the making of British history. Stevens crosses the country in Mr. Faraday's Ford, an American car, so his projected image acquires a double rooting, which makes him even more impossible to "place". It is the reader's overall impression that Stevens doesn't want to advertise where he was coming from and is never too open about his being from Darlington Hall. In a way, we might say he is travelling undercover yet throughout his trip Stevens has to reveal the fact that he is from Darlington Hall. The name of the place is due to raise a few eyebrows since its former owner had been a Nazi collaborator. Being associated with the place proves to be more of a scarlet letter that Stevens wears with dignity. He defends the memory of its former owner to the very end and gives him all the credit with extenuating circumstances, yet his identity is shaken.

Despite some sad personal realizations, Stevens is looking forward to returning to Darlington Hall, as that is the space that gives him security and a sense of belonging.

> What can we ever gain in forever looking back and blaming ourselves if our lives have not turned out quite as we might have

> wished? The hard reality is, surely, that for the likes of you and I, there is little choice other than to leave our fate, ultimately, in the hands of those great gentlemen at the hub of this world who employ our services. What is the point in worrying oneself too much about what one could or could not have done to control the course one's life took? (RD 177)

4. Redefining Oneself

Christopher Banks, the celebrated detective in When We Were Orphans, is an orphan and since mysterious circumstances cover partially the disappearance of his parents he has to (re)define himself. In the first part of the book, there is a high society reunion he is invited to by one of his former school friends, who was particularly well connected. The sudden realization that he is labelled as nothing more than "a chap like you" makes him immerse himself in his work, that of becoming one of his best detectives and finding his parents. He "works" on his image for years, trying to become the best, thus hoping to impress Sarah Hemmings, an "ambitious" woman who would only settle for the best man. Yet he cannot connect with Sarah while he is still in England. He never seems to possess enough interest for her as to who he is and his standing in society. They are only able to connect when they meet in The International Settlement in Shanghai. Here, Christopher can retrace his roots and define himself, he becomes an entity worthy of interest. Again, the reconnection with the origins is an awkward and painful one, fate has a say this time, too. The two lovers never-to-be are separated for ever, and the familiar feeling, recurrent in Ishiguro's writings, that life might have been different, had they had roots to connect to, lingers to the end of the book.

> …for those like us, our fate is to face the world as orphans, chasing through long years the shadows of vanished parents. There is nothing for us but try and see through our missions to the end, as best as we can, for until we do so, we will be permitted no calm. (WWWO 313)

The Hailsham students in *Never Let Me Go* strive to build an identity denied to them. Tommy, one of them, is the only one who cannot produce art, he same way the others can, therefore he is bullied and seen as a misfit, even in the distorted world of Hailsham. Some of the girls at Hailsham plot to approach Madame, the person who ran the school, and scare her. They do so, yet the effect they have on her is a painful realization of them being different in a way they could not grasp at the time.

> Ruth had been right: Madame was afraid of us. But she was afraid of us in the same way someone might be afraid of spiders (NLMG 35)
>
> Thinking back now, I can see we were just at that age when we knew a few things about ourselves – about who we were, how we were different from our guardians, from the people outside – but hadn't yet understood what any of it meant. (NLMG 36)

All of the students have the tendency to "pretend" they are real people. One day they might become actors, Ruth actually thinks she might get a deferral and work in an office. They form couples, discuss literature, art, write essays and avoid smoking. Actually, as I have mentioned before, their world mimics the real one. Not even the reader can tell from the very beginning the distorted world they are reading about. The author is late on revealing things and hints only get a meaning later on in the book. People seem to be unaware, although cloning is a national programme in the book. On their memorable trip to Norfolk, when Ruth manages to see her possible and Kathy manages to find a

copy of her long-lost tape with the song Never Let Me Go, the group of friends from the cottages visit an art gallery. They are taken for students and have a blissful moment, yet Ruth sets things straight in a painful moment of anger:

> We all know it. We're modelled from trash. Junkies, prostitutes, winos, tramps. Convicts, maybe, just so long as they aren't psychos. That's what we come from. We all know it, so why don't we say it? […] A bit of fun. Let's have a bit of fun pretending. Art students, that's what she thought we were. Do you think she'd have talked to us like that if she'd known what we really were? (NLMG 164)

Kathy understands that the only thing they ever had was Hailsham, that's what Madame and her friends and sponsors tried to offer them, *identity* and *memory*. The Hailsham students are considered privileged among the clones in other centres, they are special. Everybody wants to hear their stories from Hailsham, that is have a piece of their memory. The others have not been allowed to have anything resembling a human life. As Madame says, "you'd not sleep for days if you saw what still goes on in some of those places" (NLMG 260).

Kathy is the one that understands that the dreaming should not be about the future but about the past. Hailsham and the memory of it is about all that she would ever get. So, she spends her miserable life looking for glimpses of it, not the real Hailsham, as it no longer exists anyway, but the memory of things past (Ishiguro had a breakthrough in his writing career after he read Proust).

> Mind you, though I say I never go Looking for Hailsham, what I find is that sometimes, when I'm driving around, I suddenly think I've spotted some bit of it. I see a sports pavilion in the distance and I'm sure it's ours. Or a row of poplars on the

> horizon […] These moments hit me when I'm least expecting it, when I'm driving with something else entirely in my mind. So maybe at some level, I am on the lookout for Hailsham. (NLMG 281)

Kathy would have let go of Hailsham had she not looked after a donor close to completion who asked her to tell her everything about her childhood at Hailsham. He took delight in it as, obviously, his childhood was a far cry from what she had had.

> There have been times over the years when I've tried to leave Hailsham behind, when I've told myself I shouldn't look back so much. But then came a moment when I stopped resisting. It had to do with this particular donor […] it was his reaction when I mentioned I was from Hailsham. […] That was when I first understood, really understood, just how lucky we'd been – Tommy, Ruth, me, all the rest of us. (NLMG p. 5 -6)

In the last pages of the book, we find Kathy looking forward to settling down and starting her donation programme, so she would have time to think about her Hailsham.

5. Conclusions

Is Ishiguro forever reliving the projection of his Japan in his mind? Can he ever escape the ghost of the abandoned island? He has tried to find a new setting in all of his books written in his post "my Japan" period. As he has confessed, the reason why it took him so long to write a book was his inability to find a setting[14], yet despite the fact that his choice of places is very eclectic at first glance, all of them are set in England. The search does not consume but fuels and amplifies itself. When he wrote his most recent book, The Buried Giant, Ishiguro tried to create

[14] Ibid 8

"that world that doesn't already exist."[15] He does that, yet he sets it in England stripped to its bare origins. Psychologically speaking, some might say that he tries to compensate for not being English, but the Japanese boy. Poetically speaking, he is caught between two seas and, in order to redeem himself, he has to tell his story over and over again. The same as in his life, Ishiguro tries to reconnect first with his Japan, in order to let go and return to his second homeland, his adoptive island, England. From the point of view of the settings used in his books, we might say Kazuo Ishiguro has experienced two phases as a writer, the first one in which he tried to come to terms with the Japanese landscape his imagination created, corresponding to novels such as *A Pale View of Hills* (1982), *An Artist of the Floating World* (1986), and the second one, in which he tries to find a new British identity, all set in England, in novels such as *The Remains of the Day* (1989), *When We Were Orphans* (2000), *Never Let Me Go* (2005), *The Buried Giant* (2015).

All the characters in Ishiguro's books bear the mark of undecided identity, the most obvious trait being that of not being able to choose one's destiny. As one of the famous quotes attributed to Kazuo Ishiguro says, "There was another life that I might have had, but I am having this one." Stevens, the butler, Christopher Banks, the detective, Kate, the clone carer are trapped in destinies they did not necessarily choose but try to make the best of it. One cannot help drawing parallel lines with Ishiguro's destiny.

A certain behavioural pattern strikes through all of his works. Stevens, the butler, an iconic English figure, has to choose between his duty of fulfilling his job and his secret wish but fails

[15] Kazuo Ishiguro Uncovers "The Buried Giant" found at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j_MpnJ4belI on 11.03/2018 at 11.15 am (min 21:17)

to do so as life overtakes him and places him in a situation he can no longer escape. So, he sticks to whatever he has left, his job, for as long as his American employer decides he needs him. Christopher Banks, another iconic English figure, comes to a point where he has to choose between his duty to find his missing parents or listen to his heart and find love. He wants both, but destiny walks faster than him and denies him the choice. He, too, can only return to his duty towards his adoptive daughter and, the same as Stevens, is denied spending his life with the woman he was in love with. Kate, the carer, takes painful resignation to the utmost of "human" endurance. She can only choose to live in the past, love is not denied in the end but becomes pointless. Again, the only option she has is to fulfil what she was literally made for. All these characters stand in Ishiguro's gallery of failed emotions. Even the secondary characters are but clones of the same model, the non-Japanese, non-English, non-anything little boy sailing where life takes him. The same way famous painters sometimes draw their self-portrait hidden among others in the painting, Kazuo Ishiguro depicted himself in the small Japanese boy, Akira, Cristopher's Banks' childhood long lost friend. Akira's family is but Ishiguro's family, father, mother and sister. Akira, too, is educated following strict Japanese tradition yet when he goes back to Japan, the same way Ishiguro might have had but he never did, he doesn't seem to fit. He can only come back to the International Settlement, where he is to spend the rest of his life, even if an alien there too. Akira and Christopher seem to be the twin sides of young Kazuo: Akira is the Japanese boy who cannot be truly so and Christopher, the English boy by adoption, as he spent his early childhood outside the borders of England. They are Ishiguro's inner demons and have to meet and reunite in order to find solace. It is so important for Ishiguro to reunite the two that he forces the narrative line in the most incredulously theatrical manner to make the two meet again. He sacrifices the plot and

leaves Sarah Hemmings wait for Christopher, baggage packed and everything at the climax of the plot, a disappointing manoeuvre for the readers yet a rewarding one for Ishiguro's inner searching.

The journey is one of Ishiguro's greatest obsessions, thus specific predilection Ishiguro has for "sailing" metaphors and terminology. The only way Stevens, the butler, can solve his dilemma is by engaging in a long motorised trip which he compares to sailing. The trip offers him the opportunity to see his image reflected in other waters than the still ones at home. It is a trip down the memory lane too and the flashbacks are intertwined with the narration. He has to let go and break down in order to be able to return and assume his designated position again.

While Stevens has to make one trip, Christopher Banks has to make several. Firstly, he is sent to England where he has to turn the miserable orphan boy Puffin, as Akira called him, into renowned detective Christopher Banks, a powerful man who can find the missing parents. A sea captain will see he gets to England safely. Then, years later, he returns to the International Settlement prepared to find his parents. Yet Christopher Banks, too, has to take a redeeming journey through the warren where he finds his doppelgänger, Akira. Only reunited can they reach the end of their journey.

Kate has set the sails of her imagination on finding her beloved Hailsham, the one she grew up in, the only gift humans could spare her, the gift of having something to remember. Her journey is not a geographical but an introspective one. Travelling across the country triggers, in a most Proustian kind of way, her recollection of Hailsham. Ruth, Kate's friend, sets on a trip to find her possible, but the experience turns out to be painful as she only gets to have a glimpse of a life she might have had. Kate and Tommy also have to find and meet the people from their childhood and travel together to see Madame, hoping to get a deferral, yet they have to come back and accept their fate as it is.

The three books discussed, *The Remains of the Day*, *When We Were Orphans* and *Never Let Me Go*, feature lonesome islanders, who live on some sort of island or secluded world, Darlington Hall, The International Settlement, Hailsham. They all ramble on timeless alleys of memory trying to come to terms with their childhood – or, more generally, with the past. Reconnecting with the past is more often painful yet enlightening, as they acknowledge the failure and move on. Identity and memory are quintessential to all characters since life on their island doesn't offer what they expected, they have to take refuge inside and redefine themselves.

One question comes to mind: is Ishiguro longing for the life he might have had? None of his interviewers ask him that. From the point of view of the European, who thinks the world he lives in is the supreme one, the question is probably out of the question. The success Ishiguro enjoyed and the numerous prizes he has been awarded, Nobel prize on top of all, might induce us to say that he is most reasonably happy with the life he has. Leaving the author out of the picture though, at least two of the three books tackled with (*The Remains of the Day* and *Never Let Me Go*) are memorable, haunting stories that touch the most profound strings of our souls resonating with our hidden failed emotions. The motivation for the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2017 could never have been more accurate on describing Kazuo Ishiguro as the writer who in novels of great emotional force, has uncovered the abyss beneath our illusory sense of connection with the world".

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