

Etsuko's memory of past relationships in Japan in Kazuo Ishiguro's *A Pale View of Hills*

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Introduction

Etsuko Sheringham, the protagonist of Kazuo Ishiguro's first novel, *A Pale View of Hills*, is the mother of two daughters, Keiko and Niki, from two different marriages. Having survived the bombing of Nagasaki and suffered great personal loss, she attempts to go on with her life by marrying and starting her own nuclear family. During the time of her pregnancy with her first daughter, Keiko, she meets Sachiko, a single mother of a daughter, Mariko, from a previous, unhappy marriage. Many critics have commented on the similarities between the two mother-daughter relationships. Wong remarks that "Sachiko's life seem(s) to mirror and to foreshadow aspects of Etsuko's own" (27). She and others have also speculated as to whether Sachiko and Mariko truly exist or are they just figments of Etsuko's imagination (30) or is the traumatized Etsuko simply using them as a way to distance herself in order to tell her own story? As she recalls the past, Etsuko often admits confusion and the uncertainty of her memory in recalling her own story and that of Sachiko's which is typical of Ishiguro's novels in his use of the unreliable first-person narrator.

While Etsuko has natural lapses of memory that inevitably occur with time, what she chooses to say and not say are meaningful and have certain implications. Her reticence leaves important questions unanswered as she attempts to justify the life choices she has made to herself and to the reader despite the tragic outcome of Keiko's suicide and a second marriage that does not measure up to her expectations. Ishiguro mentioned in an interview with Don Swaim in 1990 the use of information gaps in his stories:

Particularly at the time I wrote *A Pale View of Hills*—I must say going back ten years—I was very interested in the technique of using gaps and spaces in fiction to create very powerful vacuums. That's something that I always used in my later fiction, but I think it's particularly noticeable in my first book. The reason I'm interested in these gaps, these kinds of black holes of information is because I'm interested in the way people can't face certain things, when people resort to self-deception and tell themselves stories that aren't quite complete about what happened in their past. (*Conversations* 97)

This is clearly his strategy with Etsuko and the reason why she often describes Sachiko's story in much greater detail than her own, leaving her own story incomplete. The reader is often left in doubt as to a clear distinction between the two women's stories and must interpret the meager details Etsuko provides about her own story. Apart from them both having daughters whom they decide to take with them to a foreign country with foreign partners, both Etsuko and Sachiko have been married to men in their own native country, Japan. In this paper, I will examine Etsuko's past relationships in Japan before she goes to England with her second husband. I will focus primarily on three characters who represent substitute parental figures, Mrs. Fujiwara and Ogata-San, her lost love, Nakamura-San, and her first husband, Jiro. By discussing her memories of these relationships and the trauma of loss, I will show how Etsuko lacks a sense of self and numbed with pain, can only follow the conventional life of a woman of her time and place which her parental figures recommend: get married and have a family. This, however, brings her no contentment and she feels both alienated and dissatisfied with her life. Leaving England for a new start several years later demonstrates her taking initiative and going against her culture to have a more satisfying life; however, this results in the death of her daughter, Keiko while giving life of a different kind to her second daughter, Niki.

I. Niki's Role as Defender of her Mother's Past

The novel opens in the present with the protagonist, Etsuko, spending time with her second daughter, Niki, at her Surrey home. Niki lives in London and rarely comes to visit. This visit in particular comes soon after the funeral of Etsuko's first daughter, Keiko, who had committed suicide in Manchester. Niki chose not to attend her half-sister's funeral as the relationship between the sisters was far from close. Niki feels some guilt and embarrassment for not attending but admits that she could not remember Keiko's face and that she only recalled her as "someone who used to make (her) miserable" (10). The word "miserable" is also later used with reference to Etsuko's pregnancy with Keiko in a flashback. But Niki has come to show her support for her mother and her decision to leave Japan. Etsuko recognizes that Niki

had come to me out of sense of mission. For recent years she had taken it upon herself to admire certain aspects of my past, and she had come prepared to tell me things were no different now, that I should have no regrets for those choices I once made. In short, to reassure me I was not responsible for Keiko's death. (10)

Etsuko's comment on responsibility for her daughter's death shows that both she and Niki are very aware of Keiko's continued hold on them beyond the grave. Niki almost appears to be like a lawyer in the way she argues for the correctness of her mother's decision to leave Jiro and Japan for her father and England. She also tells her mother that her friends were impressed with Etsuko's refusal to "waste her life" in Japan, implying that staying with Jiro would have made for a miserable future (90). Niki does not intend to "waste" her own life, living in the conventional way. She lives with a boyfriend and has no desire to get married or have children as she thinks that "many women just get brainwashed" into thinking that "all there is to life is getting married and having a load of kids" (180). This is the natural course of life to Etsuko and what she did especially in regard to her first marriage with Jiro after the war which resulted in the birth of her first daughter.

Keiko is not far from Niki's mind as well during her visit. She feels an eeriness about Keiko's bedroom, mentioning to her mother an "odd feeling" sleeping in her old room which is opposite that of her deceased sister's. In fact, she cannot endure it and requests another room. Etsuko reacts coldly to her daughter's request, although she herself feels "a strange spell (that) seemed to linger there" and one that had "grown all the stronger now that Keiko was dead" (33). The room had been Keiko's sanctuary where she had escaped from the outside world and the conflicts she had with both Niki and her step-father. Keiko's inability to cope with life at home and even away in Manchester show that she had suffered mental anguish that may have been akin to that which Etsuko herself had faced in the aftermath of the bombing of Nagasaki. Keiko had endured a life without friends or a warm family environment while Etsuko endured the loss of both family and friends.

II. Etsuko in Post-war Nagasaki

In recalling post World War II Nagasaki, Etsuko says that "(t)he worst days were over by then. American soldiers were as numerous as ever—for there was fighting in Korea—but in Nagasaki, after what had gone before, those were days of calm and relief. The world had a feeling of change about it (11). She does not discuss details about those "worst days" and instead talks about rebuilding efforts and of living in one of the new apartment blocks filled with people like herself and Jiro, "young married couples, the husbands having found good employment with expanding firms" (12). Although she does comment about the halt in the rebuilding, of some stagnant, unhealthy wasteland and a sense of "transience there, as if we were all of us waiting for the day we could move to something better," she puts forth a calm, positive attitude. The unhealthy landscape near her home and the "transience" reflect her disquietude and sense of emptiness. Although she has found stability in married life with a man able to provide for her financially, she is anxious and uneasy about her impending motherhood. She feels like an outsider, unable to commiserate with the other young wives who gossip about the newcomer, Sachiko. Etsuko remarks about the other women:

... I do not doubt that amongst these women I lived with then, there were those who had suffered, those with sad and terrible memories. But to watch them each day, busily involved with their husbands and their children, I found

this hard to believe—that their lives had ever held the tragedies and nightmares of wartime. (13)

Etsuko feels alienated from the very women she should have most in common with as they have survived the aftermath of war and the atomic bomb. Her choice to not associate with these women may be due to not wanting to share the “tragedies and nightmares of wartime” that she has undergone. Indeed, Etsuko refuses to share much of her wartime tragedies with the reader, only offering brief, scattered hints. She is in a state of mental instability, only outwardly assuaged by a marriage that she went through with, mainly from the persuasion of those around her.

III. Etsuko's Family, Nakamura-San, and Mrs. Fujiwara

When she goes to her home district of Nakagawa, Etsuko admits to feeling “mixed emotions of sadness and pleasure” and a “deep sense of loss” (23). She tells the reader nothing about her family of birth. In fact, she never talks of having brothers, sisters, or any information about her parents, other than her mother's close friendship with a Mrs. Fujiwara who still resides in Nakagawa. Etsuko tells Sachiko all about Mrs. Fujiwara's circumstances:

“She had five children. And her husband was an important man in Nagasaki. When the bomb fell, they all died except her eldest son. It must have been such a blow to her, but she kept going....

Her husband was an important man.... Whenever I see her, I think to myself I have to be like her, I should keep looking forward. *Because in many ways, she lost more than I did*” (111). (my italics)

Etsuko does not hesitate to talk about another person's losses but will not do so about her own. She never explicitly states in what ways Mrs. Fujiwara lost more than she did. Despite her losses, Mrs. Fujiwara forges ahead in her life and due to her reduced circumstances, makes her living running a noodle shop. While Etsuko is influenced by Mrs. Fujiwara's positive stance towards life, Sachiko, on the other hand, sees Mrs. Fujiwara as “a woman with nothing left in her life” (122). Etsuko points out that she has a shop and her son but Sachiko does not seem very convinced by this argument; in truth, Etsuko may also view Mrs. Fujiwara's life as empty. Despite her own hardships, Mrs. Fujiwara worries about Etsuko, the daughter of her friend, just as she worries about her own remaining child, Kazuo. In this way, she is a mother figure for Etsuko. She tells Etsuko that she needs to look to the future and, when Etsuko gets married and becomes pregnant, she suggests that she should look forward to having her child. Mrs. Fujiwara's influence is not unlike that of Lady Russell over Anne Elliot in Jane Austen's *Persuasion*, except in the former case, she is recommending a swift marriage to get over a loss, not preventing a marriage and incurring a loss. Etsuko, like Anne, is a gentle soul and a traumatized one as well who cannot oppose such persuasion, and Mrs. Fujiwara, like Lady Russell, is a formidable woman.

While Etsuko does not mention siblings or talk about her parents, she gives a few random comments in reference to a previous serious relationship. Mrs. Fujiwara knows about her relationship with Nakamura-San, a man who has died during the war, presumably from the atomic bomb. Like a concerned mother, Mrs. Fujiwara counsels Etsuko to keep looking forward, not backward to what could have been with Nakamura-San. Etsuko has done as advised by marrying Jiro and becoming pregnant; however, this does not mean that she has forgotten her lost love and Mrs. Fujiwara seems to be aware of Etsuko's state of mind. When Etsuko expresses sympathy for Kazuo's loss of his fiancée, Miss Michiko and his inability to forget her, Mrs. Fujiwara responds with “You too, Etsuko, I remember you were very heartbroken once” (76). Etsuko regrets talking about the past and admits, “I think about Nakamura-San sometimes. I can't help it”; although they had not been officially engaged, this very admission shows that she had been in love with Nakamura-San and had hoped to have a life with him (76-77).

The depth of her relationship with Nakamura-San and her deep sense of loss are further implied when Ogata-San, her father-in-law, asks her to play the violin. Etsuko admits to not having touched it for a long time and then Ogata-San describes the time when she played the violin soon after the end of the war:

“... (Y)ou were so devoted. I remember when you used to play in the dead of night and wake up the house.”

“Wake up the house? When did I do that?”

“Yes, I remember. When you first came to stay with us.... Don't look so worried, Etsuko. We all forgave you....”

“Is that true? I woke up the house?”

“Don't look so worried, Etsuko. It was years ago....”

“But why didn’t you stop me?”

“It was only for the first few nights. And besides, we didn’t mind in the least.” (57)

Clearly Etsuko does not recall this episode and it may be the trauma of her losses that caused her to behave in such a way. Ogata-San describes her “very shocked” but that “(w)e were all shocked, those of us who were left” (58). Etsuko realizes that she had acted like a “mad girl” and one contributive factor was likely her loss of her fiancé-to-be. Etsuko does not mention any other people close to her besides her mother and Nakamura-San.

In addition, Nakamura-San’s memory is hinted at when Etsuko goes to her bedroom to retrieve money to loan to Sachiko. Etsuko goes to a cupboard in her bedroom where she keeps things of value to her to get the money:

From the lowest drawer, I removed various items—photograph albums, greeting cards, a fold of water-colours my mother had painted—laying them carefully on the floor beside me. At the bottom of the drawer was the black lacquer gift-box. Lifting the lid, I found the several letters I had preserved—*unknown to my husband*—together with two or three small photographs. (71). (my italics)

This is where she keeps her precious belongings such as her mother’s paintings. The reader is left to guess from whom the letters are from and whose pictures they are but a reasonable conclusion is that they are mementoes from Nakamura-San. The fact that she keeps these things hidden from Jiro seems to imply that Etsuko believe that her husband would not be pleased that she still had such keepsakes.

IV. Ogata-San: Father Figure turned Father-in-law

As mentioned in the previous section, Ogata-San had allowed Etsuko to stay with his family after the bombing. Etsuko feels gratitude, telling Mrs. Fujiwara that “Ogata-San was very kind to me in those days. I don’t know what would have become of me otherwise” (76). Etsuko uses the past tense here but she does later, insist to Niki that she was “very fond” of him as she saw him as a father figure from the beginning. Ogata-San also cared enough for Etsuko to wish for her to marry his own son, Jiro; in fact, he reminds her to what extent he wanted her to join the family when he talks about his planting of her favorite flowers, azaleas, at the gateway of the Ogata family home:

“...I planted them in the gateway that day. The day it was decided.”

“The day what was decided?”

“That you and Jiro were to be married...But you see, Etsuko, you asked for them.... In fact, you positively ordered me to plant them in the gateway.”

“What?”—I laughed—“I ordered you?”

“Yes, you ordered me. Like I was some hired gardener. Don’t you remember? Just when I thought it was all settled at last, and you were finally to become my daughter-in-law, you told me there was one thing more, you wouldn’t live in a house with azaleas in the gateway. And if I didn’t plant azaleas, then the whole thing would be called off. So what could I do? I went straight out and planted azaleas.” (136)

Etsuko has completely forgotten that he did this to ensure the marriage took place. Ogata-San had also done this in the hopes of the couple continuing to live in the family home. Ironically, the family home is abandoned with Jiro and Etsuko in company housing, Kikuko, Jiro’s sister, living with her father-in-law, and Ogata-San himself alone in a small apartment in Fukuoka. His efforts to keep the family together had been in vain and he make his frustration and disappointment clear with his passive-aggressive conversations with both Etsuko and Jiro. Etsuko feels gratitude for his former kindness and treats him with respect due a father-in-law; in addition, his presence provides a topic of conversation with her husband as well as some much-needed company for her.

Etsuko plays the role of a good daughter-in-law in paying attention to Ogata-San and showing consideration to him. They banter in a friendly manner and Etsuko willingly prepares a lunch box for him when he hints that he would like one. She notices that the old man wants his son’s company and tries to appeal to her husband on his behalf. She listens to him complaining about his daughter’s father-in-law being so domineering in not allowing the young couple to live on their own while he himself appears to wish for the same arrangement with Etsuko and Jiro. Etsuko also accompanies him when he goes to visit Jiro’s former classmate, Shigeo Matsuda, to upbraid him on an article he wrote, criticizing the pre-war education that Ogata-San espoused. She goes as far as to sympathize with her father-in-law, even though her

own husband will not take the trouble to broach the topic with Matsuda himself. Etsuko's solicitous behavior toward Ogata-San is her way of showing gratitude for his prior generosity and to do her duty. She takes her father-in-law's part when she notices her husband's disdainful attitude towards him, by proposing that Jiro spend more time with his father during his visit. In this way, she is a go-between for Ogata-San and Jiro who also have a problematic relationship. However, Jiro does not appreciate her efforts and feels irritated by his father's visit coming at what he considers an inconvenient time and abruptly ends conversations with his wife by going to bed or leaving for work.

Ogata-San's frustration with his son originates from Jiro's decision not to follow the tradition of living in the family home with his father after his marriage to Etsuko (181). As mentioned earlier, he also felt used by Etsuko whom he felt "ordered" him to plant azaleas as a condition for marriage but he expected her to support his wish of their continuing to live in the family home. Although Etsuko does not explicitly voice her view on the matter to her husband, Jiro himself decided for them to move away, which implies her implicit consent or, at least, passive compliance. Ogata-San complains to Etsuko about his daughter's father-in-law, Watanabe-San as being like a "war lord" but he himself would like to be the head of the family instead of a mere visitor. Etsuko appears to understand his meaning and makes efforts to placate him. To Niki many years later, she admits that she "would have been happy if he'd live with (them)" (181) which implies that she had no say in the matter.

Jiro treats his father in an uncaring, dismissive way. During Ogata-San's visit, Jiro often pleads off spending time with him with the excuses of being busy at work and being tired from work. He apologizes for his busyness and not being able to spend more time and pretends to listen to his father's conversations but is always in a rush to get away. Ogata-San also pretends to be understanding of his son's situation repeatedly saying comments like, "...if you have to work, it doesn't matter in the least"(30) but Etsuko is acutely aware of his real meaning. The two men engage in a polite conversation most of the time but inwardly both are seething. Jiro ignores his father's complaints and deflects; however, they do have a frank talk over chess.

Etsuko describes this conversation in detail as it represents perhaps the main character flaw she sees in her husband. During a chess game that Jiro is eager to get away from, Ogata-San discusses strategy, that a "good chess player needs to think ahead, three moves on at the very least" (128). Jiro is unimpressed and uninterested in his father's advice and simply wants to read a report for work. However, when Ogata-San continues his lecture about chess, the two have an angry exchange. Jiro responds to his father:

"...Forgive me if I'm mistaken... but I believe you just said yourself, the player who cannot maintain a coherent strategy is inevitably the loser. Well, as you've pointed out repeatedly, I've been thinking only one move at a time, so there seems little point in carrying on...."

"Why, Jiro, this is sheer defeatism. The game's far from lost. I've just told you. You should be planning your defence now, to survive and fight me again. Jiro, you always had a streak of defeatism in you, ever since you were young. I'd hoped I'd taken it out of you, but here it is again, after all this time" (129).

While Jiro believes that this talk is only about chess, Etsuko certainly sees it in a more significant light—otherwise she would not recall this discussion in such detail. Ogata-San, too, sees chess is more than just a game and sees it as an example of one of Jiro's inability to think ahead and strategize. Ogata-San's final assessment of his son is that he has not matured: "Just like when he was a child....When he doesn't get his own way, he sulks and there's nothing to be done with him" (130). Etsuko recognizes the same characteristics in Jiro as Ogata-San, remembering her own experiences with her husband.

V. Etsuko and Jiro

Etsuko's descriptions of her interactions with her husband are far from warm or pleasant. Jiro appears to be a very traditional Japanese man who is preoccupied with getting ahead and is part of the young generation that will bring about the post-war Japanese economic miracle. He, a "small, stocky man wearing a stern expression" and with a tendency to "hunch forward—in a manner not unlike that of a boxer—whether standing or walking" (28) cares about advancing his career in an electronics firm and does not wish to dwell on what happened during the war. He speaks little to Etsuko and does not confide in her, even when he is about to be promoted. On the morning of an important meeting,

Etsuko tries to start a conversation with her husband at the breakfast table while he is reading the newspaper:

"I hope it all goes well today", I said, after we had sat in silence for some minutes.

My husband gave a shrug. "It's nothing to make a fuss about," he said. Then he looked up at me and said: "I wanted my black silk tie today, but you seem to have done something with it. I wish you wouldn't meddle with my ties."

"The black silk one? It's hanging on the rail with your other ties."

"It wasn't there just now. I wish you'd stop meddling with them all the time." (132)

Etsuko shows her husband to be very picky, "fastidious" about his appearance, and not easy to please. Jiro treats her like a servant who does not know how to do her work properly. The primary emotion he seems to express with her is that of annoyance and dissatisfaction. When his colleagues drop by for a visit, she finds out that they have nicknamed him "Pharaoh" because "he urges (them) to work like slaves while he does nothing himself" (61): both at home and at work he behaves like a dictator. Even when he gets good news about his promotion, he does not tell Etsuko directly although she is his wife. When she overhears his conversation with his father about his promotion, she tries to please him:

"Congratulations," I said, smiling at my husband. "I'm so glad."

Jiro looked up, as if noticing me for the first time.

"Why are you standing there like that?" he asked. "I wouldn't mind some tea, you know." (154)

He looks to his wife to keep house as a place of rest for him and to serve him. Etsuko says nothing about him showing any consideration towards her when she is pregnant which may be one of the reasons for her misgivings about motherhood. She notices careless habits of him such as him eating cake sloppily, dropping pieces of it onto the tatami mat. Often times, he says nothing to Etsuko but simply gives her disapproving or annoyed looks whenever she speaks or takes some action that is not expected of her. They have few conversations and, as Etsuko simply puts it regarding talking to her husband, "it was never in the nature of our relationship to discuss... things openly" (127). Lastly, Etsuko also relates a disturbing episode when Jiro is talking to his co-workers about one of them threatening to beat his wife with a golf club because she did not vote the same way as him (62). Jiro seems to be interested in how his colleague dealt with a wife who refused to obey him. Etsuko remembers these negative details, clearly leaving the impression that Jiro is a demanding, inconsiderate husband. This leaves the reader to conclude that Etsuko had just cause for her unhappiness and dissatisfaction in her marriage with Jiro.

On the other hand, Etsuko speaks positively about her marriage and circumstances in public and never complains to anyone about her husband. When the pregnant Etsuko visits Mrs. Fujiwara at her noodle shop, Mrs. Fujiwara examines her carefully and they have the following conversation:

... "Etsuko, you're looking rather tired today."

"I suppose I am." I laughed a little. "It's only to be expected, I suppose."

"Yes, of course." Mrs. Fujiwara kept looking into my face. "But I meant you looked a little—miserable."

"Miserable? I certainly don't feel it. I'm just a little tired, but otherwise I've never been happier." (24)

Etsuko cannot conceal her negative feelings, but she insists that she is the happiest she has ever been and only admits to tiredness. Later, Ogata-San also makes a similar inquiry to her when they are talking about baby names:

"... But if it's a boy I'd like him to be named after you. You were like a father to me once."

"Am I no longer like a father to you?"

"Yes, of course. But it's different."

"Jiro is a good husband to you, I hope."

"Of course. I couldn't be happier."

"And the child will make you happy."

"Yes, it couldn't have happened at a better time. We're quite settled here now, and Jiro's work is going well.

This is the ideal time for this to have happened."

"So you're happy?"

"Yes, I'm very happy." (34)

Forms of the word "happy" are used repeatedly but she describes her happiness in reference to Jiro's work and the timing of her pregnancy; in this way, the feeling she expresses seems forced and merely polite. Ogata-San appears to doubt that

she and Jiro are happy together and during his visit he has a chance to see what the marriage is like for himself.

Etsuko also denies her unhappiness when she gets into an argument with Sachiko about not taking into consideration Mariko's feelings about going to the U.S. Sachiko angrily accuses her of being envious to which Etsuko responds:

"I assure you I'm happy for you. As for myself, I couldn't be happier with things as they are. Jiro's work is going so well, and now the child arriving just when we wanted it.... I'm very happy with my life where I am..." (46).

Again, Etsuko insists she's happy because of Jiro's work going well and a child being born soon. Instead of saying that she is happy with her husband and about her impending motherhood. Etsuko's claims of happiness to all three people sound hollow and unconvincing: her response to Sachiko is merely to save face and to the two people who are her parental figures, she seeks to reassure and not worry them as well as to convince herself of how she *should* feel, being married and provided for by a husband with a good career.

Etsuko had not forgotten Nakamura-San which means that her marriage, while practical and convenient, did not help her to get over her sadness; in fact, it may have exacerbated her feelings of loss and emptiness since her view of marriage and Jiro's view of it do not seem to be in sync. While Etsuko tried to talk with Jiro, he was too preoccupied with work and avoided discussion or any kind of confrontation. Even the birth of Keiko could not close the rift between her and Jiro.

Jiro has a passive strategy for dealing with problems, as Ogata-San noticed as well, and he uses time to his advantage. He waits in the expectation of problems to disappear if enough time elapses. Etsuko refers to this tendency of Jiro's in regard to how he dealt with his father's distress over his former classmate's critical article about him:

... (M)y husband was simply waiting for Ogata-San to return home to Fukuoka so the whole affair could be forgotten. Meanwhile, he would continue to agree readily that such an attack on the family name should be dealt with both promptly and firmly, that the matter was his concern as much as his father's, and that he would write to his old schoolfriend as soon as he had time. I can see now, with hindsight, how typical this was of the way Jiro faced any potentially awkward confrontation. *Had he not, years later, faced another crisis in much the same manner, it may be that I would never have left Nagasaki.* (126) (my italics)

While Etsuko carefully tries not to put blame for Keiko's death on Jiro, she clearly blames him for leaving her no choice but to leave. Etsuko never explains the reason for the divorce but clearly some problem had arisen and Jiro had avoided facing the problem directly, instead perhaps choosing the path of least resistance as he had earlier with his father.

However, ultimately, Etsuko does not blame Jiro for the failure of the marriage nor Keiko's unhappy end. During the conversation with Niki in which Niki tells her mother that she should "be proud of what (she) did with (her) life," Etsuko remembers that Niki's father, despite being a writer about Japan, he "never understood the way of our culture, even less a man like Jiro" (90). She takes Jiro's side against the idea of him being an "oafish man":

Jiro worked hard to do his part for the family and he expected me to do mine; in his own terms, he was a dutiful husband. And indeed, for the seven years he knew his daughter, he was a good father to her. Whatever else I convinced myself of during those final days, I never pretended Keiko would not miss him. (90)

Etsuko clearly understands that she deprived her daughter of her father and, in her telling of Sachiko's story, reveals that she promised Keiko that they could return to Japan if she wanted. Although she tried to convince Keiko that Sheringham was "very fond" of her and would be "just like a new father" (172), Niki admits that "(h)e ignored (Keiko) most of the time" (175). At the end, Etsuko confesses that she had not done what was best for Keiko: "... I knew all along. I knew all along she wouldn't be happy over here. But I decided to bring her just the same" (176). It is here that Etsuko confesses that she acted in the hope of her own happiness rather than going through the motions of continuing her unhappy marriage with Jiro. Etsuko cannot think in the same way as Niki that "sometimes you have to take risks" and "(y)ou can't just watch your life wasting away" (176). She ultimately blames herself for failing in her duty as a mother primarily but also as a wife to Jiro.

Conclusion

In *A Pale View of Hills*, Etsuko tries to fulfill society's expectations of her by becoming both a wife and mother.

Despite having survived the atomic bomb in Nagasaki and great personal loss, she like the rest of the survivors tries to rebuild her life. Having lost Nakamura-San, the man who would have been her fiancé and without any family, she is out in the world alone. Mrs. Fujiwara, her mother's friend, undertakes to guide her through the post-war trauma and move forward to a life of normalcy and attempt to forget the past. Etsuko admits to acting like a "mad girl" in the aftermath of the bombing when Ogata-San takes her in and she ultimately becomes part of his family with her marriage to Jiro. However, she and Jiro are more of an arranged match than a love match and more of a marriage of convenience. Etsuko recalls little affection or communication between them and, while trying to fulfill her duties as Jiro's wife, feels increasing dissatisfaction. She becomes pregnant with Keiko and, instead of feeling excitement or joy, feels misgivings about motherhood and no lessening of her personal unhappiness. Her feelings and future actions are foreshadowed by Sachiko's story of an escape to America with her American lover. Etsuko herself ends up seeking a similar escape by marrying an Englishman and running off to England. Niki, the product of her second marriage, admires her mother's decision to seek happiness for herself; she, like her father, has little understanding of Japanese culture. Therefore, she cannot comprehend Etsuko's sense of responsibility for Keiko's tragic end.

In *A Pale View of Hills* and his following two novels, *An Artist of the Floating World* and *Remains of the Day*, Kazuo Ishiguro addresses the theme of personal responsibility and how people, when remembering the past, try to deceive themselves into believing that what they have done with their lives was justified and meaningful. Memory as Etsuko says "can be an unreliable thing; often it is heavily coloured by the circumstances in which one remembers" (156) and Ishiguro's next protagonists, Ono and Stevens, both prove this point. There are no clear-cut happy endings and Etsuko can only attempt to put her past to rest and, as Mrs. Fujiwara repeatedly advised her, "look to the future" in her second daughter and seek some solace in a relationship with her. From his first novel, *A Pale View of Hills*, Ishiguro brings to the fore his themes of conflict between two worlds and wrestling with the past, the present, and the future.

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