

Approaching the ‘Trauma Aesthetic’
in Kazuo Ishiguro’s Novels:
The Grey Zone and the Manipulation of Memory

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Abstract

This article discusses the grey zone and the manipulation of memory evinced by the narrators of Kazuo Ishiguro’s novels, with special emphasis on *A Pale View of Hills* (1982), *An Artist of the Floating World* (1986), *The Remains of the Day* (1989), and *Never Let Me Go* (2005). It will show how the unreliable Ishigurian narrators allow for the use of a trauma methodology that focuses on what Primo Levi called ‘the grey zone.’ In recent trauma research, the contentious issue of ‘perpetrator trauma’ has started to gain scholars’ interest: Michael Rothberg’s ‘implicated subject,’ for instance, or Dominick LaCapra’s notion of ‘empathic unsettlement’ go beyond the traditional trauma model and challenge the fixed dichotomic relationship between perpetrators and victims. This view does by no means deny the trauma of the victims but rather indicates that, in Ishiguro’s novels, perpetrators are rarely purely evil and can even suffer from PITS (Perpetration-Induced Traumatic Stress). Rather than making excuses for unspeakable acts, my approach aims to explore the relationship between guilt, shame, and what psychologists call moral injury, in relation to Ishigurian narrators. This article will show that in the aforementioned novels, the main characters, as well as secondary and episodic ones, are, at times, both perpetrators and victims.

Keywords: the grey zone, implicated subject, moral injury, guilt, shame, unreliability

The four novels penned by Kazuo Ishiguro chosen for analysis in this article, namely *A Pale View of Hills* (1982), *An Artist of the Floating World* (1986), *The Remains of the Day* (1989), and *Never Let Me Go* (2005) evince certain common traits that point towards the possibility of clustering them under the umbrella of ‘grey zone’ trauma and perpetration, as defined by Primo Levi in *The Drowned and the Saved* (1986). This article will show how Ishiguro’s narrators, as well as secondary or episodic characters, face repressed shame that resurfaces in unreliable narration employing digressions and the ‘proleptic past perfect,’ as defined by Mark Currie. Finally, it will discuss to what extent healing from trauma is possible in the cases of these characters that manipulate memories in the interplay between past and present.

In *About Time* (2010), Mark Currie suggests that all novels are about time and focuses on the relationship between fictional narratives, future time, and the nature of being. In *Narrating the Past: Historiography, Memory and the Contemporary Novel* (2011), Alan Robinson establishes that history and historical fiction – and, by extension, any narrative dealing with memory and the past – “project an anachronistic narrative world,” a narrative based on what Arthur Danti dubbed “cognitive asymmetry” (x). Robinson deems historiographic metafiction, a term coined by critic Linda Hutcheon in the 1980s, outdated and narrow, as it fails to observe the interplay between the past, present, and future, being incompatible with “discourses of spectrality, the uncanny, trauma, photographic postmemory and cultural memory” (xii). Robinson distinguishes between “the present past” – our mental representation of what has come to be known as ‘the past’ – and “the past present” – the historical agents’ immanent perspective of “past actuality,” whose “anticipatory planning is directed towards the past future,” i.e. projections and speculation of possible events (xii).

Similarly, in his book *Reading the Times: Temporality and History in Twentieth-Century Fiction* (2019), Randall Stevenson discusses the issue of the mutability of time, the relationship of the past with the truth, and the role of narratives by relying on the fictional and/or theoretical work of modernist writers such as Virginia Woolf, T. S. Eliot, Joseph Conrad, D. H. Lawrence, and Samuel Beckett. Peter Boxall, in his study *Twenty-First-Century Fiction: A Critical Introduction* (2013), argues that T. S. Eliot's "discovery" that "Time present and time past / Are both perhaps present in time future, / And time future contained in time past" represents a "threshold between . . . one mode of historical thinking and the next" (45). Stevenson's insight, however, suggests that the past being part of and modified by the present, albeit compellingly expressed by Eliot, is a discovery of the Modernists more generally (75).

The above-mentioned concepts, evocative of a Modernist worldview in their engagement with time escapism and timelessness, lead to the examination of the main thematic preoccupations pertaining to the depiction of memory and of the historical or personal past in the contemporary novel: trauma, re-imagining wars or any other large-scale disasters, individual and collective memory, the tension between self-determination and external factors, the relationship between the individual and society, and the structure-agency debate. Such narrative concerns pave the way for the emergence of an "anachronistic present past" altered by present-day events or interests, with a view to recreating "a plausible past present" (Robinson xiii). In this theoretical context, i.e. that of memory and trauma studies, as well as that of the High Modernists' preference for narrating/re-inventing the past, Ishiguro's novels have been analysed by scholars such as Barry Lewis, Cynthia Wong, Patricia Waugh, Sebastian Groes, Sean Matthews, Mark Currie, Peter Sloane, and Yugin Teo, who have indicated how his novels are deeply rooted in the problematics of time, memory, and accountability, and revolve around the (im)possibility of surpassing traumatic events.

While Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), one of the pillars of Modernism, has been instrumental in the development of trauma studies, there were other pioneers in the field as well who contributed to the development of trauma theories. For instance, displacement, one of the key notions in the study of trauma, was not, in fact, Freud's coinage but Pierre Janet's (1859-1947), a student of Jean Martin Charcot (1825-1893). Freud and Janet "continually criticised each other with Freud believing that Janet underestimated the power of the unconscious, whilst conversely Janet thought Freud placed too much emphasis on the unconscious" (Davies). Equally important for the history of trauma studies, Charcot studied traumatic neuroses and focused on how and why physical injuries could lead to psychical effects, with special emphasis on hysteria, initially in women and later in working-class men who suffered industrial accidents. In the nineteenth century, any neurosis, be it what we would now call PTSD or multiple personality disorder, was placed under the umbrella term 'hysteria' (Bond and Craps 19-20). Thus, historically,

dissociative disorders were classified as forms of hysteria, more prevalent in women than men. Sigmund Freud regarded dissociation to be a normal means through which the ego defended itself against unacceptable unconscious thoughts – an expression of unconscious conflict. Pierre Janet, one of Freud's contemporaries, had differing thoughts and considered dissociation as abnormal – detachment from conscious awareness occurred only as a part of psychopathology. (Oltmanns and Emery qtd. in Davies)

Janet argued that dissociation "was the underlying mechanism that connected hysteria and trauma" (Bond and Craps 21), i.e. Charcot's and Freud's work, and that it was most often triggered by a traumatic event, resulting in "hysterical symptoms, including sleepwalking, hallucinations, nightmares, and forms of automatic writing" (Bond and Craps 22). Such symptoms, according to Janet, helped the traumatised subjects rid themselves of an *idée fixe* ('fixed idea'), i.e. "thoughts or mental images which assume

exaggerated proportions, have a high emotional charge and, in hysterical patients, are isolated from the habitual personality” (van der Hart and Horst qtd. in Bond and Craps 22). In other words, traumatic memories are, according to Janet, split from “personal consciousness” (i.e. the subject experiences dissociation) and persist as fixed ideas, most likely unconsciously, in dreams, flashbacks, or dissociative episodes (qtd. in Bond and Craps 22). Although this particular approach is now obsolete, Janet’s *idéés fixes* seem evocative of the way in which stream-of-consciousness is depicted, for instance, in Ishiguro’s *The Unconsoled* (1995): in the dream/nightmare-like setting of the novel, Ryder seems obsessed with various ideas, people, and events, such as his parents’ coming (or rather not making it) to his recital, and does not seem to be aware of time, space, or even himself. Similarly, Stevens, in *The Remains of the Day*, is overly concerned with his responsibilities as a butler to the point to which his work becomes a mission: his pathological need to be constantly available for this employer and to perform tasks exemplarily reveal an obsession, I argue, with proving his worth to his father.

Today, the commonly agreed-upon definition of dissociation is “a common defence or reaction to a traumatic situation” (Steinberg qtd. in Davies), i.e. “a natural bodily response to life threatening situations” or other traumatic events. When one feels threatened and unprotected, “the nervous system automatically switches into dissociative mode . . . these memories are not erased but rather *buried* and may *resurface* at a later time” (Davies; emphasis added). This perspective is evocative of Ishiguro’s narrators and characters, even on a lexical level, for instance, in the case of *The Buried Giant*. In Ishiguro’s 2015 novel, the protagonists, Axl and Beatrice, embark on a journey to find their long-lost son of whom they have no memory due to an amnesia-inducing mist affecting the entire community. The traumatic and guilt-ridden memories that resurface as the plot unfolds could be indicative of a form of (collective) dissociation inflicted by both personal and collective trauma. Similarly, in Ishiguro’s early novels, *A Pale View of Hills*, *An Artist of the*

Floating World, and *The Remains of the Day*, repressed memories resurface, to various extents, in the unreliable narrators' dissociated stream-of-consciousness accounts, revealing built-up guilt and shame regarding their past actions. Hence, in Ishiguro's unreliable narratives, the manipulation of traumatic memories is evinced by means of digressions and the presence of the stream-of-consciousness, or by what Currie has identified as the "proleptic past perfect" ("Controlling Time" 94). Currie argues that in *Never Let Me Go*, time "has a particular atmosphere, a kind of doubleness, that shapes all levels of the discourse, from setting to narrative voice:" the plot takes place in the last decade of 20th century England but there is "a kind of timelessness," due to the "scarcity of historical locators and specific temporal references" (93). These elements create an "odd historical present, with its atmosphere of the past and the future," evincing buried – and more or less accurate – memories that resurface in what Currie calls the "proleptic past perfect," which results in layered and labyrinthine recollections, rendering the narrative process even more unreliable (93-94).

In her entry on memory and trauma studies in *The Encyclopedia of Literary and Cultural Theory*, Anne Whitehead considers trauma studies as part of the broader field of memory studies and links trauma to memory by further stating that traumatic experiences lead to pathological remembering (878). While the relationship between trauma and memory disorders had been theorised before, especially by Freud in *Mourning and Melancholia* (1917), *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), and *Moses and Monotheism* (1939), Whitehead traces the origins of trauma studies to the later decades of the 20th century, which were marked by the aftermath of the Vietnam War, as well as by the official recognition of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) by the American Psychiatric Association in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (1980) (878). As one of the forerunners of trauma studies, Cathy Caruth's trauma theory draws numerous conclusions from Freud's *Moses and Monotheism* rather than his *Mourning and Melancholia*, for instance. This has led to a theory of trauma that is based on catastrophic, violent events that have transgenerational

consequences. From the rest of Freud's work, including *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Caruth builds on methodology: the unrepresentability of trauma, its pathologic character, dissociation. There are various second-wave trauma scholars (Ruth Leys, Wulf Kansteiner and Harold Weilnböck, and Anne Rothe) who have harshly criticised Caruth's framework of analysis, arguing that new trauma theories need not be based on Caruthian methods, launching "an all-out attack on trauma theory" (Bond and Craps 132). Following the argument of Lucy Bond and Stef Craps in *Trauma* (2020), this article does not intend to join the bandwagon of the "backlash against trauma theory" but rather to hold a position of appreciation and critical judgement (136). Hence, second-wave theories, such as Michelle Balaev's, Michel Rothberg's, or Greg Forter's, seem suitable for this reason: they build on first-wave methodology and aim to go beyond it but do not deny its relevance and legacy.

In Balaev's model, silence, i.e. the 'unrepresentability' of tragic events or the impossibility of their explicit depiction, is no longer due to what Caruth considered the "unspeakability" of trauma due to its unknown character. On the contrary, for Balaev, silence, i.e. omissions, becomes a marker of cultural models:

the 'speakability' of traumatic experience is strongly influenced by cultural models in the novel that identify the most important aspects to remember. This perspective reminds us that the 'unspeakability' of trauma claimed by so many literary critics today can be understood less as an epistemological conundrum or neurobiological fact, but more as an outcome of cultural values. ("Trends" 157)

Balaev further mentions that silence in the trauma model can be a rhetorical device and proves her point by briefly analysing Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861) from this perspective, illustrating how the rhetorical use of silence pinpoints the dehumanising and torturous effects of slavery while emphasising inner strength and resiliency (158). The presence of silence in the memoir, the refusal of graphic descriptions of

traumatic events, can also be explained culturally: what is withheld is conditioned by the social standards and narrative conventions of the time rather than by what Caruth deemed “speechless terror” (158).

Another point worth making in relation to Balaev’s perspective on the rhetorical use of silence in the trauma novel is that omissions allow for digressions and narrative unreliability, which are extremely common in Ishiguro’s fiction. In Ishiguro, the narrators’ omissions or failure to tell the entire story is a stylistic device that also evinces shame and guilt, seeking redemption. Thus, for instance, the entire narrative of *A Pale View of Hills*, as told by Etsuko to her younger daughter, Niki, is an attempt at metaphorical redemption, as it is indirectly revealed that Etsuko feels responsible for Keiko’s, her eldest daughter, suicide. Etsuko tells Niki the story of how she came to meet another woman, Sachiko, whom she befriended while being pregnant with Keiko:

In many ways Niki is an affectionate child. She had not come simply to see how I had taken the news of Keiko’s death; she had come to me out of a sense of mission. For in recent years she has 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. I have no great wish to dwell on Keiko now, it brings me little comfort. I only mention her here because those were the circumstances around Niki’s visit this April, and because it was during that visit I remembered Sachiko again after all this time. I never knew Sachiko well. In fact our friendship was no more than a matter of some several weeks one summer many years ago. (*PVH* 10-11)

Etsuko avoids thinking about Keiko all the while unconsciously doing so. In fact, as it can be inferred towards the end of the novel, Etsuko creates an alter-ego of her own persona, Sachiko, who is cold towards her child and seems more interested in her own well-being rather than her daughter’s: in Etsuko’s account, Sachiko (or, rather, Etsuko herself) neglects her daughter, Mariko (or, rather,

Keiko). Nevertheless, because of the dissociated and repressed nature of her recollections, Etsuko is unable to truly change the narrative and overcome her shame even in these fabricated memories: she and Mariko are unable to connect, due to the latter's unfriendly and overly cautious behaviour.

Research in the field of affect theory has focused extensively on shame and its materialisations in everyday life as well as in fiction. In his comprehensive study *On Shame* (2008), Michael L. Morgan quotes Helen Lewis who differentiates between guilt and shame: "guilt is focused on specific bits of behaviour or precise actions, while shame is aimed at the self as a whole, globally" (45). Similarly, another definition reads that "guilt involves feeling distress and remorse regarding the morally injurious event (e.g., 'I did something bad.')" as opposed to shame, which is evinced when "the belief about the event generalizes to the whole self (e.g., 'I am bad because of what I did.')" (Wilkins et al. qtd. in Norman and Maguen). Thus, guilt is about what we have done, but shame resurfaces in relation to who we are and to how we think others perceive us: "shame is our own way of seeing ourselves, not through the prism of our actions, but through the prism of how others would see us in terms of our features or actions . . . [it is] a *judgement of value* about what we think others should think about who we are," based on our past behaviour (Morgan 15; emphasis added). Similarly, in the introduction to *Blush: Faces of Shame* (2005), Elspeth Probyn argues that "shame puts one's self-esteem on the line and questions our value system" and that shame cannot occur unless there is "a strong interest in being a good person," adding that one feels shamed about something that pertains to "an essential part" of oneself (x).

According to Ruth Leys, who also wrote extensively on trauma, "today, shame (and shamelessness) has displaced guilt as a dominant emotional reference in the West," marking a "major paradigm shift" from guilt to shame (qtd. in Michell 1). In *Writing Shame: Contemporary Literature, Gender, and Negative Affect* (2020), Kaye Michell argues that the West inhabits "a kind of 'shame culture,' and that we have been organising "our

(increasingly *fractured*) sense of *self* around and through shame” (2; emphasis added). Michell’s statement, echoing E. Ann Kaplan’s and Roger Luckhurst’s work on the contemporary “trauma culture,” Mark Seltzer’s “wound culture,” as well as Caruth’s notion of the shattered self as a result of traumatic events, indicates that shame and trauma are clearly connected: “shame, like trauma before it, becomes a kind of ‘key’ to identity, its organising principle, its origin – as well as its undoing” (Michell 3). This perspective is further supported by Sandra Bartky’s views on shame, which imply that shame is closely linked to identity and selfhood (qtd. in Michell 2), particularly to “*flawed* selfhood” (Michell 2). I argue that the issue of flawed selfhood as a result of traumatic experiences and the “shift of focus from actions to the self” (Leys qtd. in Michell 3) reflects the condition of Ishigurian narrators.

In *The Cultural Politics of Emotions* (2004), Sara Ahmed points to the fact that, as opposed to disgust, for instance, when experiencing shame, “the ‘bad feeling’ is attributed to oneself rather than to an object or other . . . and hence to expel the badness, I have to expel myself from myself” (104). In cases of acute, prolonged experiences of shame, the subject might be brought “perilously close to suicide” (104). In *An Artist of the Floating World*, Ono, a former propagandist for the totalitarian regime in World War II Japan, refuses to openly assume responsibility for his immoral political actions and finds himself unable to act accordingly, although his narrative is subtly imbued with regret and acute shame, especially when it comes to the current social standing of his family. Ono’s denial of his shame is subtly evinced in a conversation with Miyake, his prospective son-in-law, when Miyake praises the recent suicide of a well-known supporter of the same totalitarian regime and director of a company, and Ono is quick to fervently find excuses for why one would do whatever it took to support one’s country when at war, deeming the suicide “a waste” (*AFW* 55):

‘Indeed, sir, it is a pity. Sometimes I think there are many who should be giving their lives in apology who are too cowardly

to face up to their responsibilities. It is then left to the likes of our President to carry out the noble gestures. There are plenty of men already back in positions they held during the war. Some of them are no better than war criminals. They should be the ones apologizing.'

'I see your point,' I said. 'But those who fought and worked loyally for our country during the war cannot be called war criminals. I fear that's an expression used too freely these days.'

'But these are the men who led the country astray, sir. Surely, it's only right they should acknowledge their responsibility. It's a cowardice that these men refuse to admit to their mistakes. And when those mistakes were made on behalf of the whole country, why then it must be the greatest cowardice of all.'

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. This is quite possible; I had after all come to regard Miyake as my prospective son-in-law, and I may indeed have somehow associated him with my actual son-in-law. (*AFW* 56)

The fact that Ono is not sure whether he remembers the conversation correctly is testament to his unreliability as a narrator, as well to the dissociative nature of his memories and his denying any responsibility. The extreme gesture Ono and Miyake talk about can be interpreted as an objective correlative for the shame the director of the company felt and for the denial Ono feels towards his own condemnable actions. Another possibility is that rather than being an objective correlative for mere (repressed) shame, the conversation may be an objective correlative for what psychologists call 'moral injury' or, rather, for Ono's denial of feeling it.

Moral injury is a relevant concept to trauma studies and to Ishiguro's *An Artist of the Floating World* in particular. It refers to the "distressing psychological, behavioral, social, and sometimes spiritual aftermath" of exposure to traumatic events or unusually stressful situations that "contradict deeply held moral beliefs and expectations" (Stein et al. qtd. in Norman and Maguen). Moral injury occurs when someone feels that "a transgression took place

and that they or someone else crossed a line with respect to their moral beliefs” and its main symptoms are “guilt, shame, disgust and anger” (Norman and Maguen). The relevance of this concept lies in the fact that Ono might have repressed all of these symptoms and is now faced with the fact that there are other people in his position who resorted to extreme solutions in order to achieve a sense of redemption. Moreover, it is also worth investigating to what extent Ono or the president of the company who committed suicide do indeed face moral injury or are, in fact, sheer perpetrators. Another aspect of moral injury is if this concept can also be applied to novels such as *Never Let Me Go*. According to Sonya B. Norman and Shira Maguen, moral injury can occur in numerous contexts of traumatic events, such as service members and veterans, those experiencing community violence, or in the case of healthcare workers, who might experience survivor guilt, for instance. To what extent can it be argued that the carers in Ishiguro’s novel may experience moral injury?

The most recent directions in trauma studies have brought to the fore issues related to ‘Perpetration-Induced Traumatic Stress’ (PITS) and ‘perpetrator trauma’ or to what Levi, a Holocaust survivor, theorised as the ‘grey zone’ in the eponymous chapter of his study *The Drowned and the Saved* (1986), which discusses, amongst other aspects, the status of the so-called “privileged prisoners” (Levi 40) in Nazi concentration camps: “it would seem the time has come to explore the space which separates (and not only in Nazi Lagers) the victims from the persecutors, and to do so with a lighter hand, and with a less turbid spirit than has been done, for instance, in a number of films” (40). Levi also mentions extreme cases of collaboration, where one “hesitates to speak of privilege,” namely the *Sonderkommandos* (literally ‘special unit’ or ‘special squad’), which was the term the SS used for the group of prisoners forced to run the crematoria: “whoever belonged to this group was privileged only to the extent that – but at what cost! – he had enough to eat for a few months, certainly not because he could be envied” (50). Moreover, the special squad did not escape the fate experienced by the rest of the prisoners: “the SS exerted the

greatest diligence to prevent any man who had been part of it from surviving and telling. Twelve squads succeeded each other in Auschwitz . . . [a]s its initiation, the next squad burnt the corpses of its predecessors” (50). Levi further notes how it is “very difficult, almost impossible, to form an image for ourselves of how these men lived day by day, saw themselves, accepted their condition” (50). Levi’s account uneasily echoes how in *Never Let Me Go* it is the clones, those who have been trained as carers, who accompany the other clones (the donors) on their surgeries. The carers, i.e. the ones chosen to physically and mentally aid the donors, stand by the donors during their recovery-surgery cycle until the time has come for the carers to become donors and meet their ultimate demise, too. While the carers are not responsible for the fate of the donors, they are, albeit unwillingly, directly involved in the processes leading to their death. Returning to the issue of moral injury developed above, I argue that such a notion can be employed in the analysis of *Never Let Me Go* and be placed under the umbrella notion of ‘grey zone’ – the clones are forced to take part in their demise and questions pertaining to the consequences of such practices should be raised in future research, especially in relation to shame.

Michael Rothberg’s 2019 study, *The Implicated Subject: Beyond Victims and Perpetrators*, introduces the notion of ‘implicated subject,’ referring to certain people who facilitate and gain from traumatic events without any direct involvement as victims or perpetrators. Stevens, in *The Remains of the Day*, can be considered an implicated subject when he is present at political discussions organised by Lord Darlington, a Nazi sympathiser, or when Lord Darlington fires two Jewish employees, and Stevens finds himself unable to position himself ethically. In the latter case, when confronted by Miss Kenton – towards whom he has repressed his feelings as well – Stevens is unable to justify himself, resorting to his well-developed coping mechanism which relies on blindly doing one’s duty:

‘Mr Stevens, I am outraged that you can sit there and utter what you have just done as though you were discussing orders for

the larder. I simply cannot believe it. You are saying Ruth and Sarah are to be dismissed on the grounds that they are Jewish?’

‘Miss Kenton, I have just this moment explained the situation to you fully. His lordship has made his decision and there is nothing for you and I to debate over.’

‘Does it not occur to you, Mr Stevens, that to dismiss Ruth and Sarah on these grounds would be simply - *wrong*? I will not stand for such things. I will not work in a house in which such things can occur.’

...
 ‘Miss Kenton, I am surprised to find you reacting in this manner. Surely I don't have to remind you that our professional duty is not to our own foibles and sentiments, but to the wishes of our employer.’ (RD 156-157)

Similarly, Miss Emily, the head guardian, and Madame, a sort of benefactor, in *Never Let Me Go*, may also fall in this category: Madame is, as opposed to Stevens, a visibly distressed witness to the plight of the Hailsham students and the condition of the clones but, nevertheless, does nothing of genuine relevance to influence their fate. Madame visits Hailsham regularly to select pieces of the students' artwork for the gallery to prove, along with Miss Emily, that the clones are humane and have spiritual natures, and bursts into tears of pity when seeing Kathy dancing in her room but, yet again, neither takes real, genuine action. The only guardian who does try to help the students in more concrete ways, while still not truly fighting the system or genuinely aiding the clones, is Miss Lucy. She attempts to defy some of the guardians and warn the students against the harsh world outside Hailsham, but is fired and ultimately remains a powerless pawn:

Miss Emily raised her eyebrows. ‘Lucy Wainright? She was important to you? Forgive me, dear students, I'm forgetting again. Lucy wasn't with us for long, so for us she's just a peripheral figure in our memory of Hailsham. And not an altogether happy one ... She was a nice enough girl, Lucy Wainright. But after she'd been with us for a while, she began to have these ideas. She thought you students had to be made more aware. More aware of

what lay ahead of you, who you were, what you were for. She believed you should be given as full a picture as possible. That to do anything less would be somehow to cheat you. We considered her view and concluded she was mistaken.’ (NLMG 262)

Miss Lucy’s opinions were merely meant to better prepare the students for their future rather than anything else but were considered mistaken and, consequently, dangerous, hence her dismissal. This, alongside the fact that the guardians seem to be the lesser evil when compared to the system, reveals that there are various degrees of perpetrator implication in the novel. The characters discussed above are, as Maria Christou observes when investigating Ishiguro’s fiction, “non-actors” (368). When analysing *The Remains of the Day*, the scholar concludes that “[a]t the center stage in this novel, in short, is a man whose entire life is defined by non-action” (369) – the same label can be applied to all of the above-mentioned characters. Ishiguro’s characters are to be found in the ‘grey zone’ of perpetration: on the one hand, they do not do intentional, cold-blooded harm, but they do not act, either. In this context, it could also be argued that both Stevens and the guardians, together with Madame, suffer a moral injury and feel ashamed, but, similarly to Ono’s and Etsuko’s cases, they repress and rationalise such feelings.

According to Whitehead in her article “Writing with Care: Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go*,” the readers’ (and, I would add, Madame’s and the guardians’ as well) identification with Kathy and the other clones is “deliberately destabilised” and “raises uncomfortable questions regarding our proximity to those who benefit from the donation system” (58). Whitehead’s insight is based on Dominick LaCapra’s coinage of ‘empathic unsettlement,’ which refers to “a mode of identification that avoids the appropriation of victims’ painful experience, while it can also confront the possibility in ourselves of behaviours that might bear analogies or resemblances to those of perpetrators” (58). These notions, suggesting that there are degrees of perpetrator implication or victimhood, are problematic, as they can be interpreted as, on the

one hand, betraying the memory of the victims, and, on the other hand, as possibly partly exonerating the perpetrators (Bond and Craps 146-147).

In the early 2000s, historian LaCapra made the distinction between “historical trauma,” i.e. historical catastrophes, and “structural trauma,” i.e. “an anxiety-producing condition of humanity, namely mortality, which becomes the traumatic event in the mind of the subject” (qtd. in Romero-Jodar 1). As opposed to historical trauma, which refers to specific traumatising events (e.g. The Holocaust, 9/11), structural trauma does not identify specific instances of loss or suffering but “an originary absence that cannot be overcome” (Bond and Craps 144). Following the same line of argument, LaCapra also introduced and differentiated between ‘loss’ – which is personal – and ‘absence’ – which is historical: people face “particular losses in distinct ways” (45) but ‘absence’ was never there to begin with and cannot be experienced as lack or loss:

The very conflation [of absence and loss] attests to the way one remains possessed or haunted by the past . . . indeed, in post-traumatic situations in which one relives (or acts out) the past, distinctions tend to collapse, including the crucial distinction between then and now wherein one is able to remember what happened to one in the past but realize one is living in the here and now with future possibilities. (46)

Historical trauma is “open to various processes of working-through” that allow the traumatised subject to clearly set boundaries between and reconnect with the past, present, and future, while structural trauma is not responsive to such processes (Bonds and Craps 144).

Similar to LaCapra’s historical and structural trauma/personal loss and historical absence, Greg Forter, who starts from the Freudian-Caruthian model but adapts it to contemporary theories, differentiates between ‘punctual’ and ‘non-punctual’ trauma in his book *Gender, Race, and Mourning in American Modernism* (2011). According to Forter, “punctual traumas” refer

to “historical events of such singularity, magnitude, and horror that they can be read as shocks that disable the psychic system” (98), i.e. they are once-occurring catastrophic events of traumatic consequence, while non-punctual trauma is an ongoing event or state, such as racism. Forter also introduces the concept of ‘signification trauma’ and discusses it in relation to Faulkner’s fiction:

The entire panoply of Faulknerian techniques – the endlessly deferred periods; the interruption of sentences that resume a hundred or more pages later; the enigmatically precocious references . . . seek collectively to induce a kind of *signification trauma*. They work to ‘say’ through the novel’s form *that the story it tells is itself a trauma* that must be transmitted and known as trauma. They work, in other words, to transmit a form of psychic disequilibrium ‘directly’ to the reader, rather than offering a merely cognitive knowledge of the traumas. (134; emphasis added)

Thus, signification trauma allows for “a transformative realisation of the experience,” which, in turn, pinpoints its meaning: contrary to first-wave trauma theories, this transformative experience does not lead to a shattered self but rather to a sense of self re-organisation (Balaev, “Trauma Studies” 368).

Balaev’s theory of self-reorganisation implies a certain degree of what LaCapra calls ‘working-through,’ as opposed to its counterpart, ‘acting-out.’ LaCapra borrows these notions from Freud’s *Mourning and Melancholia*, where ‘mourning’ is associated with ‘working-through,’ i.e. “coming to terms with trauma and moving beyond it” (Bond and Craps 151), and ‘melancholia’ with ‘acting-out,’ i.e. being “haunted and possessed by the past, and compulsively reliving the traumatic events of the past in the present . . . in flashbacks or nightmares” (Bond and Craps 143). In the case of ‘acting-out,’ the past, present, and future are no longer distinguishable for the traumatised subject, who sees no hope for the future (143). Moreover, melancholia (acting-out) is a necessary step in recovering from a traumatic experience:

“working-through requires and presupposes acting-out,” as the latter is “unavoidable” in the healing process (Bond and Craps 143). Mourning (working-through) can lead to resilience and to what Lawrence Calhoun and Richard Tedeschi deemed ‘post-traumatic growth,’ namely to experiencing positive effects as the result of traumatic events (qtd. in Bond and Craps 143). Such effects can manifest, according to Bond and Craps, “in the domains of self-perception, interpersonal relationships, and life philosophy” (147). Such discussions indicate the necessity of approaching Ishiguro’s narrators from these perspectives: are they predominantly working-through or acting-out? From the close-reading of *A Pale View of Hills*, *An Artist of the Floating World*, and *The Remains of the Day* that this article has proposed, it can be concluded that Ono, Etsuko, and Stevens are prone to melancholia rather than mourning: they are trapped in the webs – some of their own making – of their past, and avoid facing the guilt and shame they have repressed. As far as the characters in the dystopian *Never Let Me Go* are concerned, while the guardians and Madame are part of the perpetration system, they evince, to more or less visible extents, guilt and shame in relation to the state of affairs, hence the creation of Hailsham and the existence of the Gallery. It is almost impossible to assess to what extent the clones *could*, in fact, submit themselves to a process of working-through/mourning, as they are trapped in tragic situations that are out of their control, but further research might reveal to what extent they could be ashamed, following Levi’s take on shame and Holocaust survivors.

By critically engaging with trauma methodology and by close-reading passages from Ishiguro’s early novels, this article has shown that a trauma framework is suitable for an analysis of Ishiguro’s fiction. Nevertheless, there seems to be a dearth of theories covering not life-threatening events but personal, domestic forms of violence, be they physical or mental. LaCapra’s distinction between personal loss and historical absence is not encompassing enough, for instance, for an analysis of trauma that does not refer to extremely violent, catastrophic, or war-related events; the same observation can be applied to Forter’s punctual/non-punctual

trauma. The need for theories discussing *types of trauma* in cultural and literary studies has been noticed by scholars such as Rothberg, who, in the preface to *The Future of Trauma Theory* (2014), raises the following concerns:

trauma is not a category that encompasses death directly, but rather draws our attention to the *survival* of subjects in and beyond sites of violence and in *proximity* to death. The dead workers [in factories in Bangladesh] are not the victims of trauma, and thus trauma theory can only partially reckon with their death. But if trauma theory cannot fully encompass the event, that does not imply that a renovated trauma studies is of no use. What kinds of violence are at stake here and how does trauma fit into this scenario? . . . We need better ways of understanding how different forms of suffering and violence may inhabit the same social spaces and we need to understand what such overlap entails for the possibilities of resistance, healing, and social change. (xiv-xvii)

Rothberg questions whether the current state of trauma theory can account for deadly fires or accidents in factories, extreme environmental events such as hurricanes or everyday human exploitation and inhumane working conditions. The scholar calls for “multi-faceted, interdisciplinary approaches” that could be able to classify and discuss various forms of violence and suffering (xvi). Similarly, in the 1970s and especially in the 1980s, when PTSD was officially recognised as a condition and introduced in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, feminist activists drew attention to the fact that the close association of PTSD with shell shock and warfare in general could lead to the exclusion of the private when it comes to trauma and its consequences. In other words, according to Bond and Craps, “private scenes of conflict” such as domestic abuse or rape run the risk of being ignored from the field of traumatic experience (39). This phenomenon can also be observed in literary studies: the majority (if not all) of the work in trauma studies has focused on the analysis of catastrophic events that affected communities, such as the Holocaust or 9/11. While

attention to these traumatic experiences is more than necessary – and this article is by no means contesting its critical relevance – research should also be conducted in the private sphere of trauma.

One of the reasons why writers such as Ishiguro have not been subject to trauma analysis might be precisely this: while the plot may be set against the backdrop of war or its aftermath or of a dystopian, traumatic reality, his characters are deeply individualised rather than representatives of a group or community. Contrastingly, Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, for instance, has been aptly and widely analysed through the lens of trauma, as it shows how the aftermath of the trauma suffered by survivors of slavery is "passed down to members of the next generation" (Bond and Craps 56). Novels such as *Beloved* clearly depict traumatic realities and the "paradoxes of memorialisation," and in which, according to Naomi Mandel, "silence and forgetting are as much a strategic and self-conscious gesture on the part of the subjugated as they are the product of the subjugating culture's demands and requirements" (qtd. in Balaev, "Trauma Studies" 368). In novels such as *Beloved*, trauma and its aftermath are more evident than in Ishiguro's fiction, which is imbued with narrative unreliability and what I have referred to as lyricism.

The field of trauma studies has focused almost exclusively on trauma induced by catastrophic or war-related events that induce clear PTSD symptoms. However, it must be acknowledged that trauma does not occur only when there are visible PTSD symptoms, which is largely Ishiguro's case. A number of scholars have, nevertheless, focused on the aftermath of lesser traumatic events. For instance, Maria Root and Laura Brown coined and developed the concept of 'insidious trauma,' which refers to everyday, ongoing negative experiences stemming from forms of oppression (sexism, homophobia, racism, etc.) (Bond and Craps 145). Evocative of Forter's non-punctual trauma, insidious trauma does not meet the criteria for PTSD but has been, nonetheless, theorised and critically applied in cultural studies. Moreover, concepts such as 'secondary' or 'vicarious traumatising or witnessing' have also been developed. Secondary/vicarious traumatising refers to the

indirect trauma inflicted when someone experiences traumatic symptoms after exposure (by means of media footage or survivor testimony) to a representation of an event that they have not lived through themselves (Bond and Craps 149). Similarly, secondary/vicarious witnessing describes “an encounter with the memories of another person or group” (testimonies, films, museums) (Bond and Craps 149). Secondary witnessing includes concepts such as ‘postmemory’ – inheriting traumatic memories from parents or close relatives by means of storytelling or looking at pictures – and ‘prosthetic memory’ – gaining traumatic memories by means of technologies of mass culture – coined and developed by Marianne Hirsch and Alison Landsberg, respectively. Even more recently, contentious notions of ‘pretrauma,’ i.e. the traumatising impact of a possibly catastrophic future, as theorised by Paul Saint-Amour, or hypothetical conditions such as ‘pre-traumatic stress syndrome’ – as theorised by E. Ann Kaplan – have emerged, especially in relation to climate change.

Since such forms of trauma have been, if not recognised, at least theorised, this article has proposed an appropriate framework to theorise that form of trauma which is not necessarily the result of catastrophic events or social oppression or extreme fear about the future but pertains to other experiences, purely personal or domestic, that inflict emotional and/or physical pain. For instance, Stevens, in *The Remains of the Day*, is a deeply traumatised individual, although not due to having experienced catastrophic or extremely violent events. He is unable to live his life outside his daily routine and duties and clearly projects – by means of what psychologists call ‘transference’ – his emotionally distant and cold father onto Lord Darling. Stevens even fails to say his last goodbye to his father in a final attempt to prove his worth by being the perfect butler and thus hoping to gain his father’s affection. He is unable to express his feelings towards the woman he clearly cherishes and acquiesces to everything a superior might do or say. As discussed above, he even becomes an implicated subject during the Nazi sympathisers’ table talk and the firing of the two Jewish maids. In *A Pale View of Hills*, Etsuko finds herself in constant

denial of her actions having had an effect on her daughters' lives. However, one of her daughters committed suicide, while her other daughter avoids her as much as possible. Etsuko is traumatised by both the life she was forced to lead and by the consequences that affected her children as well. In *An Artist of the Floating World*, Ono finds himself joining a bandwagon that would prove to bring his demise later on and can be analysed in terms of 'perpetrator trauma' and 'moral injury.' The reader can empathise – unsettlingly, to paraphrase LaCapra – with Ishiguro's narrators and characters even if they, too, might have deeply wronged others precisely because they, too, have been faced with traumatic experiences.

My stance is that most of Ishiguro's characters, and especially his narrators, find themselves in a form of 'grey zone' – they are both victims and implicated, to various extents, in other people's traumas. In the case of the clones in *Never Let Me Go*, healing from trauma is a quasi-impossible task, as their fate is tragic and sealed, while for the rest of Ishiguro's narrators and characters, their implication leads to repressed shame, dissociation, and narrative unreliability, which hinders their strife to reorganise their self and work through the trauma they have experienced and/or contributed to. Ishiguro's subtle prose allows – and, in fact, invites – such interpretations that would add to the current state of trauma studies in literary studies and the contemporary British novel.

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