

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Vol.6.Issue.1.2019 (Jan-March)



INTERNATIONAL  
STANDARD  
SERIAL  
NUMBER  
INDIA

2395-2628(Print):2349-9451(online)

TRAUMATIC MEMORY IN *A PALE VIEW OF HILLS*

YANG HAIXIA<sup>1</sup>, GUFAN<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Associate professor, <sup>2</sup>Student

College of Foreign Languages, North China Electric Power University, China

doi: <https://doi.org/10.33329/ijelr.6119.143>



ABSTRACT

On the basis of trauma theory, this paper analyses the trauma in Kazuo Ishiguro's *A Pale View of Hills* and its unique narrative strategy. *A Pale View of Hills* is Ishiguro's debut novel. It is about a Japanese woman, Etsuko, who is exiled in Britain in middle age, and there is a certain area of her life that is very painful to her. It has something to do with her coming over to the west and the effect it has on her daughter, who subsequently commits suicide. She talks all around it, but she leave it as a gap. Instead, she tells another story altogether, going back years and talking about somebody she once knew, So the whole narrative strategy of the book was about how someone ends up talking about things they cannot face directly through other people's stories. Since the middle of the 20th century, the works and research of traumatic literary have been emerging constantly, and traumatology has been continued to develop, which has gradually become an important branch of the study of literary trauma. Paying attention to trauma is not for cynicism, not for forgetting memories, but through reproductive trauma, allowing people to repair trauma in reflection. This paper aims to induce readers think more deeply about traumatic theory through the analysis of *A Pale View of Hills*.

**Key Words:** Kazuo Ishiguro, *A Pale View of Hills*, Trauma, memory, narrative

I. Introduction

Kazuo Ishiguro, a Japanese-born British writer, is one of the best-known contemporary British novelists. As a banner of British Immigrant Writers. Kazuo Ishiguro, together with Salman Rushdie and V.S.Naipaul, is grouped as "Three Giants of British Immigrant Writers". He is very good at digging people complex inner world. Kazuo Ishiguro likes recollecting. He regards memory as the filter of life. But in his novels, the memory become the most unreliable existence, because every attempt to recall the story of the heroine mind are burdened with trauma. He believes that the memory itself is a lens for looking at things.

Although he is also deeply troubled by issues of identity, while it is difficult to see heterogeneity or conflicts between different nationalities in his works. The protagonists are mostly Asian and stories often take place in Asia. But the novels are about the loneliness of life, the traumas of war and other themes which involve universal significance. He has called himself an international writer in many interviews. Ishiguro reckons that the international novel contains an important view of life for people of different cultural

backgrounds in the world. As a result, his novels are richer and more unique than other immigrant writers. *A Pale View of Hills* is Ishiguro's debut novel, sparked a heated discussion among literature critics since its publication. Unique narrative perspective and narrative approach have won not only the international readership but also the recognition from critic. The language he use tends to be the sort that actually suppresses meaning and tries to hide away meaning. As a writer, he is almost the antithesis. And these are the most striking features of Kazuo Ishiguro's work. This way stimulate the readers' thinking of the truth.

Stemming from a Greek word, the term "trauma" formerly means "a piercing of the skin, a breaking of the bodily envelope" (Garland 9). Original meaning of the word trauma is damage or injury the body or the mind. It can refer to both visible and invisible trauma or wounds. But Floyd selected psychoanalysis as the subject of trauma research and that was his irreplaceable contribution. On the broadest level, traumatic experiences can be said to be the key to Floyd's early research and discovery, and has laid the foundation for his earliest model of Psychoanalysis. Floyd's description of the trauma included the concept of "delay", which emphasized the injured person's initial experience or memory for the rest of the day. Trauma theory mainly contains the following areas: psychological trauma, cultural trauma and historical trauma. This thesis mainly applies and analyzes the psychological trauma, which is the most basic one of trauma theory. Psychological trauma refers to a mental damage which is caused by extremely deplorable experiences. It will not appear immediately when the disaster occurred, but began to exert influence on victims in a certain period of time by casting shadow

This is important implications for experts in the field of contemporary trauma research. Herman and Carus, who allegedly influenced by Floyd's, put forward that the conflict between the will to deny horrible events and the will to proclaim them aloud is the central dialectic of psychological trauma (3). What makes the study unique to Carus and others is that this complex concept of psychoanalysis about the individual is used to study violent events in human history, thus revealing its impact on the collective process. These theories indicate that the trauma depicts a sudden, catastrophic, inescapable experience. It usually caused by massive, catastrophic events. These traumas continue to evolve into post traumatic stress disorder or PTSD. The famous psychologist Robert. J. Lifton and Bessel found that injured individuals typically undergo the following process after a traumatic event: first, to return to the event and to try to put together the pieces to gain an understanding of the event; second, to combine this experience with the individual's current understanding of the world, although this understanding has changed a great deal; and third, to describe the experience in a narrative language (Caruth, 1995:137).

*A Pale View of Hills* is Ishiguro's debut novel, which won the prestigious Winifred Holtby Prize awarded by the Royal Society Literature. Though *A Pale View of Hills* is one of his early works, characters' inner emotions and traumatic experiences in the novel are presented by his exquisite narrative techniques and reserved and subtle language. It has great literary significance both in content and form. With great subtly, Ishiguro presents a first-person narrator, Etsuko, a middle-ages Japanese woman, now, exiled in England over thirty years after world war II. Traumatized by the recent suicide of her elder daughter, she tells her own story and that of a wayward friend in postwar Nagasaki before she left. Her enigmatic recall, tantalizingly hamstrung by gaps and internal inconsistencies, works toward a disquieting and haunting revelation, masterfully embedded in the point of view itself. This novel is a first-person narration which is built into a two-story structure. Both of them are told by the protagonist Etsuko, who is a survivor of the Nagasaki atomic bombing. During a visit from her daughter, Niki, Etsuko reflects on her own life as a young woman in Japan. Etsuko thought of Sachiko and her daughter Mariko she knew in Japan and began to reminisce her traumatic experiences in Nagasaki in Japan.

## II. The Causes of Trauma

The traumatic events which bring severe damages to the victims' minds can be mainly divided into three types. The first one is natural disasters like earthquake, hurricanes, and tsunami. The second type is accidental catastrophe such as traffic accidents, nuclear accidents and so on. The third is man-made calamities including robbery, rape, terrorism and war, which not only bring great impacts on the victims, but also on

witnesses and loved ones of victims. Psychological trauma happens for many reasons. It is caused by not only the tremendous traumatic events, like war and natural disasters, but also many trivial and subtle things, such as others' attitudes, opinions and treatments. Lacking love and affection, being mocked, suffering emotional abuse, neglect and abandon all have the destructive power to cause mental damages. It is those sufferings that are very possible to cast a shadow over people's spirits and lead to psychological trauma. In this thesis, those kind of subtle and invisible sufferings will be analyzed in detail. In this book, Kazuo Ishiguro was trying something rather odd with the narrative. The main strategy was to leave a big gap. As a result, the reader can only piece together the causes of the trauma through details in two intertwined narrative lines. Under a framework of trauma theory, this thesis attempt to dig out the individual and collective traumas that are repressed into sub-consciousness and unconsciousness of the main characters in the novel.

In the first chapter, the author goes on to say that Keiko has hanged herself and more than one British newspaper had reported that. The younger daughter, Niki, came to visit her mother, Etsuko, but five days later she hurried back to London because she was not used to the drab life of the country. Niki did not discuss the Keiko directly with Etsuko until the second day after she return home and she didn't even go to her sister's funeral. Niki just said, "I don't even remember what she looked like now" these details highlight the strange feelings between the two sisters. Lately, Etsuko said: "unlike Niki, the Keiko is pure-blooded Japanese." During this short conversion, neither Nikki nor Etsuko spoke directly about the death of Keiko. But the scene of Keiko's suicide made the novel to be shrouded in unspeakable heaviness. The brief conversation between the mother and daughter suggested that the death of Keiko was an unspeakable pain to the family, expecially Etsuko. The novel begins with a scene of Keiko's suicide, and emphasizes that she is a pure Japanese, which seems to have a strong symbolic significance.

Inadvertently, Etsuko was reminded of the "Sachiko" whom she had met many years ago in Nagasaki, but the friendship was only last a few weeks. At the time, Etsuko was pregnant and living with her ex-husband on the outskirts of the city on the east side of Nagasaki. In this book, Kazuo Ishiguro described Nagasaki as "The worst days were over by then, but in Nagasaki, after what had gone before. those were days of calm and relief. The world had a feeling of change about it"(18). Change is a word that appears many times in the text, but whether it is a good change or a bad one, the author does not give a clear answer. The first chapter shows that Nagasaki is recovering from the disaster and ends with Etsuko's acquaintance with Sachiko and Mariko, and Etsuko introduces a job at the Fujiwara's noddle shop for Sacjiko who was lived in a poverty. The second chapter begins with Etsuko's visit to Fujiwara, and then the article directly went back to Etsuko's ex-husband, referring to the anxiety of his former father-in-law. Shigeo Matsuda, once a student of Etsuko's father-in-law ,wrote a critical article about him. And this part ended with Sachiko knocking on the door of Etsuko's house in search of her daughter. So far, the main characteristics and their background have been broadly explained. In the first two chapters, the author does not directly describe anything about the wars or disasters. There is not detailed introduction about their social background. After analysis, the readers can know that both Sachiko and Fujiwara's husband died in the disaster, and they lost their nobility and lovers after this war. But from the daily life of people can still feel that their life is filled with pains which are hard to forget. Although they were survivors of the war, they were struggling to rebuild after the war, But craters, ruins, died lovers, and even new ideas are still hitting the survivors intensely. War has had an unacceptable impact on the lives of all people. Imagined that there were not the war, all of them would not lose protective shelter of their nobility life. It is the war that changes everything and is the source of all traumas.

Compared with neighbours, the disaster was more traumatic for Etsuko. When she saw them each day, busily involved with their husbands and their children. She found this hard to believe-that their lives had ever held the tragedies and nightmares of wartime. Etsuko said: "It was never my intention to appear unfriendly, but it was probably true that i made no special effort to seem. Otherwise, for at that point in my life, I was still wishing to be left alone"(78). These indicated that she could not truly get rid of the trauma of war, which would have laid clues for her future emigration to the UK. If Etsuko and Sachiko don't put hope on escaping from Japan, the tragedy can be avoided. In the story, the argument between Sachiko and Mariko about moving to the United States vaguely reminds readers of the fact that Keiko does not want to emigrate to

the UK with his mother, and Keiko ended up killing herself because she couldn't adapt to exotic environment. Her stubborn pursuit led to Keiko's tragedy and her own indelible traumas. After analysis of this novel, the reader can realized that the war serves as collective trauma to everyone. It can be regard as the original cause of trauma. Depend on the different attitude towards trauma, some people bury their wounds in their hearts and face life in a positive way, such as Mrs Fujiwara, while some people couldn't deal with trauma even chose to escape, such as Etsuko. Her stubborn pursuit led to daughter's tragedy and her own indelible trauma.

### III. Therapy of Trauma Symptom

According to the symptoms of trauma, the process of recovery can be divided into three stages. In Trauma and Recovery, Judith Herman points out that every stage has its central task. According to Herman, establishing the sense of security is the main task of the first stage. The next stage is to recall and reorganize the victims' memories, helping them release the past traumatic experiences. The last stage is to build new interpersonal relationships and reconnect with ordinary life (Herman 155). When going through these three stages successfully, the traumatized generally recover and can have a normal life again. After undergoing the traumatic events, great changes may happen to the victims. The way they think and learn, the way they feel about themselves and others, and the way they perceive the world all changed completely. The common trauma symptoms of the victims are different, such as sensitivity, depression, hopelessness or flashback and so on.

In the *A Pale View of Hills*, Ishiguro's did not follow the traditional narrative order, but the protagonist underwent these typical process. Confronting the traumas, different people take different strategies. Etsuko's seemingly fragmentary, yet nightmarish memories do not come by chance. Psychologically speaking, it is an image reconstruction or construct. This reconstruction or concept is related to our attitude and salient details. What makes this novel to be unique is that under the guise of reminiscence, Etsuko concocted a story that tried to tell her story in someone else's name. In Etsuko's memory, Sachiko's experience looked very similar to that of Etsuko. Actually, it was Etsuko who reflected the traumatic memories she could not face on Sachiko, this way serve as a tool to keep Etsuko at a safe distance to examine his past and guilty. Through the analysis, the reader will find that the dual structure in the novel has many convergence points.

At the beginning of the novel, it is the place where the contradiction of the story is intensified.: Keiko committed suicide. However, the following did not explain why Keiko committed suicide and did not lay out the general sorrow that should be between loved ones. There was Nothing. Unexpectedly, it was all so bland that the author began to jump away and wrote the memories 20 years ago. Readers can't help but wonder wonders: Why is there suddenly another thing going on, and is there a strong connection between these things? At this point, the memory began to come to the scene, and the reality was temporarily retired. It's hard for readers to understand that such a leap in time and space can only go down with the memory.

With the appearance of Sachiko and Mariko, the reader enters the world of the unhappy mother and daughter, in which Etsuko becomes an onlooker. In the novel, Sachiko cares less about her daughter, Mariko. All she cares about is immigrate to America through her American boyfriend and making a good life for herself and her daughter. In fact, Mariko hates her mother's boyfriend and doesn't want to go to America. In Etsuko's memory, Sachiko's action belie her words that put her daughter's interests first. Sachiko always was calm even when she face Mariko's life-threatening behaviors. This kind of calm reminds the reader of the Etsuko's dullness and tranquility as she was describing Keiko's suicide.

In the middle of chapter six, Mariko ran out of the room because of an altercation with his mother. When Etsuko asked Sachiko whether they should go and look for her now. Sachiko just said "No, She'll be back soon. Let her stay out if that's what she wants" (110).The reader was not surprised of her attitude because she doesn't seem to care what her daughter feels. But in the next line, the novel suddenly shifts to the present day, Niki's fifth day in home. This is a very tender eposide. Etsuko said to Niki" I feel only regret now for those attitudes I displayed towards Keiko"(111) .Somehow, the reader could feel the connection between the two scenes, because of Sachiko's aloof attitude to Mariko, Etsuko suddenly regretted what she had done to Keiko. Later, Etsuko added "It was for her protection i opposed her so vehemently"(111). This sentence also seems to

explain Sachiko's attitude toward Mariko. There are a lot of other overlaps. For example, In Chapter 10, when she heard her mother's decision to go to the US with Frankie, she ran out, and Etsuko ran after the river. Their conversation was as following:

"I don't want to go away. I do not like him. He's like a pig"

"You mustn't speak like that, "I said more calmly, "He's very fond of you, and he'll be like a new father. Everything will turn out well, I promise."

If you don't like it over there, we'll come straight back. But we have to try it and see if we like it there. I'm sure we will"(223-224).

Here, Etsuko used the word "we" repeatedly, just as it was Etsuko was talking to Keiko. Etsuko and Sachiko's identity neatly merged into one. The intersection of the two lines makes the fact increasingly clear. The trauma memories of the victims are gradually mended in the narrative. The trauma Etsuko suffered in Nagasaki was repeated in a reconstituted or transposed way was not a direct manifestation of the incident.

At the end of the novel, the line Between Etsuko and her spokesmen became blur. She consoled herself and said to Niki almost as Sachiko did. She said:"My motivation to leave Japan was justified, and I always took the interest of the view into my heart"(226). But after a while, she scolded herself "In those days, he really believed we could give her a happy life over there. But you see, Niki, i knew all along, i knew all along she would not be happy over here. But i decided to bring her just the same" (228). Before Niki left, she asked Etsuko for a postcard from Nagasaki, and after Etsuko found the postcard, she said:"Keiko was happy that day, we rode on cable-cars"(237). So far, Etsuko's psychological defenses were finally broken. The story she told about the woman in Nagasaki was a lie she made up. She used Sachiko and Mariko as cover, but in fact, she constantly suspicion that the roots of the tragedy of Keiko are rooted in her willingness to leave Japan. Etsuko's life has been a bitter struggle for her conscience, It seems that since the terrible event, her stable life has been disrupted. Etsuko was full of remorse for Keiko, and she was also consumed by guilty and self-delusion. That is to say, She made fictive amends for the unrepentant past.

If Japanese misfortune created by the war is beyond their personal abilities to solve, different life attitudes can be decided in the face of adversity. Mrs Fujiwara is a kind woman with grey hair. Her noodle shop is located in a busy street. She had five children. And before the war, her husband was an important figure in Nagasaki. But the war destroys everything. Facing the disaster, her life attitude is positive and practical. She opened a noodle shop, looking forward in an optimistic attitude towards life.

#### IV. Conclusion

As trauma researchers have studied, the characters in the novel exhibit many of the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, such as hyper arousal, intrusion, constriction and numbness reaction. The narrative tone of the novel's characters in the memory is too calm to believe, because the author wants to express that the recipient wants to avoid painful memories and hope to get some comfort through the narrative. In this novel, trauma is the theme and expression. Kazuo Ishiguro was trying something rather odd with the narrative. The main strategy was to leave a big gap. Etsuko use Sachiko and Mariko's story to talk about herself. So you have this highly Estuko-ed version of his other person's story. Throughout history, people in pursuit of happiness and good life at the same time are suffering from natural and man-made disasters, war, disease, terror, massacre, mental stress and so on. Paying attention to trauma is not for cynicism, not for forgetting memories, but through reproductive trauma, allowing people to repair trauma in reflection.

#### Works Cited

- Booth, Wayne C. *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (second edition) . Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1983. Print
- Brian W. Shaffer, Cynthia F. Wong. *Conversations with Kazuo Ishiguro*. University Press of Mississippi, 2008. 25. Print
- Bowlby, John. *Maternal Care and Mental Health* [M]. Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1995. Print

- Caruth Cathy. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* [M]. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996. Print
- Drag, Woj ciech. *Revisiting Loss : Memory,Trauma and Nostalgia in the Novels of Kazuo Ishiguro*. Cambridge : Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014. Print
- Groes Sebastian and Barry Lewis. Ed.*Kazuo Ishiguro. New Critical Visions of the Novels*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011. PrintKazuo Ishiguro. *A Pale View of Hills*. London: Random House US, 2011.
- Langer, Lawrence L. Holocaust testimonies: *The ruins of memory*. New Haven: Yale Universtiy Press, 1991.Print
- Matthews Sean and Sebastian Groes. ED. Kazuo Ishiguro: Contemporary Critical Perspectives. Continuum International Publishing Group, 2009. Print
- GrowSebastian and Barry Lewis. Ed. Kazuo Ishiguro: New Critical Visions of the novels. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011. Print
- Renn,Paul. The Silent Past and the Invisible Present."Memory,Trauma, and Representation in Psychotherapy. New York:Rouledge, 2012. Print
- Shaffer Brian W.Understanding Kazuo Ishiguro Understanding Contemporary British Literature.University of South Carolina Press.1998. Print
- 安娅, 幸福是个肥皂泡——石黑一雄访谈录[J].《外国文学动态》, 2001 年第 1 期
- 宁宝剑, 创伤批评理论渊源探究[J].《安徽理工大学学报》, 2014.
- 柳晓, 创伤与叙事[M]. 北京 : 中国社会科学出版社, 2013.
- 申丹, 叙事、文体与潜文本:重读英美经典短篇小说[M]. 北京:北京大学出版社, 2009.
- 师彦灵, 再现、记忆、复原: 欧美创伤理论研究的三个方面. 田兰州大学学报(社会科学版), 2011 (2) :132 — 138
- 周颖, 创伤视角下的石黑一雄小说研究[D].上海:上海外国语大学博士论文, 2014.