Conflicted Memory, Irreversible Loss: Dissociative Projection in Kazuo Ishiguro's *A Pale View of Hills* and Yasunari Kawabata's *The Sound of the Mountain*

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Abstract

The task of identifying main hallmarks of Ishiguro's and Kawabata's oeuvres is but of double-edged nature – one may be unconsciously driven to seemingly obvious and unequivocal categorisations, naming attempts at self-understanding and self-interpretation as the core of their narratives. Both writers are associated with highly poeticised, sensual, and atmospheric explorations of the past long gone. They thoroughly investigate and comment upon one's personal loss, alienation, displacement, or falling into obsolescence. They depict the worlds that perished once and for all, simultaneously making them a mythologised locus of ultimate contentment, plenitude, and fulfilment. In this sense, the past is superimposable onto the present – it develops into a safe haven formed out of one's innermost feelings and memories, a place where one takes refuge in one's reminiscences. This paper surveys the role of memory, nostalgia, and loss in Ishiguro's first novel, A Pale View of Hills*, and Kawabata's work from his mature period,* The Sound of the Mountain*. The former, a veritable attempt at recreating and re-orientalising the Orient, is subjected to a comparative analysis with the publication often assessed as the pinnacle of post-war Japanese literature. Characterial disintegration, dissociative symptoms, and affectivity that are present in both novels are analysed as determinants of their fragmentary narrative structure.*

Keywords

memory studies, trauma studies, narrative identity, intertextuality, aesthetics, neo-sensualism, British literature, Japanese literature

1.

In 1986 in an interview with Gregory Mason (only later published in Autumn 1989) Kazuo Ishiguro revealed his main sources of inspiration and authors whose literary output not only prompted him to pursue the path of a writer himself but also greatly influenced his still-developing style. He wistfully talks about the years he spent at the University of Kent and the University of East Anglia, mentioning devoting much of his free time to Charlotte Brontë, Dostoevsky, Chekhov, or Dickens.[1] Ishiguro goes to great lengths to emphasise that his education and writing style are predominantly rooted in the Western tradition, further voicing his surprise at being set side by side by critics with authors such as Yukio Mishima.[2] He does, though, admit that he actually acquainted himself with Japanese literary classics, naming Jun'ichirō Tanizaki, Masuji Ibuse, Sōseki Natsume, and Yasunari Kawabata as his primary influences.[3] Despite Ishiguro's enduring reluctance to any authorial categorisations, it is particularly tempting to trace his early steps as a budding

1 Gregory Mason, "An Interview with Kazuo Ishiguro," in *Conversations with Kazuo Ishiguro*, ed. Brian W. Schaffer and Cynthia F. Wong (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2008), 4.

2 All Japanese names in the article have been transcribed in a reversed order, i.e. the given name followed by the family name, with the exception of direct quotations, in which the original order (if applicable) has been preserved.

3 Mason, "Interview," 4.

novelist and analyse his first works as opposed to the oeuvres of the aforementioned authors. His diverse literary output may well be deeply entrenched in the Occident, but it also does show many non-occidental (and, in some cases, even auto-oriental) traits and tendencies, which is partially accountable to the fact – as suggested by the author himself – that he still feels torn between his homeland and England, unconsciously trying to (re-)create "Japan of his own". In an interview with Suzie Mackenzie Ishiguro states: "I never properly said goodbye to Japan, only a temporary goodbye. For a long time, I simply assumed that we would return. […] It was just time, life, the world, that came along and rearranged things when I wasn't looking. The next time I looked, Japan was gone."[4] Elsewhere he admits outright: "I just invent a Japan which serves my needs. And I put that Japan together out of little scraps, out of memories, out of speculation, out of imagination."[5] It, then, does not seem in any way justifiable to compare Ishiguro on equal terms to Japanese-born and -bred writers, but – as the article argues – his search for "the quintessential traits of Japan," and thus for his own roots, creates an interesting comparative context.

Just like Ibuse, Ishiguro does never wend the beaten path, with each respective publication making an attempt to "reinvent himself" and address new, normally overlooked or completely disregarded problems. Even when confronting the same issues as his Japanese predecessors, for instance, the topic of the atomic bombing, minutely depicted in Ibuse's *Black Rain* (*Kuroi ame*), Ishiguro does not compromise his considerable finesse and verbal dexterity, offering an innovative, highly idiosyncratic view on the issue in question. His characters, just like the eponymous amphibian in Ibuse's "The Salamander" ("Sanshōō") – by their gradual retreat into their personal safe haven – become so accustomed to their comfort zone that it eventually becomes a place of their confinement, a prison in which they ultimately cannot escape despite their greatest efforts. Their struggles are carefully retold in a retrospective, confessional mode – Ishiguro's first-person narrators take special care not to mention events and life decisions that would make them look uncouth, indelicate, or inconsiderate. Their narratives are characterised by a noticeable artistic stylisation. Not only do they alter the depicted world of the novel, but they also re-aestheticise and amend it in the process. Given the (oftentimes problematic) content of their accounts, as much can be read or intuited from their words as from the moments in which they cease to speak at all – omissions, understatements, as well as numerous breaks and thematic fractures present in Ishiguro's protagonists' narratives can be as informative as direct assertions, especially when they are uttered by such unreliable narrators. In this sense, much is and should be left unsaid – the characters retreat, as if, into the shadows, which seems to be very much to the Japanese liking.

In "In Praise of Shadows" ("In'ei raisan"), a seminal essay on Japanese aesthetics, Jun'ichirō Tanizaki expounds on the transient beauty of all that is concealed. The Occident, materialistic and

4 Suzie Mackenzie, "Between two worlds," *The Guardian*, March 25, 2000, accessed July 14, 2016, https://www.theguardian.com/books/2000/mar/25/fiction.bookerprize2000. Cf. Graham Swift, "Shorts: Kazuo Ishiguro," in *Conversations with Kazuo Ishiguro*, ed. Brian W. Schaffer and Cynthia F. Wong (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2008), 35–41. Ishiguro in an insightful conversation with Swift particularises and comments upon his nationality: "I'm not entirely like English people because I've been brought up by Japanese parents in a Japanese-speaking home. My parents didn't realize that we were going to say in this country for so long, they felt responsible for keeping me in touch with Japanese values. I do have a distinct background. I think differently, my perspectives are slightly different." Swift, "Shorts," 35.

5 Mason, "Interview," 9.

growth-oriented, may lack delicacy and sensitivity needed to comprehend, respect, and appreciate Eastern spiritualism. Tanizaki emphasises the multi-dimensional character of the East-West dichotomy, projecting their dyadic relationship onto a model of two antagonistic, irreconcilable cultures: one of luminosity and one of tenebrosity. The West praises illumination and progress, whereas the East glorifies umbral elegance and dignity, for they better correspond to and correlate with the typically Japanese affection for all things mutable and transient. Thus understood, the unsaid is an important locus of meaning – what characters fail to properly express in words can be deduced from the non-verbal means of communication and otherwise meaningful signs: their general behaviour, bodily stance, facial expression, but also the atmosphere or even the interplay between light and shadow. Having Ishiguro's oeuvre in mind, the protagonists of his first two novels, *A Pale View of Hills* and *An Artist of the Floating World*, may immediately strike the reader as affected by the aforementioned theory – their emotional distance, passivity, and austerity well harmonise with Tanizaki's advocated reticence. And so do their accounts – at times sparse, passionless, and controlled, they do not reveal much about the characters' personalities. They are also, what is quite conspicuous and should be borne in mind, quite rich aesthetically. The evocative descriptions of Etsuko's and Masuji Ono's immediate environs in themselves disclose much of what they feel and think.

The impact of the aforementioned writers (or, in fact, any writers at all but for Proust)[6] on Ishiguro's style is nigh impossible to be objectively measured, nonetheless I will attempt to compare his first novel, *A Pale View of Hills* (1982), to – by now well-established in the Japanese literary canon – *The Sound of the Mountain* (*Yama no oto*, 1954) by Yasunari Kawabata. I do not take the liberty of interpreting it as form of homage to Kawabata (which in many ways would be a blatant overstatement), nor do I wish to compare Ishiguro's career to that of Kawabata's, but to examine the latter's masterpiece as a work in a number of ways similar to the literary debut of Ishiguro. It is highly doubtful it served as a direct inspiration, but Ishiguro does admit to being acquainted with Kawabata's works, even though he discloses that he "find[s] [them] terribly difficult."[7] Less controversial a statement is that Ishiguro's literary output is influenced by cinematography. On many occasions the author asserts that he is an avid cinephile, particularly relishing Far-Eastern cinema. Having addressed the impact Akira Kurosawa had on Hollywood, he states: "Some of my very favourite films of all times are Japanese ones."[8] "I see a lot of Japanese films. The visual images of Japan have a great poignancy for me, particularly in domestic films like those of Ozu and

6 Marcel Proust is the only writer to which Kazuo Ishiguro has referred continuously in a number of interviews as a formative influence on his early literary career. He openly admits to not having acquainted himself with the entirety Proust's oeuvre, nonetheless he recognises and fully acknowledges the impact the initial impression of À la recherche du temps perdu had on his style. "I've never read the entire novel [Remembrance of Things Past]," confesses Ishiguro. "I've only read the first volume. The overture, the first sixty pages, that's where I got a lot of this stuff about mimicking the movement of memory in somebody's head. I read that between my first and second novels – it had a big impact on me, I realized that as a novelist, you did not necessarily have to actually mimic the way memory rubs through someone's mind." Lewis Burke Frumkes, "Kazuo Ishiguro," in *Conversations with Kazuo Ishiguro*, ed. Brian W. Shaffer and Cynthia F. Wong (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2008), 193. In an exclusive article (anticipating the special thirtieth-anniversary edition of An Artist of the Floating World) written by Ishiguro himself for The Guardian (June 24, 2016), the author provides his readership with more insightful commentary on his relationship with Proust.

7 Suanne Kelman, "Ishiguro in Toronto," in *Conversations with Kazuo Ishiguro*, ed. Brian W. Shaffer and Cynthia F. Wong (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2008), 47.

8 Kelman, "Ishiguro," 48.

Naruse […]."[9] One does not find the names mentioned very surprising – Ishiguro's descriptions, particularly in his first two novels, often evoke an air of transience and wistful longing very much reminiscent of Yasujirō Ozu's or Kenji Mizoguchi's oneiric, hypnotic style. Mikio Naruse is an equally obvious association, as he is known for his numerous literary adaptations, including the ones of Kawabata's *Maihime* (1951) and *The Sound of the Mountain* (1954).

2.

Kazuo Ishiguro's first novel, *A Pale View of Hills*, is a story of Etsuko, a middle-aged Japanese émigré who, unable to find herself in the new reality of post-World War II Japan, decides to permanently settle somewhere in the English countryside. Entertaining her daughter Niki, who came from London to pay her a visit, Etsuko begins a sentimental journey into the past, reliving memories of the time right before she resolved to emigrate. As the reader soon learns, her story covers some harrowing experiences that left Etsuko mentally conflicted. Reasons for her disturbing account are not known right from the beginning – she takes special care not to mention events and life decisions that would make her look indelicate.

The story covers the aftermath of the atomic bombing of Nagasaki, an event so traumatic it is practically never mentioned in Etsuko's account save for three sparse comments. Tragedy that occurred on the 6th and 9th of August 1945 in Hiroshima and Nagasaki caused a great number of casualties and had an enormous impact on the lives of the Japanese people. This historical background, even if not directly referred to, is an ominously looming presence always at play, visible against the protagonist's personal tribulations. Etsuko begins to recount her story from the moment she and her husband, Jiro, move in an apartment in a newly-built block of flats. Soon she makes the acquaintance of Sachiko, a woman of no means who lives in a nearby cottage. After some time, they become good friends when Etsuko offers to look after Sachiko's daughter, Mariko. Being pregnant herself, she manifests strong maternal instinct, definitely not present in her new neighbour.

The narrator often switches between disparate subplots, making additional commentary while prompted by random things that come to her mind. The reader learns more about her mysterious neighbour and her whereabouts – her story, just like Etsuko's narration on various occasions, is chaotic, fragmentary, and often in conflict with itself. It seems to give an insight into Sachiko's life only to further confuse the reader by reorienting the motivations of the character in question. She tries to do everything she can (using her daughter's welfare as an excuse) to run away from the squalor, vacillating between relatively safe occupation (she is a hired hand in a noodle shop) and a thought of an unrealistic romantic escapade with Frank. Etsuko, though, seems to be greatly resilient, not to say immune, to the impact of her wayward friend – she tries to comprehend Sachiko's mindset but not once does she show any changes in her behaviour herself.

Etsuko's story, complex and multifaceted as it may be, is in all respects marked by trauma and loss. The roots of her traumatic experience can be traced back to the Nagasaki bombing – even though it is conspicuously absent in her relation, it is the event that reshaped many aspects

9 Mason, "Interview," 4.

of her life. Not only is it problematic as a reason for so great a change, but also – what is never stated in the novel – because the protagonist may have lost her family in the atomic bombing. In her recollections, Etsuko does not mention any other members of her family, but for her husband and father-in-law, with the one exception of a time she accompanies Ogata to Nakagawa: "We walked on, past other houses more grand-looking, but we passed neither Ogata-San's old house nor the house I had once lived in with my parents. In fact, the thought occurred to me that perhaps Ogata-San had chosen a route so as to deliberately avoid them,"[10] making no further comment as for who her parents were or what happened to them. It is just one of numerous omissions and subjective alterations of reality to be found in the novel. As it turns out, striving for impartiality and recollective exactitude is often a difficult venture:

> Objectivity in a desirable sense should be seen as a process of attempting to counteract identificatory and other phantasmatic tendencies without denying, or believing one can fully transcend, them. Rather, limited but significant objectification should be cogently related to other discursive and signifying possibilities depending on the nature of the object of study and how one is able to negotiate one's own subject positions.[11]

Objectivity of one's account and subject positions are important categories that enhance self-awareness and understanding of one's experiences, as well as facilitate identity-forming processes, which "*might even be defined in nonessentialized terms as a problematic attempt to configure and, in certain ways, coordinate subject positions-in-process*."[12] One's current standing, set of beliefs, familial bonds, and social or professional status might determine the way one is and changes over time. Naturally, the perception of self/selves and its verbal realisations are also crucial for comprehending one's motives and life aspirations. For this reason, the very way in which an individual relates his or her story conveys a great amount of information about a given person. The analysis gets more complicated when the account is marked by traumatic or otherwise shocking experiences. Etsuko's rendering of her life story is highly fragmented, abound with gaps and understatements. Her withdrawal from what cannot be easily assimilated is typical of such a predicament, so is the distorted form her narrative takes:

> The traumatic experience has normally long been submerged and has become distorted in its submersion. The horror of the historical experience is maintained in the testimony only as an elusive memory that feels as if it no longer resembles any reality. The horror is, indeed, compelling not only in its reality but even more so, in its flagrant distortion and subversion of reality. Realizing its dimensions becomes a process that demands retreat.[13]

Some issues cannot be fully stifled and disregarded, and they sooner or later find their way into the narrative, just as can be seen in the example of the bombing that has been already

10 Kazuo Ishiguro, *A Pale View of Hills* (London: Faber and Faber, 1991), 141.

11 Dominick LaCapra, *History in Transit: Experience, Identity, Critical Theory* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2004), 71.

12 LaCapra, *History in Transit*, 59–60 (emphasis in original).

13 Dori Laub, "Truth and Testimony: The Process and the Struggle," in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1995), 62.

mentioned. What Etsuko once names as "the tragedies and nightmares of wartime"[14] is hinted at only three times,[15] in a very dispassionate, succinct way: "But then the bomb had fallen and afterwards all that remained were charred ruins."[16] By doing so, the narrator clearly distances herself from the tragedy, changing her role from a victim to an impassive observer.

Etsuko, in fact, is a member of the *hibakusha* – the survivors of the atomic bombings. While analysing common characteristics of this group, Wojciech Drąg names their most typical feature, namely "the propensity to defend themselves against the traumatic legacy of death by means of a suppression of feeling, which in more severe cases may develop into a disorder of psychic closing-off or, in extreme cases, psychic numbing."[17] The protagonist of Ishiguro's novel does not seem to suffer from complete mental debilitation. She does, though, manifest some dissociative symptoms. Similar reasoning is provided by Piątek, who adds that "dissociation may take on very different manifestations depending on the extent of traumatic impact and the resilience of the subject, split personality disorder and amnesia are among the most severe forms of dissociation."[18] While acquainting oneself with Etsuko's narrative, initially it does not seem justifiable to name her account amnesiac, as she manages to successfully convey much meaningful, coherent information. Nevertheless, with each respective page it becomes increasingly obvious that what she says has only the appearance of being true – numerous breaks in the narrative account for its imperfection and the inner conflict. Bożena Kucała, basing her observations on Wai-chew Sim's research, emphasises "the co-existence of the desires for self-deception and self-protection in Ishiguro's narrators."[19] She asserts that "The truth about their past errors and misdeeds is intuited by the narrators but, if fully acknowledged, might prove unbearable, which is why they resort to various strategies of evasion."[20] The effort Etsuko makes to consolidate her confession into a meaningful whole also renders it very unemotional in the process, at times giving the impression of the narrator greatly struggling with her strenuous task. It may be then stated that Etsuko suffers from both partial psychic numbing and a dissociative disorder: "the peculiarly disengaged and desensitised manner of Etsuko's narration – her apparent emotional distance from the nuclear tragedy and her daughter's suicide alike – could partly be attributed to a post-traumatic condition of affective anaesthesia."[21]

The problem of recurring displacement present in the novel and the sheer magnitude of Etsuko's familial loss call for something more than mental scars – it is also marked by what Aleida Assmann named "the wound of time". It partly can be described as a need for splitting one's identity. This split divides the subject into a person who is remembered and who remembers. In the

14 Ishiguro, *Pale View*, 13.

15 Ishiguro, *Pale View*, 11, 73, 111.

16 Ishiguro, *Pale View*, 11.

17 Wojciech Drąg, *Revisiting Loss: Memory, Trauma and Nostalgia in the Novels of Kazuo Ishiguro* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), 93.

18 Beata Piątek, *History, Memory, Trauma in Contemporary British and Irish Fiction* (Kraków: Jagiellonian University Press, 2014), 126.

19 Bożena Kucała, "Ignorance Is Strength: Kazuo Ishiguro's and Graham Swift's Argument against Knowledge," in *American and British Studies Annual* 8 (2015), 77.

20 Kucała, "Ignorance," 77.

21 Drąg, *Revisiting Loss*, 93.

case of a conflicted personality, it causes this irreparable "injury" in the respect that "one cannot bring back the past without at the same time perceiving a gap within oneself […]. Otherness in one's own self is experienced as something painful – a wound of time. The philosophy of senses makes memory appear as a faded, decayed form of the original experience. What was once vividly present diminishes with time."[22] It accounts for the problematic nature of the main character's recollections – if the "period of mourning" is not over, a venture of such a type is doomed to fail. Etsuko manages to locate the object of her loss but does not accommodate to it and it comes back in irregular surges (exactly when her narrative happens to lack coherence or is in conflict with itself). The character's trauma caused by the bombing and subsequent displacement makes her unable to work through the trauma. In Freudian terms, she is between the period of mourning and melancholia.

The key to understanding Etsuko's problem lies in characters of Sachiko and Mariko. When the protagonist recounts their initial meetings, the reader does not have many reasons to believe their relationship is by any means out of ordinary. Yet, while closely analysing the text, one may spot certain inaccuracies that gain in prominence with time. Sachiko, as a newcomer to the community, is certainly the object of gossip. Not only does she reside in a shabby cottage across a field of bare land – which in itself separates her from the housing estate – but she also fails as a caring mother, leaving her daughter unattended and allowing her to skip classes. One day Etsuko eavesdrops on two neighbours, one of whom "had received a clear snub" from "the woman who had moved into the derelict house by the river."[23] They proceed to discuss unsociability and inimical attitude of Sachiko, clearly alluding also to her romance with a foreigner. Etsuko's recollections seem to wander off in a different direction, as she makes a few comments on how harsh the reality is for women in the contemporary society, but then suddenly breaks her train of thought and states "It was never my intention to appear unfriendly, but it was probably true that I made no special effort to seem otherwise."[24] This is the first instance of textual inconsistency that may arise one's suspicions and makes one wonder what compels Etsuko to address her own persona, as clearly the subject of the discussion was that of their new neighbour.

In the light of all the psychological evidence that has been provided, I wish to argue that Etsuko's emotional state is, in fact, even worse than may initially be seen. She manifests many of the features of traumatic dissociation, displacement, repression, and sublimation, as well as symptoms characteristic of post-atomic trauma often present in the *hibakusha*,[25] which makes it justifiable to surmise she suffers from yet another form of dissociative disorder, namely that of split personality. Her fascination with Sachiko goes far beyond the limits of normal friendship – in some respects, she idealises her neighbour and makes her the liberated woman whom she herself cannot become. Sachiko is fully independent, refined, and proud – she does what she wants and does not seek anyone's approval. She can even indulge in a frivolous romance, while Etsuko is always constrained by her domineering husband and social mores. The one respect in

22 Aleida Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization: Functions, Media, Archives* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 90–91.

23 Ishiguro, *Pale View*, 12.

24 Ishiguro, *Pale View*, 13.

25 Drąg, *Revisiting Loss*, 101.

which her friend is lacking is that of maternal tenderness – the very thing that Etsuko believes she possesses, but eventually dismisses by going to England despite her daughter's pleas, which leads to Keiko's suicide.

This dissociative projection is used with hindsight by Etsuko in an attempt to make up for her grave mistakes. Notwithstanding the fact that the protagonist cannot change the past, she surely seeks a source of consolation, entertaining the notion that the reality can be "rewritten" and amended in her mind, even if – as rightly stated by Kucała – "present reflections [in Ishiguro's fiction] co-exist with and are often difficult to disentangle from the labyrinth of recollections".[26] Apparently, working through the protagonist's guilt and her daughter's desire for self-destruction necessitated a more detailed analysis of the process of self-isolation. The "subject" of Etsuko's scrutiny is young Mariko. The girl, much like Keiko many years later, is completely maladjusted to her surroundings. Her mother is unable to instil any moral principles in her, just like Etsuko was not able to reach to her daughter and fully comprehend her condition. The mutual understanding concomitant with mother-daughter relationship is not present in both cases. Constant neglect of Mariko makes her a solitary child – she does not react to any commands nor does she regard anyone with due esteem. She is prone to running away from home and hiding somewhere in her surroundings; on one of such occasions, Etsuko visits Sachiko's cottage and tries to persuade her friend to look for her daughter – she even offers to go alone should Sachiko manifest no desire to accompany her. This attempt is most symbolic – even in her reminiscences, she tries to prove that she is helpful, protective, and caring.

In the climactic scene of the novel, Sachiko reveals to Etsuko she is finally going to America with Frank. Mariko is very much against her mother's idea (once again, a parallel can be drawn between Mariko and Keiko, who also did not wish to leave Japan); the child's opinion is not taken into account, making her run away from home. She is followed by Etsuko, who – none the less aroused – thus addresses Sachiko's daughter: "[Frank is] very fond of you, and he'll be just like a new father. Everything will turn out well, I promise. […] [I]f you don't like it over there, *we* can always come back. […] 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."[27] The change of personal pronouns is the clearest indication of Etsuko's confusion. At that very moment, she and Sachiko become one – a person bearing "the wound of time", projecting present problems onto the past, assuming a stance of the idealised persona who is able to overcome the factors causing her trauma. At that point the narrative comes to a halt – whether or not the emotional strain was too much to endure is debatable, but this episode ends Etsuko's attempt at working through her agonising past. The reader does not know whether her venture is successful. Having abruptly finished her recollections, Etsuko relates what happens in the present, conversing with Niki and making some plans for the future. Her irrevocable wish to break up with the past might be seen in her plan to sell the house, seemingly too big for just one person.

26 Kucała, "Ignorance," 75.

27 Ishiguro, *Pale View*, 87 (emphasis added).

3.

The Sound of the Mountain is a very special position among Kawabata's masterpieces. Written over the course of five years and serialised irregularly in sixteen instalments in various magazines (finally published on its own in 1954), it may be assessed as a work belonging to his mature period, although any classification of such a prolific writer's output is more than likely to fall short of due fidelity and exactitude. *The Sound of the Mountain* may partially draw upon his early days when Kawabata was very much fascinated with modernism, but it is equally tempting to trace some influences from the time he was still a part of Shin-kankaku-ha, the New Sensationalist literary school, frequently regarded simply as a group of neo-sensualists. His desire for novelty and experimentation in many ways anticipated post-modernism, but eventually dissipated or rather found its outlet in reworking neo-sensualists' patterns. Donald Keene, a renowned Japanese scholar, translator, and literary historian, names Joyce and Proust as Kawabata's early inspirations.[28] Keene is led to believe that under their influence Kawabata gradually transitioned from Shin-kankaku-ha to New Psychologism,[29] further expanding his literary interests and revising his writing style. Not only did he attempt to implement stream-of-consciousness-like passages in his short stories (e.g. "Suishō gensō" or "Hari to garasu to kiri"), but he also started to experiment with the subject matter, eventually – based on his experience of drafting (semi-)autobiographical pieces – writing *shinkyō-shōsetsu* [psychological novels]. Finally, Kawabata rediscovered beauty of classical Japanese literature, which made him partially disregard the trends that he had adopted, and write hybridised narratives unlike anything else ever present in Japanese literature. This sudden shift, surprising though it may be, was not regarded in any way as contradictory or unnatural by the author himself: "I have received the baptism of modern Western literature and I have myself imitated it, but basically I am an oriental, and for fifteen years I have never lost sight of my bearings."[30] Indeed, in the years following his early literary experiments, Kawabata returned to his Japanese roots for good. He indulged in Shikibu Murasaki's *Genji monogatari* and Sei Shōnagon's *Makura no sōshi*, two legendary works of the Heian period, which certainly exerted major influence on Kawabata's sensitivity. It seems to have rekindled his patriotic feelings and unmatched zeal for the preservation of Japanese values, further reinforced by the traumatic experience of World War II. Following the observation of Keene, though, one should note that:

> Kawabata moved back and forth constantly between the two worlds of East and West. It is true that he never manifested the unconditional admiration of the West found in some of Tanizaki's writings, but he never rejected the West either. […] Kawabata's development was by no means a linear "return to the East" after an initial fascination with Western Modernism.[31]

It goes without saying that Yasunari Kawabata's literary journey was an interesting one – his oeuvre combines elements so disparate and unlike it is hardly possible to subsume them under

28 Donald Keene, *Dawn to the West: Japanese Literature of the Modern Era*, Vol. 3 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 798.

29 Keene, *Dawn to the West*, 800.

30 Keene, *Dawn to the West*, 807.

31 Keene, *Dawn to the West*, 810.

any concrete, clear categories. They span both works based on hundreds-year-old traditions, some of which are placed nowadays at the very summit of Japanese literature, and dozens of titles (none the less ingenious) published in middlebrow magazines and more obscure papers. *The Sound of the Mountain* follows Kawabata's best-known works, *The Izu Dancer* (*Izu no odoriko*) and *Snow Country* (*Yukiguni*), and shares some common features with his equally famous novellas from the same period, *Thousand Cranes* (*Senbazuru*) and *The House of Sleeping Beauties* (*Nemureru bijo*). The reason I refer to those works collectively is that – even though they are different in form, tone, and message – they happen to pertain to similar issues, including the workings of memory, forgetting, transient beauty, virginal innocence, senility, and imminent death.

The Sound of the Mountain is a poignant meditation on the passage of time and unfulfilled yearnings, the core of which are painful memories that happen to haunt a great number of characters, particularly the novel's protagonist, Shingo Ogata. Even though the story is told from the perspective of an unknown third-person heterodiegetic narrator, as in a deliberate attempt at its objectification, one could surmise it may just as well be recounted by the novel's main focaliser. The narrator-protagonist takes the reader to post-war Kamakura, precisely to the Ogata household. Shingo, the head of the family, prompted by sporadic lapses of memory, feels that he starts to grow senile. The sudden realisation compels him to reassess his current life standing – his recollective venture is of paramount importance to the gradual disunification of the narrative structure. For Shingo, time seems to concurrently move both forward and backwards. With each passing moment, the clock ticks relentlessly, but the protagonist is much more preoccupied with psychological time, which bends the chronology of the narrative. The reader is left somewhere in-between, wavering between two inseparably interwoven plains of existence. Time and tide wait for no man, but in Shingo's recollection they happen to intertwine and affect one another – this spatial parallax makes one feel as if actually drifting in a rough body of water, constantly vacillating between the past and the present.

The mythified realm of the past serves as a secret, unassailable refuge, where the tedium of everyday life can be forgotten, and one's anxieties – allayed or completely nullified. But the nature of Shingo's retreat to his recollections is completely different from that of Etsuko's. Whereas the heroine of Ishiguro's novel wishes to justify her past misdeeds and absolve herself from her negligence, old Ogata indulges in pleasant reminiscences as he desires to recapture his long-lost love. He feigns indifference to his speculative recollections, pondering whether they are just one of the symptoms of his "nostalgic syndrome,"[32] but it is patently obvious that his playful imagination leads him to believe that young Kikuko, his daughter-in-law, is a living embodiment of the girl he loved over three decades earlier. The object of his longings is his wife's sister – a mysterious woman, not even named once in the course of the whole narrative. Shingo idealises her as an angelic, immaculate beauty. The crux of the protagonist's problem is that the object of his desires had first married the other man and later passed away. In this sense, the arrival of his daughter-in-law is an experience verging on a personal epiphany, for he superimposes the image of Yasuko's dead sister onto the character of Kikuko. What should be noted is that this superimposition differs from the one present in *A Pale View of Hills*, as Etsuko projects her fantasies onto the past, whereas Shingo

32 Yasunari Kawabata, *The Sound of the Mountain* (London: Penguin, 2011), 33.

does so onto the present, thus giving rise to a yawning gap in the narrative itself. The illusory projection is a very specific type of a dissociative reaction which the character cannot counter (nor does he express the slightest wish to do so had he such a possibility).

I postulate that Shingo's predicament, much like Etsuko's, can be interpreted by means of psychoanalytical categories of lack and loss, both of which have been analysed by Freud and Lacan. Wojciech Drąg states that "Whereas for Freud the constitution of the subject is predicated on the severed attachments, or the losses the ego has sustained, Lacan argues that it is lack, not loss, that determines the process of self-definition."[33] This lack can be also perceived as a desire to rediscover and recover what one does not have, nursing the hope that the loss can be somehow undone. The search for the lost meaning is a difficult and time-consuming process, later even termed as semi-mourning by Derrida.[34] Semi-mourning and its concomitant sense of self-belittlement account for the fact that "traumatic experiences […] cannot be transformed into redemptive symbols," as they "result from experiences the intensity of which exceeds the capacity for cognitive and emotional integration."[35] Following the supposition of Lyotard, Assmann states that what cannot undergo redemption and thus "excludes representation is preserved as virulent energy"[36] that is stored in one's body; it gives rise to traumatic body/bodily memory[37] and to various dissociative reactions such as "radical disorientation, confusion, a fixation on the past, and out-of-context experiences (such as flashbacks, startle reactions, or other forms of intrusive behaviour),"[38] as well as "emotional numbing, being in a daze, derealisation […], depersonalization […], a sense that time is either slowing down or speeding up", which "may manifest [themselves] in various forms depending on the extent of shock and resilience of the subject."[39] Those reactions hinder one's recollections and may have a significant impact on their form by, for instance, altering one's perception of time – the issue very much pertinent to both narratives. They can also preclude achieving emotional closure (the result of an experience that is worked through) in that they impede moving from one's personal explorations of traumatic events to their acceptance in a narrativised form. Analysing one's personal ordeal can be a recuperative process – to use Lyotard's metaphor, mending fractured memories attenuates their virulence. It makes one accept and work through distressing experiences, thus extricating oneself from the thrall of trauma, anxiety, or emotional disturbance. What used to be a burden, becomes integrated with one's *Lebenserfahrung* and shapes one's identity. The period of "recovery" is difficult – distressing memories are anchored somatically and are realised by means of prenoetic bodily affects. It makes them the integral part of their carrier.

Shingo's and Etsuko's subconscious dissociation from reality can be thus understood as a defence mechanism. In case of Shingo, the situation – at least initially – seems to be more natural, i.e. his inclination to tranquil musings and sporadic lapses of memory are accountable to his age (one automatically thinks of an early onset of senile dementia). His family and Eiko Tanizaki, his

33 Drąg, *Revisiting Loss*, 20.

34 Drąg, *Revisiting Loss*, 22.

35 Assmann, *Cultural Memory*, 247.

36 Assmann, *Cultural Memory*, 361.

37 Assmann, *Cultural Memory*, 398.

38 LaCapra, *History in Transit*, 45.

39 Piątek, *History, Memory, Trauma*, 38.

secretary, seem to be well aware of them and assume the role of passive "prompters": "The son [Shūichi] served as a sort of prompter for the father. There were other prompters too, Yasuko and Kikuko, Shuichi's wife. The three of them worked together, a team supplementing Shingo's powers of memory. The girl in the office was yet another prompter."[40] Whereas the recent past appears to be particularly problematic (the novel starts from the protagonist's attempt at recollecting the maid his family dismissed barely five days earlier),[41] Shingo's long-term memory works much more efficiently. He may forget the most trivial of things, but he still remembers Yasuko's dead sister – her image is etched into his mind like a deep laceration that forever scars one's skin: "in another part of his mind, he asked whether, even now that he had been married to Yasuko for more than thirty years, his boyhood yearning for her sister was still with him, *an old wound*."[42] The wound cannot be in any way nursed, not even by his wife or children. The reader gets an impression that Shingo married Yasuko solely to sustain any remaining connection with the object of his desire:

> When [their daughter] Fusako was born, Shingo secretly hoped that she might be a beauty like her aunt. He could not speak of this hope to his wife. But Fusako proved to be even *homelier* than Yasuko. As Shingo would have put it, the blood of the older sister had failed to flow through the younger. He was disappointed in Yasuko.[43]

His relationship with his wife fails to meet his expectations – he does not find any traits he loved in his imagined *inamorata* in Yasuko herself, nor does his daughter bring him expected contentment. Assessed merely as *homely*, just like her mother, Fusako does not have much in common with Shingo's elusive ideal. And indeed, the protagonist of Kawabata's novel seems to be in love with an idea – a nameless embodiment of perfection and exquisiteness. While harbouring this flawless ideal (projected onto his wife and daughter) for so many years, Shingo tries to preserve his juvenile dream. With time, his romanticised vision is converted into what I earlier referred to, following Jean-François Lyotard's and Aleida Assmann's observations, as virulent energy. The only person who mitigates its workings is Kikuko, Shūichi's wife. Shy and timid, her vulnerability attracts the protagonist. The more she is neglected by her husband (Shūichi indulges in a frivolous romance with Kinuko, herself playing the role of Kikuko's depraved *Doppelgängerin*), the greater is Shingo's concern for his daughter-in-law. On the most basic level, he offers her fatherly help and compassion, yet on the deeper, subconscious layer of reality – the level of his fantasies and dreams, Shingo entertains a dangerous illusion in which Kikuko plays the role of Yasuko's deceased sister.

What strikes one as deeply paradoxical is that dead people in the novel are more alive to the protagonist than those who actually still live. Shingo recounts numerous dreams in which his

40 Kawabata, *Sound*, 6.

41 Kawabata, *Sound*, 1–2.

42 Kawabata, *Sound*, 34 (emphasis added). Interestingly enough, the character of Etsuko also likens the recurring image of her dead daughter to a maiming wound: "It may seem morbid of a mother to have such thoughts, but on hearing of her suicide, the first thought that ran through my mind – before I registered the shock – was to wonder how long she had been there like that before they had found her. […] I have found myself continually bringing to mind that picture – of my daughter hanging in her room for days on end. The horror of that image has never diminished, but it has long ceased to be a morbid matter; as with wound on one's own body, it is possible to develop an intimacy with the most disturbing of things". Ishiguro, *Pale View*, 54 (emphasis added).

43 Kawabata, *Sound*, 43 (emphasis added).

late acquaintances[44] haunt him as if in an attempt to share some important information – whether being offered a repast by a dead cabinetmaker,[45] approaching a sexual intercourse with an unknown woman,[46] or observing a former director of his company,[47] the protagonist notices with hindsight the bizarre nature of his dreams, most of which feel almost too real:

> He had reached an age when most of his friends were dead. It was perhaps natural that he should dream of the dead.
> Neither the old cabinetmaker nor Aida [the director] had appeared to him as dead, however. They had come into his dreams as living people.
> And the figures of both, as they had come into the dreams, were still vivid in his mind. They were much clearer than his usual memories of the two men. Aida's face, red from drink, was of a sort that the living Aida had never presented; and yet Shingo remembered such details as the distended pores. Why should it be that, remembering the other two so clearly, he could not call up the face of the girl who had touched him, could not remember who she might be?[48]

Shingo rejects harsh, ugly, and unsatisfactory reality, finding his dream-world much more appealing. His idealised "memoryscape" is not without its faults, though. It is a place tainted with death and premonitions of failure. Vivid images and nearly tactile sensations that he experiences have an oracular function – what he manages to remember serves as a veritable omen of what is to come. It is in his dreams where he augurs Kikuko's pregnancy and subsequent abortion[49] – the two events that further distance his daughter-in-law from his son. It is also the realm in which he visibly notices his gradual dissociation. In his second erotic dream, he engages in close contact with a woman, or rather a disembodied idea of a woman, who "was refusing to respond" and who "had no face and no body; just two breasts floating in space."[50] The protagonist becomes self-conscious even during his reverie: he feels the nonsensical nature of the spectral girl, and – once wide awake – he probably unconsciously realises that his desire to reanimate Yasuko's sister is no more real than what he descried in the dream. "The Shingo of the dream had felt neither delight nor affection, nor even wantonness."[51] The reader may feel impelled to ask: how many Shingos are there? Is the Shingo of the dream different from the Shingo of reality? The answer to this question might be found in the last but one dream recounted in the narrative, in which the protagonist, clad in an army uniform, hacks at a swarm of mosquitoes with a sword:

44 Yasunari Kawabata himself came to be known as sōshiki no meijin, the master of the funerals, as practically all of his family (but for his grandfather) died when he was still a young boy, and throughout his entire life he attended dozens of funerals of his good friends. As explicated by Keene, "[Kawabata's] nickname, which served as the title of one of his earliest published works [the short story "Sōshiki no meijin," 1923], was bestowed on him because constant practice [of attending funerals] had given him a special air of authority when he appeared at funeral services." Keene, *Dawn to the West*, 787.

45 Kawabata, *Sound*, 21.

46 Kawabata, *Sound*, 21.

47 Kawabata, *Sound*, 22.

48 Kawabata, *Sound*, 22–23.

49 Kawabata, *Sound*, 97–98.

50 Kawabata, *Sound*, 155.

51 Kawabata, *Sound*, 156.

> Here and there flames were shooting from Shingo's uniform. The strange thing was that there were two Shingos. Another Shingo was watching the Shingo along whose uniform the flames were creeping. The flames licked the sleeves and the shoulder seam and the hem of the tunic, and disappeared again. It was less that they blazed up than that they came and went like wisps from a charcoal fire, giving forth tiny noises.
> Shingo was finally at home. It seemed to be his childhood home, in Shinshu. Yasuko's beautiful sister was there.[52]

In the subversive reality of the dream, Shingo, even when set afire, is willing to do everything it takes to get to Yasuko's sister and his illusionary home. The other Shingo, a passive observer, represents his real-life equivalent – a man helpless and impotent, unable to realise his fantasies (whose chances of fulfilment are equally low as obliterating the swarm of insects with a sidearm) but simultaneously not wishing to let them go. Given his limited perspectives for future happiness, "Kikuko was for him *a window looking out of a gloomy house*. His blood kin was not as he would wish them to be, and if they were not able to live as they themselves wished to live, then the impact of the blood relation became leaden and oppressive. His daughter-in-law brought relief."[53] Her very presence in the Ogata household brightens his dreary days: "Kindness toward her [Kikuko] was a beam lighting isolation. It was a way of pampering himself, of bringing a touch of mellowness into his life."[54]

Kikuko manages to successfully, even if inadvertently, supplant other members of Shingo's family. Yasuko falls short of her husband's high standards and so does Fusako, whose failed relationship and subsequent return to her parents' house sets her, in Shingo's eyes, side by side with Kikuko. Even his own daughter seems to be of lesser importance; in many ways, she is the opposite of her father's angelic, unattainable ideal. But it is his son who seems to cause him the greatest pain. Shūichi, Kikuko's husband, shows open contempt for his wife and engages in a romantic relationship with another woman. When Shingo learns from Eiko, his secretary and an acquaintance of Shūichi's mistress, that he took dislike to his own wife because of his father showing an unduly interest in her, he becomes furious. His wrath is only exacerbated when he is told Shūichi accused him of liking Kikuko "because she was a child."[55]

> He sensed that Shuichi had referred to her body.
> Had he wanted to find a prostitute in his bride? There was astonishing ignorance in the fact, and Shingo felt in it too a frightening paralysis of the soul. […]
> Did Shuichi not feel the cleanness in her?[56]

52 Kawabata, *Sound*, 180.

53 Kawabata, *Sound*, 25 (emphasis added).

54 Kawabata, *Sound*, 26. Elsewhere the pleasant luminosity associated with Kikuko's arrival is compared to a rather dazzling flash: "after Kikuko came into the house, Shingo's memories were pierced by moments of brightness, like flashes of lightning." Kawabata, *Sound*, 11. For most of the time Shingo finds her placid disposition welcome and soothing, but there are moments when her very presence triggers him with no advance notice – it further proves his inclination towards dissociative projection and its uncontrollable, affect-laden character.

55 Kawabata, *Sound*, 78. I deem it only proper to emphasise that Kikuko – from as much as can be conjectured – is a girl of about twenty or twenty-one.

56 Kawabata, *Sound*, 78.

Any reference to Kikuko's virginity and her sexual experience (or lack thereof) is found repugnant by the protagonist. Even though he cannot engage in any sort of a closer relationship with the object of his desires, mere thinking of her in sexual categories mars her purity.[57]

The rising tension within the family and their numerous problems (including Kikuko's and Kinuko's pregnancies, as well as Fusako's husband's suicide attempt), eventually bring Shingo down to earth; his illusory haven, which he has been nursing all along, even if not completely shattered, cannot last forever. With time, the protagonist begins to notice and gradually acknowledge the taxing and morally dubious nature of his relationship with his daughter-in-law. In one of the most memorable scenes in the novel, old Ogata forgets how to tie his necktie – the very thing that he has been doing every day for decades on end.[58] Kikuko, ever helpful and obliging, offers to lend a hand to her father-in-law. Despite her best intentions, the girl fails to produce a knot and is eventually replaced by Yasuko. Shingo's wife, as if in the supreme act of fulfilment of a marital duty, gently ties the necktie, to her husband's contentment. In the meantime, "Perhaps because of the pressure at the base of his skull, he felt a little giddy, and a golden mist of snow flowed past his closed eyelids. A mist of snow from an avalanche, gold in the evening light. He thought he could hear the roar."[59] The unnatural clamour which he hears during the renewed contact with his wife is the eponymous sound of the mountain. Rich in symbolism on many layers, it heralds forthcoming changes that re-establish the order of the protagonist's life. It is also heard at the beginning of the novel:

> In these mountain recesses of Kamakura the sea could sometimes be heard at night. Shingo wondered if he might have heard the sound of the sea. But no – it was the mountain.
> It was like wind, far away, but with a depth like a rumbling of the earth. Thinking that it might be in himself, a ringing in his ears, Shingo shook his head.
> The sound stopped, and he was suddenly afraid. A chill passed over him as if he had been notified that death was approaching. He wanted to question himself, calmly and deliberately, to ask whether it had been the sound of the wind, the sound of the sea, or a sound in his ears. But he had heard no such sound, he was sure. He heard the mountain.
> It was as if a demon had passed, making the mountain sound out.[60]

The mountain seems to serve as an ultimate "prompter" of Shingo's. It reminds him of his youthful desire to preserve his unrealistic dream, but it also generates a pervasive sense of foreboding – the sound of the mountain is a harbinger of the inevitable demise. The last time the summit roared, it betokened the death of Yasuko's sister.

57 The ideal of virginal beauty is present in many of Kawabata's works, e.g. *The Izu Dancer*, where the narrator refuses to spend the night with the eponymous performer once he learns that, despite her seemingly adult clothes and hairstyle, she is still a child. *In Snow Country*, the character of Yōko, whom Shimamura meets on the train at the very beginning, in the climactic scene of the novel is depicted as an unsullied goddess, a fabled weaver-maiden known from Japanese legends. The most prominent example, though, is *The House of the Sleeping Beauties*, in which Kawabata, with remarkable efficacy and elegance, retells the story of Eguchi and the five nights he spends in a mysterious house of assignation, appreciating the unspoilt beauty of sleeping virgins in a state of nature.

58 Kawabata, *Sound*, 194–195.

59 Kawabata, *Sound*, 195.

60 Kawabata, *Sound*, 4.

4.

The use of alpine imagery in both novels is not accidental. Not only does it evoke an air of transience, but also a sense of tranquillity marked by the concept known as *mono no aware*. As worded by Paul Varley, an illustrious scholar of Japanese history and culture, "The most basic sense of mono no aware is the capacity to be moved by things, whether they are the beauties of nature or the feelings of people."[61] Ishiguro's and Kawabata's novels, with their minute care to sensitively depict the auratic qualities of the moment, the feeling, or the scenery, draw heavily from Japanese aesthetics.

> Because of the particular Japanese liking […] for the perishable beauties of nature and because of the acute Japanese sensitivity to the passage of time, *mono no aware* has always been tinged with sadness and melancholy. Some commentators have sought to convey this sense by translating the phrase as the "pathos of things." But this is misleading because it suggests that things can inherently possess qualities like pathos or a pathetic beauty. Rather, in the Japanese tradition, such qualities come into being only when people perceive them in things. In other words, the Japanese have traditionally tended to the belief that beauty is not in the object but is evoked by the subject (i.e., the perceiver).[62]

The attunement of characters with their surroundings helps them phrase their sensory impressions, as visible in their descriptions and makes them more prone to deep musings in which they also analyse themselves. The process is very important in dealing with trauma; the protagonists address painful issues indirectly, which alleviates the burden of voicing things otherwise inexpressible. By applying strictly aesthetic notions to their confessions, one can discover their multidimensional character and subtlety.

There is no explicit evidence that Ishiguro was directly indebted to any of Kawabata's masterpieces, nonetheless, an impression an attentive reader may receive from acquainting himself with *A Pale View of Hills* is that of a work notably close to the spirit of *The Sound of the Mountain*. In both novels, the characters address their innermost secrets, fears, and desires. Their attempt at incorporating them into a coherent story is a creative process that can facilitate working through the source of their problem. To do so, they reshape some aspects of their identities in the process, whether consciously or not. In this respect, addressing taxing issues, including acute loss, in the form of a written account is one of the methods of self-creation. Since psychological trauma in many of its somatic realisations can have a great impact on one's (self-)perception, it is only natural to assume that the subject may question some aspects of his or her personality, as well as past choices and life decisions. Attributes of one's character that are found to be objectionable are liable to be rendered in the narrative into something else. Such an undertaking, depending on a person, may be more or less biased, wavering between extremely detailed, objective dissections of reality and picture-perfect fantasies. In the case of an individual affected by traumatic or otherwise distressing experiences, one usually needs to (and most often does) include the source of his or her problem in the narrative.

Both Etsuko and Shingo Ogata discern the vacuity and futility of their recollective pursuits. Their quixotic search for contentment, fulfilment, and absolution compel them to create

61 H. Paul Varley, *Japanese Culture* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2000), 61.

62 Varley, *Japanese Culture*, 61.

their phantasmal worlds – biased versions of reality based on their ossified (and often false or simply fabricated) memories of their past. By means of dissociative projection, they superimpose their expectations on various individuals, be them real or imaginary, partially trying to isolate themselves from the source of their problem, partially trying to work it through. They entertain their illusions as a temporary source of consolation, which only further alienates them from other people. Since their unrealistic expectations cannot be satisfied, nor can their nostalgic longings be in any way quelled, Etsuko and Shingo have difficulties keeping in touch with reality – they would sooner indulge in contact with tameable liminal apparitions. What is unreal is perfect, pristine, and untainted by mundanity of life, by the same token being very much to their liking. The notion of purity becomes something of an *idée fixe* to both characters. For Etsuko, it is connected with her abject fear of uncouthness and indelicacy, and for Shingo – with the idea of virginal beauty.

Ishiguro's and Kawabata's narrator-protagonists live in a highly aestheticised dream. It is subject to colouring, misrepresentation, and numerous distortions. What seems to be of particular interest to both authors – and what also is, I believe, so enticing to the reader – is not the initial state of affairs or the final outcome, but the phasal change that occurs in between. It is exactly the vacillating between reality and reverie, falling in and out of the dream, that is most meaningful. This interstitial space of contact with the Levinasian Other and the Lacanian Real is the place of the characters' change. This is the realm of their lived experience, dreams, aspirations, anxieties, and trauma. Its "Otherness" manifests itself in the ultimate inexpressibility of their experiences. The self-interpretive acts may be expressed by repetitions. The re-enactment creates an illusion of controlling the repressed content of one's memory, but – most of the time – it is a missed encounter with the elusive Real. Ishiguro's and Kawabata's protagonists can only reach in its direction, yet it cannot be grasped, tamed, appropriated. Nor can it be attained by the linguistic means, but it is exactly verbalisation of the characters' experiences that is their best chance at overcoming their problem, recovering from their loss, and ultimately accepting who they really are.

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