



Disintegration of Family in Kazuo Ishiguro's *A Pale View of Hills*, *The Unconsoled*, *When We Were Orphans* and *Nocturnes*

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Abstract

This paper addresses the theme of the family disintegration in the fiction of Kazuo Ishiguro as a contemporary author whose line of thought is still developing. The way he approaches this theme is historicist as he builds on the past to reveal the impacts of the World War II on the family and show the effect of the interactions of the Orient with the Occident on it. It is also anti-capitalist as he seeks to unveil how money-grubbing has relegated family bonds to a subordinate position. These interactions make of his fiction a space where there is a plurality of views about what a family is. The core of his argument is that individualism has led to the geographical and emotional fracture of the family. Politics is introduced as a force that shakes its unity. His view about the status of the family is cosmopolitan as he goes beyond the geographical boundaries of Japan and England to reveal that the fragmentation of the family is placeless. It is everywhere. The methodology of analysis is primarily grounded on a close study of three novels (*A Pale View of Hills*, *When We Were Orphans* and *The Unconsoled*) and a collection of short stories (*Nocturnes*).

.Keywords: family disintegration, anti-capitalism, individualism, plurality, politics and money-grubbing

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Introduction

One of the main highlights of Ishiguro's fiction is his reference to family-related issues in the wake of World War II in contemporary societies. He makes an allusion to the impact of capitalist money-driven practices and beliefs on the togetherness of the family as an important socio-cultural entity. He hints at the demise of the family as a value. He draws attention to its disintegration, which is symptomatic of the disintegration of society. Family bonds are torn apart and replaced with discord in a cash-oriented industrialist world where ethics are relegated to a peripheral position. He rings the alarm bell about the future of the family and the growing gaps between old and young generations, namely among people like the Japanese.

His fiction is a plea to reflect on the impacts of the great wars on individuals and nations. He tackles this issue within the framework of Orient-Occident relationships. Ishiguro raises questions about how the process of intercultural communication between, for instance, American and Japanese people can impact families and create frictions among them. This communication is presented as a force that can shake the unity of the family and distance its members from each other. Differences in terms of voting choices, for example, within the same family is seen, namely by the old Japanese generation, as the corollary of the American-Japanese cross-cultural encounter.

Through literature, the author gets engaged in the debate over the value of the family and the risk of losing it. He tries, albeit implicitly, to disencumber his mind of his worries about the end of the family in the world of today through fiction. He seeks to purge himself of the huge responsibility of protecting this family by

raising it in his writings. He expresses his fear of the loss of the family as the nucleus of society. He wants to draw attention to the fact that it is, to use the words of Hartley, "under immediate threat of extinction" (32). Opting for childlessness and celibacy menaces the continuity of the family. Money-grubbing can make of family bonds a trivial matter. This is the message seeks to pass on in his literary texts.

2.1. Family as a Value

Ishiguro is very much concerned with what Bhabha calls "the reality of being contemporary, its conflicts and crises, its losses and lacerations" (59). One of these realities is the disintegration of family. Ishiguro is worried about the loss of the value of such precious things as family. In his report of his interview with Ishiguro published in *The Guardian* in 2005, Adams mentions Ishiguro's worry that "precious things [are] under threat". Human relationships in general and family ones in particular are at gunpoint. Some of his characters, like Ogata-San in *A Pale View of Hills*, are afraid of the loss of the family as a value, and their fear boils down to despair, antagonism, domination and disrespect.

Ogata-San, an old Japanese man, thinks that families in his country have lost their feelings of togetherness in comparison to the past. The family as a representative of a constellation of values like mutual respect and trust is in peril. He openly attributes this loss to the intercultural encounter with the West, namely with the American culture based on the autonomy of wives to do what they see as practical and right far away from the dictates of their husbands. According to him, the Japanese family has been Americanized since women like Hanada's wife have decided to be different from their husbands. This process of



Americanization has made these women vote for other candidates in political elections, which is regarded as a dereliction of familial duty and a threat to the unity of the family. Ogata-San speaks nostalgically about the past when wives were loyal to their husbands and could not act against their will. Ishiguro gives a glimpse about the discussions that have taken place in the post-war Japan about the impact of the encounter with the Orient on the Japanese family.

Ishiguro tries to question the coming of individualism into the post-war Japan and how it contributes to the disintegration of families. This individualism rips people apart from each other. By raising this issue, he implicitly beckons all those taken away by individual thinking to get re-membered and regain their lost 'we'. In *A Pale View of Hills*, there is a reference to the advocates of anti-Western fundamentalism which calls for the preservation of all that is communal. Ishiguro sheds light on the debate among Japanese people about how to deal with the American ideas after the Second War in a world governed by a global capitalist system. Through his fictional characters, he holds the American culture responsible for the disintegration of Japanese family and society at large.

In *A Pale View of Hills*, while in England, Etsuko longs for the communication and solidarity atmosphere which characterizes Japan. She poignantly aspires for the company of her dead husband, Jiro, and her father-in-law, Ogata-san. She lives alone in England after the suicide of her older daughter in Manchester. Her second daughter lives in another city. By going back to her family life in Japan, she wants to lament her family disintegration. She still has a strong relationship with her Japanese origins. Family means mutual affection, togetherness and unity. She pines for her

Japanese communal memory from which she has been dismembered. This is reminiscent of what Esteva et al. (51) call "dismemberment" through which the communal "we" is replaced with the individual "I". Big transformations have taken place in her family life in the wake of the Second War. Ishiguro is drawing attention to what Hartman calls "family changes" which "have emerged concurrently with society's departure from the modern world of the industrial age into what is now frequently called the postmodern age" (73). The Japanese family is not immune to these changes.

Ishiguro works towards showing that children are at the very center of family relationships. In *When We Were Orphans*, there is a very strong simile which reveals the importance of children not only for parents and families but also for the whole world. Akira, Christopher's childhood friend, remembers a Japanese monk's comparison of children to the twine that keeps "the slats held together" (*When We Were Orphans* 44). This means that without children, families and the entire world would fall apart. They have a role in keeping families together and braiding them with beauty and love. They interweave the strands of the family thread. The implication of this is that saving families from loss requires protecting children, giving them the value they deserve and creating an atmosphere of love and respect for them.

The choice of children as innocent creatures and the monk as a religious figure in the same novel is worth considering. It can be seen as a way to give credibility to the message the author seeks to impart. He possibly intends to mean that the protection of children should be a top priority not only for families but also for the international community to avoid the disintegration of families and societies. It can be also understood as a religious duty.



Children can make family and world connections strong. They serve as the glue which can keep parents together. This implies that the protection of the family as a value requires solidifying this glue and immunizing it against any dissolution. The dissolution of the glue means the dissolution of the family and the society at large.

Ishiguro tries to show that both parents are important for the family. The absence of one of them can result in its fragmentation and open the room wide open for strangers to step in and provide help. The implication of this is that the relationship between parents should be strong. If it is shaken, the family as a whole is fragmented. Ishiguro fictionally approaches this relationship namely in Japanese and British contexts. He provides cases of human experiences which can be echoed in different parts of the world. Both parents have a role to play to shape the identities of their children and educate them on the value of making decisive choices. They can scaffold them on a regular basis to help them formulate these choices and work toward achieving them. If the parent/ child relationship is strong, the family as a value is preserved.

To exemplify, in *The Unconsoled*, Fiona is introduced as an anxious mother who lives with her children without a man. She is worried about their social position in their neighborhood. She is concerned not only about her own being accepted and valued in the community where she lives and works but also about her two children's success to get esteemed once they grow up (*The Unconsoled* 178). This concern with social acceptance emanates from the image she has about herself as a single woman who needs someone of the caliber of Mr. Ryder the artist to pay her a visit to show her neighbors namely Inge and Trude that she is important. She needs the father of her children to protect them as

a family and make them feel secure. If she were with her husband and children as a family, she wouldn't seek the help of Mr. Ryder. Ishiguro implies that both parents are important for children and for the welfare of the family. If one of them is absent, the whole family falls down.

Fiona expresses this concern in this way: "I have to think not just about myself, but about my children. They have to grow up on the estate, they have to be accepted" (*The Unconsoled* 178). When she thinks of herself and of her children, what comes to her mind is that they are all socially rejected. Thus, she relies on her old friendship with the well-known Mr. Ryder to get respect from others. She decides to invite him and her neighbors to her apartment (178). His visit is a source of pride, respect, dignity, fame and power for her and her family. By seeing a famous pianist in her apartment, people around her will hold her and her family in high esteem. His coming means a lot to her and his absence will "let [her] down" and fills her heart with disappointment (178). This is how she views herself. She is worthless in the absence of people like Mr. Ryder. If she had her husband next to her, she would possibly feel and think differently.

Some of Ishiguro's characters are childless. By raising this issue of childlessness, he sounds a warning alarm that the family as a value is losing ground in the world of today. His message is that if childlessness and celibacy come into vogue, the ultimate outcome is the end of the family. Children ensure the continuity of the family. To elucidate, Tony Gardener and Lindy in "Crooner" are childless, and, thus, contribute, albeit implicitly, to the termination of their ancestral origins. Ishiguro seeks to draw attention to the issue of being childless and unmarried, and how it can impact the natural course of life. It can be viewed as a matter of individual freedom and personal choice, but it still



goes against the human nature as it can lead to the extinction of the family, which means the extinction of human species. This is no longer propitious for contemporary societies. Children mean human continuity.

Ishiguro highlights the role of the family, namely parents, in constructing children's ethnic identities. In *When We Were Orphans*, for example, Akira's parents who are originally Japanese are concerned about keeping their son connected to his country of origin while they are in Shanghai International Settlement. Thus, they make an effort to create a Japanese family atmosphere for him. There is, for instance, a reference to housing, architecture and furniture as important hallmarks of the Japanese cultural identity. They have "created at the top of the house the pair of 'replica' Japanese rooms" (*When We Were Orphans* 43). They are "small but uncluttered rooms with Japanese tatami mats fitted over the floors, and paper panels fixed to the walls" (43). The outer part of the house is Western and the inner side is Japanese (43). "On the outer" side, the doors are "oak-panelled with shining brass knobs; on the inner, 'Japanese' side, delicate paper with lacquer inlays" (43).

This shows that these Japanese parents strive to preserve their cultural identity, even in such a foreign place as Shanghai Settlement, and, in the meantime, they are open to Western culture. But the idea that the inner part of the house is Japanese and the outside one is Western shows that this cultural openness is just superficial and the essence of the Japanese identity is somewhat kept and preserved. This example reveals the value of the family in shaping children's identity. The outer side is for everyone to see and know, but what is inside is for the family, namely for Akira. Everything around Akira is Japanese. His parents are Japanese. The

inside of the house where he lives is also Japanese. Even the game that he plays with Christopher, the English kid, is Japanese, and everything in the room where they play is Japanese as well.

This "game" involves "piles of cards with Japanese characters on them" (43). Everything surrounding the game is Japanese. Akira does not only try to play this game but also to teach it to Christopher. This is worth considering, especially in relation to the question of identity. One way to account for this is that the house of Akira's parents can be seen as a space which represents the Japanese identity in a foreign place. It shows that these parents are very much interested in instilling in their kid the Japanese culture, including games. Akira has been educated on sticking to his Japanese origins and feeling proud of them. His being in a foreign land does not mean that he breaks with his parents' country of origins.

This can be seen as an integral part of the sense of belonging to a nation and race. This lies at the very heart of what makes an identity. The parents of Akira insist that he should belong emotionally, culturally, racially and geographically to Japan. His return to Japan to live some time with his relatives and interact with his native culture and race is an indicator that there is an immense effort on the part of his parents to make their child grow with an identity similar to theirs. A united and harmonious family has a role in fostering this sense of belonging; hence the necessity to protect it from disintegration. Thanks to his parents, Akira continuously speaks to Christopher about Japan's progress at the level of architecture and business, describing it as "a great, great country just like England" (47). Without any sort of inferiority complex, he compares the greatness of Japan to the greatness of England. In fact, both children



want to exhibit “the prowess of [their] race” (48).

Akira’s parents strive to fill him with love for Japan. They try to imbue him with feelings of loyalty to Japanese values and traditions. He lives in Shanghai and socially interacts with different nationalities, namely the English one, but this should not make him forget his being originally Japanese. When he is with Christopher and “his mother [is] out, one or another servant ... always delegated to watch over [their] every move” (*When We Were Orphans* 56). “Supervision” is highly required (56). It is not only Akira who is under the supervision of his parents and their delegated servants, but also his Japanese identity. He seizes every occasion to show the superiority and greatness of the Japanese over the Western. For example, when he talks to Christopher about the reason why he does not have an amah, he says that “Japanese Children [do not] need an amah because they [are] braver than Western children” (56). He also says that “Japanese mothers never [go] out unless the child specifically [permits] them to do so”; this is “a claim” that Christopher finds “hard to believe” (56). Akira hints at the idea that Japanese children are brave and are treated in a special way in comparison to Western ones. Akira thinks and acts in this way thanks to his parents.

Thus, Ishiguro foregrounds the role of the family as a value. He fictionally presents some human experiences and stories to spotlight the family crisis in the world of today and draw attention to the importance of protecting it from fragmentation. Both parents constitute the pillars that hold it up. The absence of one of them can result in its disequilibrium. Children are the glue that sticks its different parts of together. Childlessness and celibacy are introduced as a risk to its continuity. Ishiguro’s fiction is an invitation and warning at the same time.

It’s an invitation to ponder upon the situation of families today and a warning against their disintegration.

2.2. Family Disintegration

There is a diasporic dimension of Ishiguro’s fiction full of sites of global movements and settlements which have variously impacted the value of the family and its meaning. He tries to show that immigration as one of the corollaries of the war can lead to the loss of something in the Japaneseness of the Japanese: “a lot of Japanese people are starting properly to travel ... [not] just as tourists ... their Japaneseness is going to be dissipated” (Ishiguro, Kazuo, and Allan Vorda et al. 67). It is “the fear ... that these people and their children will come back to Japan having lost something” (67). In his fiction, there are voyages from and to such countries as Japan, England, China, Poland, Czech Republic, Italy and Spain. The intention is to reveal how physical and emotional confrontation with new lands, experiences and ideas can bring about drastic changes to the way people conceive the family.

To illustrate, the USA and England are presented as privileged geographical destinations for some of his Japanese characters in *A Pale View of Hills*. Etsuko, for instance, is in England. She has lost one of her daughters, Keiko, and lives far from the second, Niko. Her family is disintegrated. They live separately from each other in a non-Japanese soil and rarely see each other. Ishiguro hints at the socio-cultural, political and historical circumstances which create this desire to leave Japan in the wake of the Second World War. The destruction that occurred to Japan during the war has led to this immigration which has impacted the fabrics of the Japanese family. The Japanese family has lost its Japaneseness.



This is the message Ishiguro wants to convey.

Ishiguro considers the issue of political rights in the post-war Japan within the same family, especially those related to people's rights to vote, namely women. He makes important insinuations to the impact of men's interference with women's decisions to vote for this party or the other on the family. Men can even use violence to make their wives give their votes for particular candidates. In *A Pale View of Hills*, Jiro embarrasses his colleague Hanada by telling him that he threatened to beat his wife with a golf club in case she would not vote the way he wanted; Hanada denied the accusation claiming that his wife got the right to choose her favorite party and that his threat was meant just to make her see sense (34). Hanada criticizes his wife for having voted for Yoshida simply because he resembles her uncle, saying that women know nothing about politics. In his mind, women "think they can choose the country's leaders the same way they choose dresses" (35).

Ishiguro seeks to imply that politics is a force of division and not unity. Politics can lead to familial disputes and discords. Voting for different parties as it is the case with Hanada and his wife in the post-war Japan is presented as a debatable issue associated with violence and patriarchy. Hanada is for women's right to vote, but he thinks that they should be shown how to do that. Such a gender-based view shows how some men disparagingly view women in matters of politics in the post-war Japan and how this view is a risk to the family. Hanada represents Japanese men who grudgingly accept the idea of seeing their wives voting for a different party. Old men like Ogata-San see it as a new thing in the Japanese culture: "A few years ago that would have been unthinkable" (36). For him, this is one of the impacts of the war and US occupation of Japan.

Ogata-San describes these things as extraordinary, but, at the same time, he considers them odd affairs to take place in the Japanese society, blaming the American democracy for bringing about these hard-to-embrace changes (36). He accuses Hanada's wife of disloyalty towards the household under the banner of democracy. He depicts her decisions and choices as whimsical and lacking commonsense: "A wife these days feels no sense of loyalty towards the household. She just does what she pleases, votes for a different party if the whim takes her," adding that this is "so typical of the way things have gone in Japan" where "in the name of democracy people abandon obligations" (36). In fact, this discussion of democracy and the right to vote uncovers how Japanese people view the things brought by Americans after World War II. It is the discussion which probably takes place in every house and meeting in the post-war Japan.

Ogata-San sees it as a threat to the principles of loyalty to one's family, superiors and the country. This loyalty, according to him, keeps the Japanese tied to each other, and with the advent of this so-called democracy, people grow "selfish" and "forget obligations" (36). In his view, democracy is equal to the dereliction of duty and loss of values. The voice of Hanada's wife is not heard in the novel. We learn about what she does from male voices. She is hushed by the author himself. Her deed speaks louder than her words. Ishiguro is trying to draw attention to this change in women's way of thinking in the period following the war and the US occupation of Japan. He wants to show that many Japanese women who believe in democracy and freedom work silently and try their best to be free citizens far away from the control of their husbands. If Ishiguro gives the chance to Hanada's wife to speak, she may possibly describe men as



selfish and unfair. But what is important is that she does what she feels to be just and reasonable. Her deed is a turning point in the Japanese family at that time.

Thus, Ishiguro's fiction is a sphere for plurality of views within the same family. This is one of "the ingredients" of what Hartman names the "postmodern soup" (74). As seen in *A Pale View of Hills*, individuals express their opinions about the right of wives to be different from their husbands and vote for their favorite parties. They do it in an atmosphere of difference and antagonism. This is part of the conflict of the communal 'we' with the individual 'I' in matters of politics and gender. This conflictual plurality is characteristic of a postmodern society as Hartman notes: "a society enters postmodernism when it is forced to see that there are many beliefs, multiple realities, and a profusion of worldviews" (74).

Viewed from this angle, Ishiguro's fiction can be considered a "postmodern soup" whose main ingredients are pluralism, struggle for democracy, freedom and mobility. He hints at the multicultural and pluralist debates between conformist and non-conformist people about what it means to be a free and dignified woman in a male-dominated family and society. This plurality of opinions within the same family leads to the individuals' search for liberation from what Barry calls "claustrophobic embrace of fixed systems of beliefs" (62). With this liberation and plurality, the family can be subject to disintegration. Marital relationships, for instance, are riven by disagreements over issues like voting as it is the case with Hanada and his wife.

In *A Pale View of Hills*, there is an antagonistic encounter between Frank and Sachiko at the social, moral, and economic levels. In fact, this encounter is a metaphor for the encounter between the Occident and the Orient, and more precisely between

America and Japan. This encounter reveals how marriage is seen by two people from different socio-cultural backgrounds and with variant personal experiences. But what is remarkable in their relationship is that it is governed by a certain power hierarchy which reveals the American guy as powerful. The idea of marriage exists just in the mind of Sachiko who naively thinks that he can help her realize her dream of having a better life in America. He dominates her to the extent that he gets all her money and wastes it on pleasure making. His relationship with her is, in the words of Said, "a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony" just like "the relationship between the Occident and Orient" (5).

Money-grubbing deals a blow to the institution of family. There is even an allusion to the absence of men's commitment to marriage. Here, it's relevant to restate the case of Frank with Sachiko in *A Pale View of Hills*. He is described as a drunkard who spends all her money on "worthless saloon" girls (49). She wants to marry him because she thinks he can help her go to America. He tells her that she "could become a business woman ... out there" (24). She believes that he "has arranged everything" for their travel to America (92). Both of them can be blamed for the disrespect of marriage which is the basis upon which family is founded. It is a convenience marriage devoid of true love and good will. Family is, once again, flouted. Ishiguro launches a critique against this kind of hierarchical relationships which cannot help establish good families. They are a threat to the family.

Post-war Japan is also characterized by the stark differences between rich and poor families. In *A Pale View of Hills*, the two kids, Mariko and Akira, can best help shed light on these differences. Mariko is



from a poor family and Akira from a rich one. When the two meet at the Inasa Hill in the presence of their mothers, they have a debate about the binoculars, drawing, the favorite school subject, excellence at math and the dream future job (59 & 64). Akira's mother intervenes from time to time to show him how to behave. For example, when he says that his binoculars are better than Mariko's, she warns him "that's not a nice thing to say", but at the same time she tells him that not all children are as lucky as he is, as he has so many things that poor children like Mariko do not have (60). This reveals the nature of the relationship between rich and poor families in the post-war Japan.

The purpose of Ishiguro is to impart the message that money-grubbing and boasting are characteristic features of the post-modern age ruled by capitalist and cash-oriented mindsets which give value to money more than emotions. He possibly tries to say that money possession has made the gap between rich and poor families bigger in the world at large and in post-war Japan in particular. This gap can lead to nothing but frictions between the members of the society. Ishiguro possibly seeks to call for some social justice and equality which can help solidify the bonds between families and forge relationships between the different members of the same family and society.

In "Malvern Hills," Tilo and Sonja talk about their problems with their son, Peter, who does not even respond to their messages. They move to Dusseldorf, where their Peter lives, to play music and see him ("Malvern Hills" 112). But he does not answer back their phone calls and messages. He does not come to the concert to meet them. Sonja, his mother, talks about this: "we leave many messages, but no reply ... we play and then go to another city" (112). Their relationship with their son is not well-built. The disrespect of

parents is a sign of moral descent which is indicative of family disintegration. The parents have some responsibility to assume for this disintegration. Tilo, his father, mentions that because of their recurrent travelling, they leave him with his grandparents: "When we had to travel, and we couldn't take him with us, his grandparents were always delighted to help" (112). This implies that the role of parents in keeping family bonds with their children strong is very big. Any abuse of this role can result in family disintegration.

The fact that the son does not answer back his parents' calls and messages and that he does not attend their concert to see them can be seen as a reproach to them for focusing on their professional life and letting him alone. Ishiguro is trying to say that when children are relegated to a second-rate position in the life of parents, the family can easily get disintegrated and lose its moral tenets. These children may grow up as strangers for their parents. One more thing, the relationship between Tilo and Sonja as parents is not good. Sonja tells the narrator that Tilo "says [they] are finished," and they "never agree on anything" (121). The narrator replies: "It's a shame. You are having a row on your holiday" (122). Ishiguro focuses on a world of fragmentation which starts from the family. This reflects Pawar's view that "the world is fragmented; the society is fragmented; the family is fragmented" (2).

In *When We Were Orphans*, Emma Cameron's tense rapport with her mother goes beyond the walls of the house to be openly discussed in a party at a restaurant in Lower Regent Street (39). Emma describes her mother as "exasperating" (39). She talks about her "troubled relationship with her mother which [is] evidently reaching a new crisis on account of Emma's recent engagement to a Frenchman" (39). She receives comments,



advice and suggestions from the people around her. Hegley, for example, suggests to her “that all mothers - 'and aunts too, naturally'- be kept in a large zoo- like institution to be constructed beside the Serpentine” (39). His disrespectful view of mothers and aunts is another sign of family disintegration. Emma and Hegley’s troubled relationships with their mothers shows how deteriorated the relationship between some parents and their children is in the postmodern age.

The way these children speak about their parents, namely their mothers, reveal the tragic collapse of moral values and mores in the world of today. The family as a value and as an important pillar upon which societies are founded is disintegrated. Misunderstandings between parents and children can develop into feelings of hatred and enmity. The source of the troubles of Emma with her mother is simply her engagement to a Frenchman (39). The possible message of Ishiguro is that the parent-child relationship should be esteemed more than such issues as engagements. Parents need to give their sons and daughters the chance to make choices and decisions. Imposing things on them may make them go through what can be termed a state of psychic dissonance. Sets of feelings, especially negative ones, compete in the minds of children like Emma. Instead of realizing a sort of emotional satiation for them, helping them to build a well-balanced identity and lead a normal life, they are tragically subject to emotional bereavement which generates nothing but the deterioration of relationship between parents and children.

During the talks of Emma and Hegley about their mothers, Christopher Banks spots “little traces of tears in” Miss Hemmings’ eyes (39). She seems to be affected by the discussion about mothers and the way their children talk about them. Christopher Banks considers the discussion

a “symposium on troublesome mothers” (39). The word “troublesome” is an indicator that children do not like their mother’s intervention in their personal lives. It irks them that their mothers involve themselves intrusively into their personal affairs including their love and marriage choices. For children, it is intrusiveness and nosiness, but for parents, it’s care and protection. Ishiguro is trying to draw attention to the differences in terms of perspectives between parents and children due to generation gap. The wider this gap is, the more disintegrated the family can be.

This discussion about mothers makes Miss Hemmings remember the time she spent with her mother on buses (40). She uses the word “pleasure” to describe the reason behind her having been with her on these buses for a long time (40). This implies that her mother has a special place in her life. They spend too much time together on buses because they love and appreciate each other. Miss Hemmings says to Christopher that they would “spend hours sometimes, going around London, looking at everything, and talking, and pointing things out to each other” that she “used to enjoy it” (40). She probably longs for the time she spent in the company of her mother when she was a little kid. This is the kind of parent-child relationships Ishiguro possibly advocates.

The role of parents in children’s lives is very big to the extent that the psychological state of the parents can be transferred to their children. In *The Unconsoled*, Gutav’s daughter, Sophie, goes through a state of despair and despondency, and this has negatively affected the relationship which binds her to her father and son, Boris. She hasn’t spoken directly to her father for so long, and her son loves to go out for fun with his grandfather. Her rapport to them is a little bit odd. For example, her son “might be in



high spirits, talking loudly, laughing about everything. But as soon as he sees his mother coming through the door, he'll go "silent" and "restrain himself" (*The Unconsoled* 29). This sounds strange. Normally, this child should demonstrate happiness at the sight of his mother.

Their relationship between them is like a three-part chain in which the missing part to be reset is Sophie. Her despondent and desperate mood has impinged on the lives of both her father and son. The way her son lives and behaves reveals his misbalanced fragile psyche. The role of the mother in building his personal identity is almost absent. She comes and leaves like an unwanted guest. She looks like a passing visitor. Her presence in his life is not heavily felt. The rationale behind citing this is to show that the way each individual behaves, speaks and acts has a lot to do with the nature of the bond which binds him or her to the other, especially if this other is a father or a mother. Sophie leads a life of isolation (145). She loves to sit alone, and to wander around the Old Town alone, brooding over things which most often render her sad and hopeless. Her identity is the corollary of the circumstances related to her family.

This means that her family namely her relationship with her father has played a crucial role in shaping her identity. She is not happy; that's why Gustav requests Mr. Ryder "to talk to her ... just to find out what's troubling her and to give her back a sense of proportion" (15). Gustav describes her as being "at heart very conscientious, very keen to do the best for the people she most cares about" (28). But such a state is not stable when she becomes sad and isolated and "does need a little help to recover her sense of perspective" (28). There is something wrong with this family. There is the problem of communication and the father is seeking the help of a stranger, Mr. Ryder, to fix it.

Ishiguro alludes to the idea that restricting children's freedom and autonomy can end up in family disintegration. In *The Unconsoled*, there is a moment when there is a linguistic interaction between Stephan and Mr. Ryder, the professional pianist. The gist of this interaction is that Stephan, in his preparation for the Thursday night, wants to change his program and play the Kazan Glass Passions in the last minute just for the sake of his mother who loves it so much (*The Unconsoled* 131). He wants to make of it a big surprise which could bring merriment and joy to the whole family. Mr. Ryder disagrees with this and invites him to make his own decisions: "there comes a point in one's life when one must stand by one's decisions. A time to say: 'This is me, this is what I've chosen to do... [one has] to make a stand'" (149). According to Mr. Ryder, "it's always a mistake to change a programme at the eleventh hour" just to please others (148). He sensitizes Stephan to the importance of making free choices far from the influence of parents. Stephan represents the anxious youths who cannot make their own free choices because of their parents. Hankering after autonomy is a source of agony for them.

His mother represents restrictive guardianship and top-down custody in child-parent relationship. What Ishiguro seeks to imply is that parents needn't place a lot of pressure on their children, pushing them to do things they do not love or are not satisfied with as it is the case of Stephan. They need, instead, to channel their aspirations and dreams by giving them some freedom, accepting their failures and teaching them that none is perfect. Failure is just a passing instant in life. Stephan fails to meet his parents' high expectations to see him as a great pianist, but the reaction of his mother to this is not encouraging at all. She expresses her disappointment, resorts to loneliness and



boycotts piano concerts: “she got rather despondent and stopped going out very much, stopped going to the concerts” (75). He feels guilty and culpable for the unease and discomfort his mother goes through. He tries to work day and night to find a way to bring her to her original mood. That’s why he counts too much on his performance on Thursday night to come to this end.

Ishiguro raises the issues of divorce and re-marriage as features of postmodern societies. Steel et al. make a reference to this in such a way: “Divorce, re-marriage ... and cohabitation as life choices could be interpreted as further evidence of postmodern diversity, fragmentation, and plurality” (163). Ishiguro is concerned with these choices and their impact on individual identities. For instance, in “Malvern Hills,” Maggie describes Mrs. Fraser, an old teacher, as “a sad old lady whose husband’s gone and left her” (96). Even The parents of Maggie split up. In “Nocturne,” Helen leaves Steve and marries Chris Prendergast, the owner of “a string of successful diners across Washington” (“Nocturne” 131). Ishiguro highlights the topic of re-marriage known as “serial monogamy” characterized “by several successive ... marriages over the course of a lifetime” (“Serial Monogamy Definition & Meaning”).

With “serial monogamy,” the value of the family is flouted and individual identities are accordingly defined and re-defined. Helen does not want to define herself in relation to Steve, the poor ugly guy. She wants to see herself linked to Chris Prendergast, the rich one. Ishiguro wants to hint at a certain category of women who think just about money as a key to a better life by marrying and re-marrying rich men, including businessmen, movie stars and singers. They simply talk “about which clothes and shoes and make-up would help them marry a star” and

“about which movie stars or singers [are] single” (“Crooner” 19-20). Meg teaches these women “all the rules, all the tricks” which may help them reach their objective (20). With this kind of materialistic feminine thinking, both family and society get disintegrated.

Conclusion

The point Ishiguro seeks to make is that family has been subject to disintegration and even anarchy because of such cataclysms as the great wars and advances in weapon production and use. It is also due to the rise of a cash-oriented capitalist system which favors materialistic profits over human values. The same concern has been expressed by such postmodern thinkers as Jameson who says in the interview conducted by Baumbach et al.: “I don’t know whether we’re interested in families anymore” (159-160). It is the question of whether the family and its role are still a priority these days. Individualistic thinking holds sway and makes people care about themselves more than their families.

Ishiguro also highlights the complex relationship which binds members of the same family, especially after their encounter with people from a different culture in the wake of World War II. He hints basically at the impact of the US occupation on the Japanese family. Through the reference to this American-Japanese intercultural encounter, he expresses a certain worry about the future of the family as a value not only in Japan but in the world as a whole. He presents some stories of serial marriage and divorce to unveil the risks that besiege the family as a socio-cultural institution. Childlessness and celibacy are personal choices, but they jeopardize the continuity of the family. Thus, his fiction warns against the threat of family disintegration and calls for its protection.



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