

**Projecting Trauma: Parallel Narratives in Kazuo
Ishiguro's *A Pale View of Hills***

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Abstract

In this thesis, I explore how trauma and its effects are represented in Kazuo Ishiguro's debut novel *A Pale View of Hills* through its parallel narrative structure. I argue that the protagonist, Etsuko, discloses the trauma caused by her first daughter's suicide through the psychological defence mechanism of projection. The embedded story of Sachiko, thus, creates a place for Etsuko to implicitly process the traumatic event without having to confront it and the difficult emotions it arises directly, as that could undermine her self-esteem. I explore the fundamental themes of parenting, guilt, and emotional avoidance, and how these unveil what is being projected, why and how. Additionally, by examining fractures in the narrative cohesion and Etsuko's unreliability as a narrator, I argue that her defensive strategies, along with her unconscious thoughts, are further exposed to the reader. I apply trauma theories and psychoanalytic approaches to defence mechanisms, drawing primarily on the works of Cathy Caruth, Phebe Cramer and Laurie Vickroy, alongside perspectives from Sigmund Freud and later scholars.

Key words: Kazuo Ishiguro, *A Pale View of Hills*, trauma, defence mechanisms, projection, parallelism

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1 Introduction

At times what is important in a novel can only be found through examination of what lies underneath the narrative that a reader is explicitly presented, and, for instance, through the characters and the storytelling. In Kazuo Ishiguro's debut novel, *A Pale View of Hills* (1990) (henceforth referred to as *A Pale View*), as Ishiguro himself explains, "[t]he focus of the book is elsewhere, in the emotional upheaval" (Mason and Ishiguro 1989, 338), which suggests that the explicit, surface-level events in the novel are not that important, but what lies beneath them is. *A Pale View* is an example of a typical trauma narrative, in which, according to Laurie Vickroy, a traumatic experience leads to defence mechanisms and, furthermore, causes the characters' identities to "shift and flow" (2015, 18–25).

A Pale View is a story of Etsuko, a Japanese woman who has relocated in England. The novel is heavily centred on a story that Etsuko tells her visiting daughter, Niki. This embedded story is of a woman called Sachiko and her young child Mariko, who Etsuko claims to have known when she was still living in Japan, pregnant with Keiko, her first child. However, Keiko is told to have committed a suicide after they relocated to England, and to Etsuko this loss works as the key traumatic experience causing "emotional and existential issues" (Vickroy 2015, 17). Additionally, the trauma causes Etsuko to use defensive strategies to cope with it and the emotions caused by her daughter's death.

This thesis analyses the previously mentioned "emotional upheaval" (Mason and Ishiguro 1989, 338). I argue that the embedded story of Sachiko and Mariko functions as a parallel narrative and is a way for Etsuko to project the distressing emotions and bring forward the trauma she has encountered without explicitly discussing it nor confronting the repercussions of her first daughter's suicide.

In this thesis I first outline the key concepts of trauma theory and defence mechanisms used to analyse the novel, drawing primarily on the works of Cathy Caruth (2016), Phebe Cramer (2006) and Laurie Vickroy (2015), alongside perspectives derived from the works of Sigmund Freud and later scholars. Additionally, I discuss on how defence mechanisms can be used to cope with a traumatic event. The analysis of *A Pale View* proceeds in three stages. First, I explore the characters and the similarities between them that create parallel narratives and make projection possible. Second, I analyse the key themes through which projection

becomes apparent. Finally, I examine the fractures within the narrative that reveal the underlying parallelism and projection more clearly.

Being a Nobel prized author, Ishiguro and his work are already the subject of multiple research projects and books. *The Cambridge Companion to Kazuo Ishiguro* mentions Ishiguro's focus on "fundamental questions of humanity and personal responsibility" as well as on "major communitarian questions" like migration and war (Bennett 2023, 2), all of which offer rich material for research and analysis purposes. Research on *A Pale View* is extensive, too; for example, Ljubica Matek's work, which will be referenced in this thesis, explores both migration and trauma (2018). Researches like Zengjing Li's often touch upon the importance of "what has been omitted from the text and the underlying reasons behind" (2025, 675), which functions as the basis of this thesis, too. However, the focus of this thesis is primarily centred on the psychological concept of projection, how it shows, and why Etsuko needs a parallel narrative. Furthermore, it serves to highlight the trauma caused by her daughter's suicide. Thus, the intent of this thesis is to illustrate how trauma is expressed through the mechanism of projection within the novel's parallel narratives.

2 Theoretical Background: Trauma Theories and Defence Mechanisms

Trauma has been a fundamental concept in psychological studies for centuries and, especially after the Second World War, it has been a growing topic in literature due to the rising of trauma awareness (Vickroy 2015, 13). Written in this period, *A Pale View* reflects this growing awareness and works as an exploration piece of trauma and its long-lasting effects. This section provides general insight into trauma theories as well as into the concept of defence mechanisms, as trauma often causes one to adopt “survival strategies that disguise shame or assert control” (Vickroy 2015, 15). The final subsection examines the specific defence mechanism Etsuko’s behaviour illustrates.

2.1 Trauma Theories

Trauma theories provide insight into comprehending how people react to and manage experiences that disrupt their lives. In *Unclaimed Experience*, Cathy Caruth describes trauma generally as an “overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena” (2016, 11–12). Additionally, Caruth acknowledges that literature is “interested in the complex relation between knowing and not knowing” (2016, 3) which corresponds to the general nature of a traumatic experience and can therefore be turned to when describing and analysing it. Caruth’s views of trauma and its resurfacing nature can be used when analysing *A Pale View*, where Keiko’s suicide functions as the “sudden” and “catastrophic” tragedy (Caruth 2016, 11).

Trauma resurfaces often through indirect manners rather than directly or consciously. Caruth’s trauma studies describes trauma as something that can return “to haunt the survivor later on” (2016, 4), which can be caused by different triggers or associative conditions, after which trauma can appear in, for example, dreams (Vickroy 2015, 19). This is further supported by Jacques Lacan’s work, in which he suggests that dreams are one way of accessing the unconscious and, furthermore, that through them “the reality that can no longer produce itself except by repeating itself endlessly” can be observed (1978, 72–73). This is illustrated in *A Pale View*, too: Etsuko repeatedly dreams of a little girl (Ishiguro 1990, 47; 55; 95) who, although she denies this connection, seems to symbolise her deceased daughter.

Therefore, as per Lacan, this offers an insight into her unconscious as well as represents the traumatic event that persists through repetition (1978, 72–73).

2.2 Defence Mechanisms as Coping Strategies

People who have undergone a traumatic event use various methods to cope with the effects of it. Vickroy states that trauma victims generally develop defensive strategies to help them process the trauma, and that these strategies correspond to those activated in overall stressful situations (2015, 17). Defence mechanisms were first introduced by Sigmund Freud, who called them repression, determining that “*the essence of repression lies simply in turning something away, and keeping it at a distance, from the conscious*” (1915, 147; emphasis as in the original). This idea of the defence mechanisms has later been expanded by multiple researchers, one of them being Phebe Cramer, who characterises the defences as strategies working against situations that “threaten self-esteem or the structure of self” (2006, 7).

The exact number of defence mechanisms remains controversial amongst scholars, though some mechanisms are considered more acceptable. As Freud never proposed a definitive list of defence mechanisms (Baumeister, Dale and Sommer 1998, 1083), several later scholars attempted to classify them. For example, Anna Freud identified ten defences in her studies of Freud’s defence theories (1992, 40). However, Baumeister, Dale and Sommer (1998) offer a more modern view of these defence mechanisms, arguing that Anna Freud’s (Freud and The Institute of Psychoanalysis 1992) list is unnecessarily long. In their study they examine how the generally accepted mechanisms function as individual strategies and question whether they exist as such at all (Baumeister, Dale and Sommer 1998). This review offers either full or partial support for a few mechanisms, including projection (*ibid.*). Projection is the exact defence mechanism that appears to be evident in *A Pale View*, as, according to Ishiguro himself, “the whole narrative strategy of the book was about how someone ends up talking about things they cannot face directly through other people’s stories” (Mason and Ishiguro 1989, 337).

2.3 Projection as a Defence Mechanism in *A Pale View of Hills*

As mentioned in the previous section, the defence mechanism I argue to be evident in *A Pale View* is projection, which Schafer defines as “a process by which an objectionable internal tendency is unrealistically attributed to another person or to other objects in the environment instead of being recognized as part of one’s self” (Schafer 1954, 279). In their review of the

defence mechanisms, Baumeister, Dale and Sommer have a similar definition characterising the act of projection as seeing the traits one wishes to deny in oneself in others (1998, 1090).

The psychological defence mechanism of projection provides the framework for comprehending Etsuko's trauma and the narration of it and, consequently, is the key element for my analysis. In her work, Cramer offers the following explanation of projection producing a division between the self and the other. This split functions as the basis for the externalisation process, which I argue is evident in Etsuko's behaviour:

This form of projection is portrayed in a number of folktales. Often it occurs in a tale of two main characters, one of whom is good, simple, and honest whereas the other is more clever, devious, and manipulative. [. . .] The components of projection [. . .] include splitting, followed by externalization of part of the main character's self-representation, and an attribution of responsibility for unacceptable actions to this externalized "other". (Cramer 2006, 75)

Similarly to the folktales Cramer uses as an example, in *A Pale View* there are two main characters, of which Etsuko can be seen as the one with "good" and "honest" characteristics, and Sachiko the one with the "devious" and "manipulative" ones (Cramer 2006, 75). This represents the narrative mechanism Cramer describes in her studies, in which the characters function both as contrasting personas and as means for the defence mechanism to take place. Sachiko's narration works as the "externalized 'other'" (ibid.) onto which Etsuko can attach events from her own past as well as the emotions her past experiences and choices arouse in her.

3 Analysis of Parallelism and Projection in *A Pale View of Hills*

The analysis of parallelism and projection as means of addressing trauma in *A Pale View* consists of three subsections that discuss characters, thematic parallels revealing projection, and the revelation of trauma through narrative instabilities. The first section provides insight into parallelism between the main characters. The subsequent section provides a more in-depth analysis of how the previously discussed character parallels enable the use of projection, revealing what is projected, why, and how. The final section focuses on the fractures of Etsuko's narrative strategy and defence mechanism through inconsistencies in the narrative cohesion and her reliability as a narrator.

3.1 Characters Enabling Narrative Parallelism

To analyse the ways in which Etsuko projects her trauma, similarities that exist in the structures of the narratives as well as characters of the novel should be explored. Said similarities can be considered as the first indication of Sachiko's story providing a basis for projection. The correspondences are best seen in parallel mother–daughter pairs, because the embedded narrative of Sachiko and Mariko is the one that works as the parallel story and, thus, as the object of Etsuko's projection.

3.1.1 Parallelism between Etsuko and Sachiko

Both Etsuko and Sachiko are depicted as mothers living in post-war Japan, raising their first children in a place that is actively recovering from the bombings. Sachiko is a single mother, whereas Etsuko, before relocating to England after her new boyfriend, is implied to have lost her husband and the father of her first daughter. Additionally, living within the same cultural context, they are both faced with certain expectations as women and mothers. These factors create the first undeniable similarities between them.

The mothers' ambiguous relationships are another unifying factor, as the relationships with the men represent emotional distance and motives for relocation. Etsuko's first husband is pictured as a "dutiful husband" who she does not recall "with affection" (Ishiguro 1990, 90), while her following relationship with a man from England remains a mystery through the narrative: he is only characterised as someone providing empty promises of a better future, and as someone who did not get along with Keiko (Ishiguro 1990, 94). Similarly, Sachiko's relationship with an American man remains unspoken, though, he, too, keeps making her

unfulfilled promises of a better life, after which he often disappears. Even though the relationships seem unstable, both women feel the urge to follow these men abroad, seeing this as an opportunity to escape the situations they are in.

The women also tend to have similar ways of explaining the choices they make in their lives. They constantly claim to be acting to enhance their children's well-being, even though their actions frequently contradict their words. For example, when talking about the previously mentioned move abroad, Sachiko explains that Mariko "will be fine" as she is a bright girl and, additionally, that growing up in America will be better for her (Ishiguro 1990, 44–46), even though Mariko has explicitly stated that she will be unhappy in the new country, with no relatives or a shared language. Similarly, Etsuko defends the move by explaining that her "motives for leaving Japan were justifiable" and that she, too, "always kept Keiko's interests very much at heart" (Ishiguro 1990, 91). By justifying the arguably questionable decisions this way, the women are trying to protect their self-images.

Finally, Etsuko and Sachiko are both emotionally detached. Etsuko often refuses to speak about any trauma, especially her daughter's death, and when she does mention it, she does it with a tone so calm and neutral one could think she is talking about something as ordinary as the weather, for example. Correspondingly, Sachiko gives little weight to her daughter's clear discomfort: even when Mariko keeps running away from home or saying that a stranger is inviting her to their home (Ishiguro 1990, 82–85; 18–19; 27), Sachiko calmly states that Mariko will come back unharmed soon, and that she is only trying to be difficult (Ishiguro 1990, 22; 38; 43; 87). The painful, disturbing events are constantly kept at an arm's length, implying that both women are emotionally distant.

3.1.2 Parallelism between Keiko and Mariko

The parallels are seen clearly between the daughters, Keiko and Mariko, too, which further highlights the use of projection in *A Pale View*. They are best characterised as withdrawn and isolated, and both have extreme difficulties in connecting with other people, including their own mothers. While Mariko often goes off alone and refuses to talk to people, Keiko isolates herself by fully refraining from social interactions after their move to England. Etsuko explains that Keiko would shut herself into her bedroom, in which no one else was allowed to enter (Ishiguro 1990, 53–54). Furthermore, they are both characterised as challenging to understand; Etsuko mentions Keiko's emotional distance multiple times, and explains that she

would often argue with everyone, whereas Sachiko is clearly frustrated at Mariko's inability to communicate.

The daughters are evidently resistant to their mothers' plans, specifically regarding the approaching move abroad. According to Etsuko, Keiko was excessively opposed to moving abroad and, furthermore, never genuinely settled into their new home (Ishiguro 1990, 88; 176). Additionally, it is implied that Keiko and Etsuko's new boyfriend did not get along well (Ishiguro 1990, 52; 94). Correspondingly, Mariko angrily states that she does not want to move nor does she like her mother's American boyfriend (Ishiguro 1990, 172). The parallels between the daughters' negative attitudes towards, for example, the upcoming relocation further reinforces the similarity between them.

Additionally, both Keiko and Mariko exhibit a tendency towards running away, though the practice of this action is slightly different between them. Mariko, in the literal sense of the word, runs away from her home and vanishes into the woods repeatedly (Ishiguro 1990, 82–85), whereas in Keiko's situation the act of fleeing is more symbolic: she moves away from home as soon as she gets the chance to never return, and, finally, she runs from the world and vanishes by taking her own life. What is similar in the daughters' situations is that the act of fleeing symbolises how they are emotionally running away from their mothers.

The parallels shown above propose that Sachiko and Mariko are, undoubtedly, narrative doubles of Etsuko and Keiko, and not simply people Etsuko once knew. Sachiko functions as someone to whom Etsuko can project her feelings and actions, whereas Mariko exists as a symbol of her deceased daughter. Through them Etsuko can tell her own story without explicitly addressing her trauma or discussing her own past. Thus, the parallels between the characters are not accidental, and they enable the use of projection.

3.2 Thematic Parallels and Projection: Parenting, Guilt, Emotional Avoidance

After exploring the fundamental similarities between the two mothers and their daughters, this section moves forward to analyse three thematic parallels revealing what emotions Etsuko projects onto the narrative of Sachiko and Mariko, why she must do so, and how this is accomplished. The first section covers failures in parenting, exposing what needs to be projected. This is followed by the analysis of the intolerable guilt caused by Etsuko's firstborn's suicide, which answers the question why she needs rely on projection. The final

section focuses on emotional avoidance, disclosing how Etsuko continues projecting painful emotions onto Sachiko until the end of the novel.

3.2.1 Inadequate Parenting

The two parallel mother-daughter relationships are one of the fundamental themes in *A Pale View*. Within Etsuko's role as a parent, one can best see the negative characteristics she tries to deny in herself, making it a vital element for this analysis. As Li observes, "[f]rom Etsuko's viewpoint, Sachiko and she respectively represent the bad mother and the good mother" (2025, 676). Thus, examining the insufficient aspects of parenting through, for instance, the similarities and dissimilarities between the two mothers reveals what Etsuko needs to project onto Sachiko.

Etsuko and Sachiko are both emotionally distant from their daughters, which reflects how they see and engage in parenting. The troubles in parenting, like disregarding their children's anxiety and opinions, eventually lead towards failing to protect their daughters: for example, Mariko, being constantly left without supervision, wanders off and even accidentally hurts herself (Ishiguro 1990, 41), while Keiko is brought to England despite Etsuko knowing that she would not be happy in there (Ishiguro 1990, 176). However, neither one of the mothers discloses these failures, and, furthermore, they seem to think that there is no issue in their parenting at all. According to Baumeister, Dale and Sommer, "projection results from trying to suppress thoughts about some bad trait in oneself" (1998, 1092), which corresponds to Etsuko's behaviour in this situation. She wants to "sustain these favorable views of self" (Baumeister, Dale and Sommer 1998, 1082) which would be in danger if she were to acknowledge her problematic parenting, so she rather associates Sachiko with it.

Throughout the book Etsuko seems to assess Sachiko's parenting through challenging and condoning some of her actions. On one hand, she questions why Sachiko is negligent with Mariko and, for example, offers to look after her even when Sachiko repeatedly tries to convince her that "Mariko's quite capable of being left on her own" and that she is "capable of amusing herself" (Ishiguro 1990, 68; 75). On the other hand, Etsuko justifies Sachiko's parenting by performing gestures of affirmation and confirming that Sachiko really gives her daughter's welfare "the most careful consideration" (Ishiguro 1990, 44). This shows two sides of her projection: the former example, where Etsuko questions Sachiko's behaviour and acts differently herself, suggests that she cares for Mariko. Considering that Mariko serves as a substitute for Keiko, this implies that Etsuko claims she properly cared and took care of Keiko

as well. On the latter instance, where she defends Sachiko, she is simultaneously defending her own actions as Keiko's mother. What is common for these two instances, is that in both cases she is able to perceive the negative behaviour as someone else's and not her own, which is the core element of projection as a defence mechanism (Baumeister, Dale and Sommer 1998, 1090–1092), allowing her to sustain a flawless self-image.

3.2.2 Intolerable Guilt

The perception of insufficient parenting, which would undermine Etsuko's self-esteem if acknowledged, provides the basis for what must be projected, while guilt can be viewed as a consequence of such parenting. Thus, the intolerable guilt Etsuko feels is the principal emotion she cannot confront, explaining why she must project it onto someone else. As supported by both Schafer's (1954, 279) and Cramer's (2006, 70) view, projection works as a means to detach these feelings of guilt from oneself and attach them onto another person to avoid acknowledging the disturbing thoughts.

Projection is primarily used against the responsibility Etsuko unconsciously feels regarding Keiko's suicide, which is consistent with how defence mechanisms are often used in situations where "to acknowledge oneself as the person responsible [. . .] would be too painful" (Cramer 2006, 83). Despite Etsuko never truly acknowledging nor stating that she feels responsible for her daughter's death, it becomes clear to the reader already from the beginning. Etsuko explains that her younger daughter had come to tell her that she should not regret the choices she had made and to reassure her that she "was not responsible for Keiko's death" (Ishiguro 1990, 11). This reassurance indicates that Etsuko does, to some extent, feel accountable for what happened to Keiko.

Etsuko's projection operates by connecting the characteristics that she cannot face in herself with Sachiko: irresponsibility and selfishness regarding the choices that affect Keiko. As Matek argues, Etsuko "not only [. . .] believes herself to be a caring, selfless mother, but also [. . .] *needs* to believe herself to be one" (2018, 138; emphasis as in the original) because being the opposite of these traits would mean addressing her responsibility in Keiko's death. Sachiko, thus, becomes a character to whom Etsuko can attach the characteristics she herself cannot be associated with if she wants to maintain the image she holds of herself.

Etsuko needs to project this unbearable guilt because it is too painful for her to confront. Guilt threatens Etsuko's identity as a sufficient, caring mother who tries her best to take care of her

daughters, and acknowledging the responsibility she has in Keiko's suicide could threaten her self-image. Therefore, externalising this "responsibility for unacceptable actions" (Cramer 2006, 77) onto Sachiko's story appears as a safer option for Etsuko.

3.2.3 Emotional Avoidance

Whereas the intolerable guilt discloses why projection is needed, emotional avoidance shows how, throughout the novel, Etsuko manages to keep distressing emotions at a distance by projecting them onto Sachiko. It is common for trauma victims to "dissociate themselves from [. . .] emotional self-awareness to avoid pain" (Vickroy 2015, 8) which aligns with Etsuko's emotionally distant nature. Furthermore, exploring her emotional repression helps to understand the fragmented structure of *A Pale View*.

Projecting as a defence also works as a way for Etsuko to refrain from emotional intimacy both externally and internally. She does not engage in deep conversations concerning Keiko and often reroutes the narrative back to the story of Sachiko, allowing her to hide the emotions trauma triggers in her. This reflects the general way trauma victims emotionally withdraw themselves from others (Vickroy 2015, 20–22). Conversely, display of internal emotional detachment is seen as Etsuko avoiding the confrontation of these emotions. Trauma victims rely on defences to manage difficult emotions by, for example, suppressing them (Vickroy 2015, 35), and these "suppressed emotions" can appear through others (Vickroy 2015, 15). This corresponds to how, rather than experiencing her own emotional reactions to the traumatic event, for example grief, shame, and the previously addressed guilt, Etsuko attaches them to Sachiko and her story. Together the internal and external suppression of emotions explain why Etsuko projects her trauma-induced feelings to Sachiko.

Apart from avoiding emotional vulnerability with both others and herself, Etsuko attempts to evade the entire topic of her deceased daughter by withdrawing whenever it arises. Traumatic events are repetitive in nature (Caruth 2016, 94) because the mind needs to cope with the trauma as well as its effects in order to "restore an earlier state of things" (Freud 2024, 36). However, trauma victims may simultaneously try to avoid the triggers that would remind them of traumatic events (Vickroy 2015, 19), which resembles Etsuko's behaviour in situations where her trauma resurfaces after, for example, someone mentions her deceased daughter: she disregards the topic, insisting that there is no point in "going over such matters again" (Ishiguro 1990, 91) and that she has "no great wish to dwell on Keiko" (Ishiguro 1990, 11). Avoidance of the topic suggests that it, and the emotions it provokes, are too painful to

directly address. This is exactly where Sachiko's parallel story serves its purpose: it works as a safer space for Etsuko to work on the distressing emotions caused by the traumatic event whenever it necessarily surfaces from the unconscious.

The parallel narrative of Sachiko also functions as a way for Etsuko to control what is said and what is not, aligning with the claim that trauma narratives are often influenced by psychological factors, such as "degree of control" (Tuval-Mashiach et al. 2004, 282). Traumatic events disrupt the normal "continuity and smooth flow" (Tuval-Mashiach et al. 2004, 281) of life after which the trauma victim can try to regain control of their life by altering their narrative in a way that does not necessarily even correlate with the actual truth (Tuval-Mashiach et al. 2004). Thus, by telling her story as if it was Sachiko's, Etsuko can restore continuity to her life. Furthermore, by altering it she can assert some control over the situation.

This section has shown how the parallel narratives of the two mothers and their daughters allow Etsuko to externalise her trauma so that she can prevent compromising her self-esteem and refrain from feeling the intolerable guilt along with other unpleasant emotions caused by her daughter's suicide. Additionally, it has explained how, through emotional avoidance, Etsuko withdraws from other people and tries to ensure that her trauma remains undisclosed. The narrative of Sachiko, which Etsuko can control, works as a protective force, allowing her to implicitly and safely communicate the traumatic events. These insights function as a basis for the subsequent section, in which it becomes increasingly apparent that Sachiko's story serves as a defensive strategy.

3.3 Narrative Inconsistencies

Narrative inconsistencies function as one of the clearest types of evidence of Sachiko's story being a projection of Etsuko's trauma. This section examines several inconsistencies, the first one being the fractures in Etsuko's narration where the defence mechanism she uses appears to fail. The latter part of this section concentrates on the unreliability of Etsuko's narration. Both aspects can be interpreted as fractures in narrative cohesion reflecting Etsuko's unconscious thoughts and used to identify what truly happens behind Sachiko's narrative.

3.3.1 Fractures in Etsuko's Narrative Strategy

Towards the end of the novel, Etsuko appears to disengage from continuously projecting her trauma. Sachiko confesses to Etsuko that she knows she is not a good mom to Mariko (Ishiguro 1990, 171), which leads to the abrupt ending of Sachiko and Mariko's narrative, left without a conclusion. This could be interpreted as Etsuko acknowledging her responsibility in Keiko's death, as she soon discloses that she decided to move regardless of knowing that Keiko would be unhappy in the new country (Ishiguro 1990, 176). This reading can be reinforced by two incidents which, according to Ishiguro himself, can be considered as slips, where Etsuko moves from talking about Sachiko to talking about herself due to not being bothered "to put it in the third person" anymore (Mason and Ishiguro 1989, 337).

The first narrative incoherence that argues for the projection is a scene at the end of Sachiko and Mariko's narrative, in which Etsuko addresses Sachiko's daughter, Mariko, as if she was her own. Mariko is distressed of the forthcoming move to America, and Etsuko reassures her that "*we* can always come back [. . .], but *we* have to try it and see if *we* like it there" (Ishiguro 1990, 173; *emphases added*) even though she should be referring to the move as something *you* will do, given that it is, after all, supposed to be Sachiko and Mariko's relocation, not Etsuko's. The sudden shift from *you* to *we* indicates a fracture in Etsuko's projection and exposes the reader to it. According to Vickroy, trauma victims suffer from "a simultaneous desire to remember (in attempts to replay and resolve the past) and to forget these experiences" (2015, 19; *parenthesis as in the original*). Whereas most of the time the narrative has only presented moments where Etsuko tries to forget, this instance corresponds to a moment in which she wishes to "replay and resolve" (*ibid.*). Hence, this should be read as more than just a linguistic slip, as it shows a fracture in the narrative strategy making it possible for the line between the characters to blur.

A corresponding break in the defence mechanism occurs in a conversation Etsuko has with Niki, in which she is remembering a time up in the mountains with her deceased daughter. "I was just remembering it, that's all. Keiko was happy that day. We rode on the cable-cars" (Ishiguro 1990, 182). Previously in the novel this specific incident was referred to as something that happened to Sachiko and Mariko. As concluded in Matek's work "[t]his is a clear contradiction to what the reader had found out earlier" (2018, 142). This incident further strengthens the argument of Sachiko and Mariko functioning as parallel characters to Etsuko

and Keiko. Combined with the preceding fracture in projection, it encourages the reader to critically consider the parallel narratives in *A Pale View*.

3.3.2 Unreliability of Etsuko's Narration

Unreliability of the narrator shapes the whole novel's narrative structure causing inconsistencies that further unveil Etsuko's repressed thoughts to the reader. Etsuko's narration is full of omissions, silence, and confusion between her and Sachiko's stories, which exposes the vulnerability of the story she attaches to Sachiko. Wayne Booth's definition of the unreliable narrator as someone who does not act upon the norms, here referred to as the implied communicative norms within the narrative world (1983, 158–159), corresponds to the behaviour of Etsuko. She suppresses information and is inconsistent with the details she provides. In *Reading Trauma Narratives*, Vickroy explains how trauma narratives show characteristics of, for example, "impaired memory, shame, repression, and dissociation" (2015, 196), which are observable in Etsuko's behaviour, too. She projects the trauma onto Sachiko to repress the negative thoughts, reduce shame and minimise responsibility, simultaneously reinforcing the unreliability of her narration.

Etsuko's highly selective memory works as a fundamental element in the unreliability of her narration, and it especially concerns Keiko's suicide. Towards the end of the novel, Etsuko even explicitly states that "[m]emory [. . .] can be an unreliable thing; often it is heavily coloured by the circumstances in which one remembers, and no doubt this applies to certain of the recollections I have gathered here" (Ishiguro 1990, 156). Narrators generally remember the unnecessary details while forgetting the "unpleasant details", especially ones "in which their responsibility comes into play" (Suter 2020, 53), which is demonstrated in the way Etsuko remembers even the smallest details in Sachiko and Mariko's life, while the details surrounding her own life, and particularly Keiko, remain ambiguous. Additionally, through selective memory narrators can build "a reassuring vision of their past" (ibid.), which Etsuko tries to do by projecting the memories of her past onto Sachiko and Mariko.

The unreliability of Etsuko's narration can also be detected through "the language of self-deception and self-protection" (Mason and Ishiguro 1989, 337), which does not only deceive her, but also the reader. Vickroy claims that unreliable narrators produce contradictory views, which readers must navigate through to resolve what truly happened and what causes the unreliability in question (2015, 196). For instance, Etsuko can go as far as to pretend that Keiko is still alive when asked about her, even though, according to her own words, she does

not “enjoy deceiving people” (Ishiguro 1990, 50–52). Hence, the reader is presented with various versions of events throughout the novel, of which they can only guess the correct one (Suter 2020, 58). However, these contradictions can be interpreted as indications of the defence mechanisms Etsuko uses: the discrepancies navigate the reader towards understanding that Sachiko’s story is only a projection of Etsuko’s trauma unveiling what Etsuko is unable to explicitly communicate.

The unreliability of Etsuko, through repeated omissions, compromised memories, and deceiving language, further supports the view of Sachiko’s narrative existing only as a projection of Etsuko’s trauma rather than a separate entity. The inconsistencies in Etsuko’s storytelling are, undoubtedly, not only mistakes, but fractures in the defence mechanism she depends on to repress the traumatic events. As the narrative becomes vague and contradictory, the projection becomes increasingly evident slowly revealing what Etsuko really feels and thinks. Hence, unreliability works as a narrative inconsistency at the whole structural level of *A Pale View*, contributing to how trauma is displayed.

4 Conclusion

This thesis set out to examine layered storytelling and its purpose in *A Pale View*. As described in this thesis, the embedded story of Sachiko and Mariko functions as a parallel narrative to Etsuko and Keiko, and, furthermore, offers Etsuko a subject to project her trauma onto. Additionally, it creates a means for Etsuko to begin accepting her daughter's death as well as processing the distressing emotions it causes.

This thesis has shown that Sachiko and Mariko can be interpreted as narrative doubles to Etsuko and Keiko, and that these characters' similarities are not coincidental and provide a fundamental basis for the parallel narratives. The analysis of Etsuko's narrative proposes that acknowledging her inadequate parenting functions as the primary cause of the guilt that she is unable to confront. This intolerable guilt, originating from the previously examined circumstances surrounding Keiko's death, is the fundamental motive for Etsuko projecting her trauma onto a parallel narrative. Furthermore, through avoiding both the topic of Keiko as well as her own emotions, Etsuko can maintain the use of projection throughout the novel. Rather than confronting the trauma and its effects, she diverts attention towards the story of Sachiko, using the narrative to create a space where she can start processing the trauma without endangering, for example, her self-esteem.

The inconsistencies in Etsuko's storytelling towards the end of the novel can be interpreted as fractures in the maladaptive strategies she uses to repress her emotions. Unreliable narration contributes to the inconsistencies by creating an unstable structure filled with evasions and gaps as well as by offering multiple versions of events. Thus, the ambiguity and unreliability of Etsuko's narration invite the reader to interpret and confront the topics and themes Etsuko herself is trying to avoid. Said narrative fractures combined with Etsuko's unreliability guide the reader towards understanding the limitations of Etsuko's control over her narrative, simultaneously exposing her unconscious thoughts.

These findings indicate intentional use of psychological concepts to create a narrative that is formed through not only explicitly stated facts but also implicitly presented clues. Therefore, the novel leaves room for the reader to draw the connections and peel off the layers of the stories. Nevertheless, the novel functions regardless of whether the reader interprets Sachiko's story real or not, as it does not change its meaning and use for Etsuko. Sachiko can be an actual person Etsuko once knew, of whom she is telling the things she best relates to, or

Sachiko's story can be the product of Etsuko's imagination. Ultimately, both these options lead to the same conclusion, which is what this thesis has established: the parallel narrative of Sachiko and Mariko serves as a place for Etsuko to project her trauma and the trauma-induced emotions.

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