



# Isolation and Loneliness: Navigating Seclusion in Kazuo Ishiguro's *A Pale View of Hills*

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## Abstract

Ishiguro's novel, *A Pale View of Hills*, the study of seclusion as a catalyst for self-annihilation takes centre stage, offering readers a deep glimpse into the workings of human solitude. The narrative discloses a post-war Nagasaki, where the protagonist, Etsuko, wrestles with her own isolation and the haunting memories of the past. This article deals with the psychological dismays of Etsuko which remains mysterious throughout the narrative. Her fears and anguishes remain intact as she tries to connect with others. The present paper is analysed within the frame work of Emile Durkheim's Theory of Suicide and it also brings out the prominence of communication and a sociable environment. The present paper also brings out the significance of quality family time and also the importance of good parental relationship.

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**Keywords:** loneliness, self-annihilation, nostalgia, identity

**DOI Number:** 10.48047/nq.2022.20.22.NQ10463

**NeuroQuantology** 2022;20(22):4612-4615

## Isolation and Loneliness: Navigating Seclusion in Kazuo Ishiguro's *A Pale View of Hills*

Kazuo Ishiguro has an amazing ability to pile the theme of loneliness into the fabric of his narratives, creating emotional and fervently resonant stories. Across various works, including *The Remains of the Day*, *Never Let Me Go*, and *A Pale View of Hills*, Ishiguro tracks solitude with a nuanced and insightful touch. Kazuo Ishiguro is a Japanese-born British writer who through his writings of great emotional force has revealed the connection of human psyche with the external world. His first two novels, *A Pale View of Hills* and *An Artist of the Floating*

*World*, both deal with sheer Japanese traditions and they explore Japanese identity. He has also dealt with genres like science fiction and historical fiction through his writings. He has been nominated for the Booker Prize four times and his novel *Remains of the Day* bagged it in 1989. *Time* named Ishiguro's science fiction *Never Let Me Go* as the best novel of 2005 and one of the 100 best English Language novels published between 1923 and 2005. Most of Ishiguro's novel portrays the effects of war and causes of war in an explicit way.

In *A Pale View of Hills*, solitude is intertwined with the cultural displacement experienced by the protagonist, Etsuko. Her



expedition becomes contemplation on the isolating impacts of war and the struggle to belong in a world that has been irreversibly changed. Most of the novels, written by Ishiguro are in first person narrative and here in this novel, Etsuko can be considered as the unreliable narrator. The psychological trauma and agony of Etsuko is clearly portrayed in the way she narrates the story of Sachiko and Mariko. Later it could be understood that Sachiko is an imaginary character, constructed by Etsuko herself for hiding her guilt.

*A Pale View of Hills* is analysed within the framework of Theory of Suicide by Emile Durkheim. Durkheim, a pioneering sociologist, introduced the theory of suicide in his seminal work, *Le Suicide: Étude de sociologie*. Published in 1897, Durkheim's trailblazing study sought to understand the social factors swaying suicide rates and to establish sociology as a distinct scientific discipline. In Durkheim's view, there are four types of suicide i) egoistic ii) anomic iii) fatalistic and iv) altruistic. Egoistic suicide stems from absence of social integration. It is committed by people who are not social with others and who always seclude themselves from others. People who tend to isolate themselves from others seemingly suffer from depression as they share less, communicate less and attach less. These people are alone or an outsider.

The novel's setting, branded by the outcome of World War II, further intensifies the theme of loneliness. The physical and emotional blemishes of the war linger, moulding a shadow over the characters' lives. The isolated people detach themselves from people around them because they always feel to be an outsider among the ones surrounds them. They always feel unable to find their own place in society and have problems adjusting to groups. Sally Brampton opines that "Killing oneself is, anyway, a misnomer. We don't kill ourselves. We are simply defeated by the long, hard, struggle to stay alive" (*Shoot the Damn Dog* 156). Egoistic suicide is nothing but excessive individualism and it is the result of the long struggle fought alone.

Etsuko's brawl to resolve with the losses and traumas of the past reflects the

wider societal struggle to find meaning in a world that has been deeply changed by conflict. Etsuko narrates some stories from her past to her younger daughter Niki, when she visits her mother in Japan with her second husband. Etsuko also discusses about her elder daughter, Keiko's suicide but in a vague way. While discussing, it is revealed that Keiko is a solitary child, who detached herself from her family members. But Etsuko never reveals the reason for her detachment. It shows that how shallow the mother daughter relationship was. Etsuko always gives a pale view of his past to her daughter Niki, as the title of the novel indicates. As Yang Haixia and Gufan in their article "Traumatic Memory in *A Pale View of Hills*" sheds light on the symptoms of trauma in Ishiguro's *A Pale View of Hills*:

As trauma researchers have studied, the characters in the novel exhibit many of the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, such as hyper arousal, intrusion, constriction and numbness reaction. The narrative tone of the novel's characters in the memory is too calm to believe, because the author wants to express that the recipient wants to avoid painful memories and hope to get some comfort through the narrative. In this novel, trauma is the theme and expression. Kazuo Ishiguro was trying something rather odd with the narrative. The main strategy was to leave a big gap. Etsuko use Sachiko and Mariko's story to talk about herself. So you have this highly Estuko-ed version of his other person's story. Throughout history, people in pursuit of happiness and good life at the same time are suffering from natural and man-made disasters, war, disease, terror, massacre, mental stress and so on. Paying attention to trauma is not for cynicism, not for forgetting memories, but through reproductive trauma, allowing people to repair trauma in reflection. (145)

As Etsuko steers the landscape of her memories, the reader is confronted with the haunting spectre of her daughter Keiko's suicide. Keiko's tragic end aids as a touching display of the disparaging power of loneliness. The literal meaning of the name, Keiko is 'happy child.' But in reality, Keiko was never a

happy child. Etsuko narrates the story of Sachiko, mentioning her as her good old friend to her younger daughter Niki. Sachiko is portrayed in a way that she is a woman who married her White lover, Frank and left Japan for England. Etsuko says Nikki that Sachiko had an elder daughter, a young vibrant girl whom she loved a lot. Mariko is her name and she becomes estranged when her mother Sachiko tells her that they are moving to England with Frank. Etsuko tells Nikki that this news made Mariko fall into silence and loneliness. She started detaching herself from her mother and all others. On the other hand, the haunting memory of the strange woman keeps the child Mariko in a miserable state and scripts her dissimilar from other children of her age. Don Kuiken highlights in his chapter "The Contrasting Effects of Nightmares, Existential Dreams, and Transcendent Dreams", to attribute the features of nightmares as follows:

Finally, yearning/longing is an emotion whose absence is distinctively characteristic of nightmares. Although the absence of an attribute is not usually considered a useful definitional criterion, this possibility becomes salient in the comparative procedures used to identify polythetic dream categories. In this case, an absence is informative; the distinctive absence of yearning/longing in nightmares may help to explain their lack of quasi-therapeutic benefit. (186)

Through nuanced categorizations and complicated narratives, Ishiguro shades a complicated portrait of loneliness, exploring its impact on the human condition in various forms. Etsuko tells Nikki that she always anxious to get close with Mariko to get her out of the dejected condition. But Mariko never wanted to mingle with any other people and she becomes more sulky day by day. Etsuko says that she was the only one who tried caring Mariko when she was in such a misery. Later it is revealed that Keiko was undergoing the same situation as Mariko in Etsuko's story. It is disclosed that Etsuko marries a White man after divorcing her first husband and takes Keiko with her to England.

Ishiguro discovers the isolation that comes from being noticeable as dissimilar and

expendable, generating an evocative narrative that requests the ethics of science and society. Keiko, like Mariko never adapts with the situation as she never wants to leave Japan. She feels like she has been uprooted from her mother nation and she also feels dislocated there in England. She distances herself from her mother, step father and step sister. She comes out of her only to grab her lunch. But it is evident that Etsuko as a mother failed to communicate with her elder daughter Keiko when she was falling apart. She left Keiko unnoticed and she went unreachable and unapproachable. Later, Keiko leads a secluded life in Massachusetts sometimes and at the end she killed herself, quelling all her lonely fights.

This sequential perplexity mirrors Etsuko's disjointed sense of self, highlighting the collapse caused by isolation. The narrative's oblique nature invites readers to piece together the puzzle of Etsuko's life, emulating her own quest for rationality in the face of loneliness. Etsuko never discusses this story and it is revealed only towards the end that Sachiko's story narrated by Etsuko is what exactly what happened in her life too. When analysing through Durkheim's Theory of Suicide and in the framework of first type of suicide, it is evident that Keiko committed suicide only because of the lack of social interaction and commitment. Etsuko as a mother never checked upon her daughter and she became the sole reason for Keiko being desperately lonely. Finally, she put an end to all her silent struggles by killing herself. The present paper stresses on the importance of being social and also the significance of a warm parent-child relationship. It is a flambeau that aims to bring out the value of communication and quality time with children and also any individual who seclude themselves from the society.

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