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The Extremities of Literature: Traumatic Memory in Two Novels by Kazuo Ishiguro

ABSTRACT

Drawing on Michel Foucault's description of literature as being from the outside, Catherine Malabou explains that only literature can give us access to the inconceivable space occupied by traumatic experiences. How a literary text opens such a space, one on the extremity of experience and literature itself, involves an understanding of trauma as a neurobiological wound. In this essay I will argue that what Malabou refers to as *neuro-literature* and her *plastic reading* of texts provide useful additions to current critical approaches to two of Kazuo Ishiguro's novels that address traumatic memories. Literary critics have approached the theme of traumatic memory in Ishiguro's work from psychological positionalities. Using psychology, like neurobiology, already suggests that a literary work can give us access to traumatic experiences. A fuller understanding of traumatic memories as manifested by Ishiguro's writing is here viewed through the lens of neurobiology which considers the plasticity of the brain and a plastic reading of these literary texts. This paper explores two narratives driven by traumatic memories: Ishiguro's *An Artist of the Floating World* (1986) and *When We Were Orphans* (2000), both of which address the long-term effects brought on by the trauma of war and loss.

Keywords: plastic reading, neuro-literature, memory, trauma, Kazuo Ishiguro.

INTRODUCTION

Post-traumatic experiences and traumatic memories have been featured in several novels by the Nobel Laureate Kazuo Ishiguro. Ishiguro's first novel, *A Pale View of Hills*, a narrative of trauma and migration, is approached from the perspective of narrative strategies and the use of an unreliable narrator in analyses by Michael R. Molino and Ljubica Matek. Both critics recognize the difficulties of understanding trauma that blocks out memories which impede any contextualization (Molino 322–34; Matek 133). Yet, as Matek points out, "this kind of unavoidable deception (provoked by the traumatic event) does not prevent a verbalization of trauma, even if this means a deeply subjective, and therefore questionable, account of the circumstances regarding the traumatic event" (133). Matthew Mead examines Ishiguro's *The Unconsoled* as a trauma narrative, looking at how it fits into the trauma aesthetic and trauma culture that emerged in the 1990s. His analysis describes textual features which encapsulate the traumatic experience, and to some extent overlaps with the current study. It does this, firstly, in its use of neurobiological terms (such as *wound*), bringing together the physical with the psychiatric; and secondly in noting that memory in Ishiguro's novel goes beyond the genre boundaries of trauma fiction, suggesting something akin to Malabou's account of extremities of the traumatic experience discussed below. In more recent works, such as the fantastical *The Buried Giant* (2015), Ishiguro exploits the trauma narrative in a story that hinges on the undoing of a spell causing collective amnesia. It has been analyzed as such by Edyta Lorek-Jezińska using psychoanalytic approaches to trauma in literature, drawing from Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, and separate research by Cathy Caruth.

The verbalization of trauma, largely through internal dialogue, is also at the heart of the two Ishiguro novels examined in this essay. *An Artist of the Floating World* (1986) and *When We Were Orphans* (2000) employ unreliable narrators reflecting on their memories of disturbing times in their pasts. The human ability to select and interpret relevant experiences in retrospect and thus combine past and present selves is a major theme of Ishiguro's work.

While *Orphans* has been discussed in terms of traumatic memories, *Artist* is mostly treated as a work about memories of shame and guilt against the backdrop of the trauma of war. Both novels, arguably by the actions and narrations of the characters, are about manifestations of trauma. Including *Artist* in an analysis of trauma fiction is also made possible by an expanded definition of trauma which has emerged in contemporary discourse and can also be found in Malabou's writings, as discussed later.

In narrating their past, the protagonists of both novels suppress their feelings in order to protect themselves from painful experiences, even though they do not fully understand or recognize those experiences. Ishiguro describes his protagonists as characters who

> know what they have to avoid and that determines the route they take through memory, and through the past. There's no coincidence that they're worrying because they sense there isn't something quite right there. But of course memory is this terribly treacherous terrain, the very ambiguities of memory go to feed self-deception. (qtd. in Swift 38–39)

In both novels, the issue of memory arises as the protagonists try to find closure with their pasts. Strictly speaking, if these were memories of the past which involved the consequences of past actions—that is, responses to being a trauma victim—then psychological interpretations might suffice. However, situations and events from the past imposed on the narrators by forces not in their control point to traumatic experiences that, in Malabou's reckoning, require a neurobiological understanding. In addition to this, using Malabou's definition of trauma to include being the perpetrator of a traumatic action on another person, and therefore racked by guilt, offers a richer analysis than that offered in current approaches to Ishiguro's work.

NEURO-LITERATURE

In her discussion of Michel Foucault's characterization of literature as being from the outside, Malabou explains that "[t]he outside is the post-traumatic, and . . . that only literature, conceived of as neutrality, could give us access to this unthinkable space" ("Neuro-literature" 86–87). This view is shared by Anne Whitehead in her seminal work *Trauma Fiction*, which suggests that literature, using its textual forms, themes, and stylistic devices (such as repetition and intertextuality), can depict and serve as a witness to trauma (83–85). While Whitehead's focus rests in literary and textual studies, Malabou's approach to understanding trauma, and the role of literature in that understanding, comes from neurobiology.

Malabou introduces "neuro-literature" not as a theory or movement akin to Jacques Derrida's deconstruction or Foucault's "archaeology of knowledge." Rather she observes that "[w]hat literature was supposed to resist most, namely scientific discourse, paradoxically appears today as revealing the truth of literature, as opening for literature the outside that it was supposed to offer, and that it actually failed to open" ("Neuro-literature" 79). For Malabou, this scientific discourse comes most fittingly

from neurobiology. Key to this is understanding what Malabou means by *cerebrality* and *plasticity* of the brain. Malabou makes a distinction between the brain and cerebrality similar to the Freudian distinction between sex and sexuality (see Freud). She argues that "[i]f the brain designates the set of 'cerebral functions,' cerebrality would be the specific word for the causal value of the damage inflicted upon these functions—that is, upon their capacity to determine the course of psychic life" (*New Wounded* 2). The recognition of this causality will be expanded upon below with the discussion of the two novels.

The concept of plasticity has been a hallmark of Malabou's philosophical writings. For the purposes of the present study, I limit discussion to the plasticity of the brain and the resulting plastic readings of literary works on trauma. According to Malabou, "[t]he work proper to the brain that engages with history and individual experience has a name: *plasticity*. What we have called the constitutive historicity of the brain is really nothing other than its plasticity" (*What Should We Do* 4). In the same work, Malabou offers this summary: "Talking about the plasticity of the brain thus amounts to thinking of the brain as something modifiable, 'formable,' and formative at the same time" (5). Applied to literary works on trauma, this could help to explain the hallucinations brought on by traumatic memories, taking our understandings beyond psychoses of the mind to the physicality of the brain.

In addition to describing the brain as being modifiable, plasticity also encapsulates the creation and destruction of forms. Malabou explains that "plasticity is situated between two extremes: on the one side the sensible image of taking form (sculpture or plastic objects), and on the other side that of the annihilation of all form (explosion)" (*What Should We Do* 5). These characteristics of plasticity are reflected in the post-traumatic experiences of the traumatized, in real life and in their fictional personae, and pull us away from a reliance on traumatic memories as the primary force of the trauma narrative.

THE TRAUMA NARRATIVE

The word *trauma* in Greek means "wound," and for centuries held only a physical signification. Trauma as an emotional and psychological phenomenon did not emerge until the mid-nineteenth century as a condition experienced by railway workers known as *railway spine*, having nightmares and flashbacks alongside chronic pain (Sehgal). The scope of its meaning has been expanding throughout the twentieth century. Recent writing about trauma tells us that it now encompasses "anything the body perceives as too much,

too fast, or too soon" (Menakem). Noting this expansion of the meaning of trauma, Sehgal explains that "[t]oday, with the term having grown even more elastic, this same diagnosis can apply to a journalist who reported on that atrocity, to descendants of the victims, and even to a historian studying the event a century later, who may be a casualty of 'vicarious trauma.'" Malabou stretches the definition of traumatic experience further still, explaining that "[t]he neurobiological approach to traumas, which considers their impact upon cerebrality, leads to a general reelaboration of the question of suffering and wounding—and thus of the question of *evil*. To be ill or to do ill" (*New Wounded* 168). This follows the works of other writers on trauma, such as Dominick LaCapra, pointing out that trauma is not only about being a victim or vicarious victim, but also the agent behind the traumatic event.

Using the concept of cerebrality, Malabou explains that trauma patients "challenge us to think pure, senseless danger as an unexpected event—*incompatible with the possibility of being fantasized.* One does not fantasize a brain injury; one cannot even represent it. Cerebrality is thus the causality of a neutral and destructive accident—without reason" (*New Wounded* 9, emphasis in the original). This "essence of trauma" is articulated by Bessel van der Kolk as "overwhelming, unbelievable, and unbearable" (194). In his work with PTSD, he discovered that "each patient demands that we suspend our sense of what is normal and accept that we are dealing with a dual reality: the reality of a relatively secure and predictable present that lives side by side with a ruinous, ever-present past" (194).

Memories, therefore, are integral to any discussion of trauma, and as noted earlier, they are a key constituent of Ishiguro's novels and more generally speaking the trauma narrative. Critical works by Elizabeth Weston, Wojciech Drąg, and Cynthia F. Wong have pointed to the common theme of memories that are both suppressed and revisited by Ishiguro's characters.

Anne Whitehead argues that trauma fiction for which memories are central requires a literary form that departs from the so-called conventional linear sequence. Although literature abounds with books that are not about trauma but tell their story without adhering to linearity, the lack of linearity is a baseline to reflect the fractured temporality and memories in the mind of the traumatized character. An alternative approach comes from Deyan Guo, who explains: "The irruption of one time into another is figured by Caruth as a form of possession or haunting. The ghost represents an appropriate embodiment of the disjunction of temporality, the surfacing of the past in the present" (2510).

The insertion of memories drawing the past into the narrative's present-day constitutes a partial account of the role of memory in traumatic experience and traumatic fiction. According to neurobiological research, "memories evolve and change. Immediately after a memory is laid down, it undergoes a lengthy

process of integration and reinterpretation—a process that automatically happens in the mind/brain without any input from the conscious self" (van der Kolk 255). Matek's analysis of *A Pale View of Hills*, noted earlier, briefly delves into the discourse of neurobiology and van der Kolk's work to explain that "traumatic memories are stored differently from ordinary memories and, consequently, they are also retrieved in a way that is not verbal (linguistic) in the usual sense of the word, but rather reoccur in the form of unusual feelings, bodily sensations, flashbacks and nightmares" (137).

The trauma narrative is, therefore, one that appears to present a fractured storyline punctuated by recurring and reinterpreted memories alongside the presence of physical bodily experiences *in extremis*.

AN ARTIST OF THE FLOATING WORLD

The novel is narrated by Masuji Ono, an elderly, retired artist living in Japan, writing a memoir over a period of two years, between 1948 and 1950. Early in his recollections, the reader is told that Ono was a distinguished artist, a member of a group of his contemporaries who were called "artists of the floating world" as they belonged to "the night-time world of pleasure, entertainment and drink" (45). Along with reflections of his past as a young artist and teacher during the war, Ono records events and conversations from the present day, in particular those involving his two adult daughters. His daughter Setsuko is married with a child, and the other daughter, Noriko, is in search of a husband. This present period is characterized by tensions between him and his daughters' generation. He argues with his son-in-law, who typifies the political views of the post-war generation, looking upon World War II as a misguided failure, and reducing it to something best forgotten.

Ono's problem is that he cannot forget. Drąg explains this in terms that appear akin to nostalgia, whereby Ono sees the past "with a plenitude of meaning," while the present is "empty" (Drąg 41). Like someone who is nostalgic for a better time, at one point Ono "indulges in conjuring up an unrealistic vision of reinstituting the old district" of night-time pleasures (43). From a neurobiological perspective, that is, recognizing the plasticity of the brain, we can see that the pleasure from the past can co-exist with the pain of the present. Moreover, as for those afflicted with trauma, the past and present appear in the same timeframe within Ono's mind.

In *Artist*, the deaths of Ono's wife and son are fairly recent to the present time of the narration, yet as Drąg points out, the story "is hardly a narration of bereavement" (42). Aside from several references to their deaths and the funeral, "Ono does not dwell on the experience of

bereavement" (42). Drąg, however, does not relate this directly to trauma. Wong also does not see this as trauma but explains the protagonist's lack of emotion over the death of his wife and son as a result of deep-seated guilt. Wong adds that, on one side, there are matters at hand to do with Ono's work during the war and the guilt over that. On the other side is "Ono's narrative strategy" whereby he talks "around these deaths by focussing his energy on his daughters' futures" (49). Recognizing Ono's experience as traumatic better explains this detachment from emotion.

Noriko's latest marriage negotiations propel Ono into fear that his past, which is likely to be investigated by the family of Noriko's future husband, could damage the outcome. As his recollections continue, elements of Ono's past are filled in while others seem to be rewritten. As the narrator, Ono is aware of his omissions and at times distortions of events. Some of this he blames on memory: "Of course, this is all a matter of many years ago now and I cannot vouch that those were my exact words . . ." (Ishiguro, *Artist* 69). Here, Ono's mind appears to struggle with modifications to his brain brought about by the physical experience of aging. Given the unsavoury truths that slowly emerge, the reader does not know whether to believe that this unreliable narrator suffers from a faulty memory or if the omissions and distortions are in fact deliberate. Firstly, Ono's work as an artist might not have been as distinguished as he had claimed. He spent many years mass-producing Japanese motifs for the overseas market. Later he painted propaganda posters promoting militarism and Japan's involvement in the war. A more disturbing event is remembered. When Ono became an art teacher he also served as an advisor to the Committee of Unpatriotic Activities. In this role, he reported a student, Kuroda, to the authorities. As a result, Kuroda was arrested and beaten and his mother interrogated, and, in the present day, Kuroda lives in squalor.

Attempting to deal with the wounds of the past, Ono presents them to the reader as a matter of practicality for his family and not as wounds that are affecting him. He expresses his fear that his involvement in the Nationalist movement might hamper the marriage negotiations of his daughter. In order to justify to the reader that his actions were innocently undertaken, Ono reflects upon his past with the aid of his fragile memory. He knows that he has lived without purpose or lasting impact and finds himself stripped of all agency and control. In the emptiness of his waning life, he appears to be desperately seeking relief from the desolation that he faces, and therefore needs to return to his past to extract from it proof of his own significance. Ono does not admit even to himself that there is a wound that needs to be healed.

The story concludes with Ono's admissions of guilt and his acceptance of his past. To Noriko's prospective in-laws, Ono admits that his art may

have had a negative influence on Japan. As noted earlier, a neurobiological approach to trauma in literature considers the concept of evil and the *doing of ill*. Ono's narration is therapeutic, but rather than address a traumatic loss, Ono's account leads to a confession for past wrongdoings and a need to try to understand their original motivations. In a moment of self-awareness, Ono comments: "We have the satisfaction of knowing that whatever we did, we did at the time in good faith" (Ishiguro, *Artist* 201–02).

Gradually, the reader realizes that the younger Ono was naïve in his actions and perhaps unaware of their consequences. As such, this unreliable narrator manages to gain the reader's empathy despite the gravity of his past deeds (Wong). An understanding of the post-traumatic brain brings clarity to this interpretation as the extremity of past experiences renders a person emotionally weak, and worthy of sympathy, while the brain remains strong in its continuous processing of guilt.

Ono's present-day behaviours suggest that he has recovered from the traumatic events of the past, appearing less delusional and confused throughout the narrative. Ono's journey is one of post-traumatic subtleties that indeed require the neutrality of literature to observe. It is likely that Ono has experienced some degree of recovery from the trauma of being a witness to war and that his post-traumatic experience, notably a collective trauma of the entire Japanese nation, is under the surface and barely perceptible to the characters in the world of the text.

Critical analyses of *Artist* have largely focused on the writing style, noting "the way the text mixes memories with commentary and moments of self-awareness, suggesting that these thoughts are floating, playing with the title of the book" (Trimarco). References to unclear memories and self-awareness appear to be part of the narrator's style of speech but can also be viewed through a neurobiological perspective; that is, that the inconsistencies result from the plasticity of the brain. Simultaneously, Ono's comments can be judged by the reader as integral to the actual story as the slips and contradictions suggest that the story needs to be told in order for Ono to understand his past. A neurobiological approach delves into the unclear memories, framing them as traumatic memories brought on by living in a place changed by war and from "the doing of ill" and consequent traumatic guilt.

WHEN WE WERE ORPHANS

This novel is narrated in the first person by Christopher Banks, a famous detective and Englishman who was born in Shanghai and lived there until he was orphaned at the age of ten following the "disappearances" of his parents

and sent to live in England with an aunt. Knowledge of these disappearances indicates to the reader the novel's status as a trauma narrative. In the terms set out by Malabou, "traumatic events appear more and more clearly as events that tend to mask their intentionality, taking two, apparently contradictory, forms: they appear either as perfectly unmotivated accidents or as the necessary blindness of natural laws. In both cases, the intentional orientation of the event is disguised or absent" (*New Wounded* 11). For Banks, who in the present is still ignorant of why his parents were taken away, those events are for him without intention and beyond natural explanation, which in part defines them as traumatic experiences.

As a collection of memories, often remembered episodes within other episodes, the narrative moves back and forth between Shanghai and London. The reader learns from these recollections that Banks's early childhood before his parents' disappearances was idyllic. He was living in the privileged International Settlement and playing with his Japanese friend Akira. Banks's father, an employee in a global trading company, was involved with the opium trade, while his mother was an outspoken critic of opium use.

As an adult, living in London, Banks is portrayed as an emotionally detached character filling his role in life as an eminent detective. The reader naturally suspects something from Banks's past as contributing to this aloofness, whether it be a specific incident or something ongoing throughout his early life. It is only when he meets an old school friend that the reader learns about Uncle Phillip, a family friend in Shanghai, who abandoned him in a market on the day his mother disappeared. These traumatic events are reported to the reader in the detached style of detective fiction, as if the narrator were describing someone else's life.

Since Banks is the novel's focalizer, it is the reported dialogue of others that gives hints that he has had a traumatic experience that he himself does not perceive as traumatic. An old school friend from his days in England, after his parents' disappearances, recalls how Banks was "such an odd bird at school" (Ishiguro, *Orphans* 5). This characterization is denied by Banks who thinks the friend has confused him with someone else. Reflecting on those English school days, he recalls overhearing a conversation with his aunt speaking to "someone," complaining about how young Banks is in his own little world, on his own for hours. The "someone" says: "But it's only to be expected, surely . . . after all that has happened to him" (10). The writer's choice to include these character assessments from characters other than the trauma victim illustrates Malabou's point regarding the potential of literature to tackle the extremes of traumatic experience. By comparison, an autobiographical account in non-fiction could easily circumvent the observations and opinions of others.

In conversation with others from his past, Banks claims to have a "most vivid memory" (24). He restates this privately to the reader in terms of being able to "with ease transport myself back" in time to recollect key events in his life in Shanghai. This claim suggests that the traumatic events of the past feel as fresh as if they were in the present. This is one of the characteristics of the traumatized individual – the confusion of past and present. As the story develops the reader realizes that some of these memories appear implausible or incomplete to the point of presenting different interpretations for the narrator than for the reader.

The reader is given further hints of Banks's troubled state of mind in the present day of 1930s London through his conversations with Sarah, a socialite he befriends but is unable to commit to. What he thinks are recollections of his childhood in Shanghai for his narrative with the reader turn out to be things that he actually said aloud to Sarah without being aware of it: "I suppose I must then have told her a few further things from the past. I did not reveal anything of any real significance, but after parting with her this afternoon—we eventually got off in Oxford Street—I was surprised and slightly alarmed that I had told her anything at all" (67).

According to Drąg, Banks's nostalgia for his childhood "could be interpreted in the context of the trauma theorists' criticism of nostalgia's escapist propensity" (Drąg 162). Other trauma theorists see the reliance on nostalgia in *Orphans* as Banks's inability to forget the past and the futility of trying to do so (Guo 2514). The narrator is aware that he is trying to work out what happened to his parents, yet as the story progresses the reader realizes that Banks is trying to work out what happened to *himself*.

Biwu Shang explores Ishiguro's narrative of memories in *Orphans* within the framework of identity construction for its narrator and principal character Christopher Banks. Referring to Weston, Shang notes that traumatic loss has contributed to creating a sense of lost identity. An attempt to reclaim this identity might help to explain why the narrator speaks of himself based on his recollections in the past tense and of his feelings during the time of narration in the present tense, creating a dual perspective (or focalization) within the first-person narration. In this way, the narrator tricks the reader into accepting what the narrator believes until the reader can see beyond it. This reflects Malabou's point regarding literature not being outside and neutral on its own but here requiring a neurobiological approach. The literary text presents an inner textual world created by the narrator and an outer textual world that draws from neurobiology (not necessarily explicitly referred to) in which the reader interacts with the text and its author. Weston describes this inner textual world "as filtered through his mind rather than a relatively objective bird's

eye perspective, [and] takes on the contours of Banks's experience and recedes from the mind's attempt to grasp it" (341). Using Malabou's work, our understanding from the outer textual world of the brain's plasticity accounts for this dualism between recorded experience, even with accurate memories, and the mind's ability, and perhaps willingness, to understand it and accept it as a genuine experience.

This dualism between true experiences and the mind accepting these experiences emerges in the novel as Banks returns to Shanghai to solve the mystery of his parents' disappearances. Drąg explains this in terms of Banks's traumatic experience: "The depth and persistence of the wound sustained by the narrator is not revealed until he returns, after over three decades, to the place of his ordeal" (146). It is 1937 and Shanghai has been destroyed by the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–45). Banks experiences what appears to the reader to be a surrealistic chain of events in his search for his missing parents. As Drąg rightly points out: "Although the earlier parts contain Banks's intimations that he still entertains the hope of finding his parents, his condition does not strike the reader as delusional" (146). This position changes when Banks unrealistically aims to reach the kidnappers' suspected hide-out. The events that follow appear surrealistic, full of the illogic of dreams that do not make sense in the real world. In digging for clues, he uncovers one house that was not searched by the police at the time his parents went missing and makes the assumption that his parents are still there after some twenty years. This otherwise logical detective, famous for solving crimes, never questions even to himself the unlikelihood that his parents are still there, if they were ever there in the first place.

The narration also reflects on the plasticity of the brain in its formulation of memories. While memories of childhood are vivid and precise, the narrator struggles to recall events in the present day when he is trying to find his parents. The search for his parents leads Banks into a war zone where he seeks the help of the local police in finding the house. He describes the scene in vague memories:

> My recollection is a little hazy now as to how we got down to the bunker. There were perhaps a few more rooms; I remember we walked along a kind of tunnel, stooping to avoid low beams; here too were sentries, and each time we encountered one of their looming black shapes, I was obliged to press myself right into the rough wall in order to squeeze past. (Ishiguro, *Orphans* 230–31)

This description resembles the recounting of a dream and suggests another traumatic event that plays out at the edge of experience.

Following Malabou's assertion that literature is not fully in a position of neutrality without a neurobiological understanding of trauma, but that it needs to reflect such an understanding, we can see how the narration places the reader in a space where the traumatic event occurs even though the narrating character does not realize their traumatized state. The police abandon Banks, yet he continues into the war zone and finds a wounded Japanese soldier whom he thinks is his old childhood friend Akira. It is obvious to the reader that the chances of running into his childhood friend are remote, especially since as a child Akira did not feel any loyalty towards Japan and might have stayed in Shanghai. Moreover, the Japanese soldier does not initially recognize him and is obviously only pretending to be his old friend by repeating the information that Banks gives him. The soldier also slips up a couple of times, admitting that he has a wife and child in Japan, which does not fit Banks's narrative. As such, the reader's realization comes in part from the literary text, but also from an understanding of the brain that originates outside of the literary text.

The notion of traumatic memories being imagined is further manipulated in the text. Following an attack by Chinese soldiers, Banks finds himself in a hospital with small injuries he does not remember receiving, as if he has forgotten a dream. The reader, vicariously experiencing the trauma, never finds out how the injuries actually occurred. Banks's switch from describing a traumatic, and likely imagined, event into accepting it as a forgotten dream reflects the plasticity of the brain to reshape itself to a former state.

The cerebral wound is healed at the story's conclusion. Banks meets Uncle Phillip again, whom he learns took on a new persona after he succeeded in safely getting young Banks out of Shanghai. The older man reveals the truth about the disappearances of Banks's parents; his father left his mother for a mistress and years later died of typhoid fever; his mother had been kidnapped by a warlord, who made her his concubine. His mother survives, and he visits her in a mental institution in Hong Kong, unsure if she knows who he is. Banks accepts this interpretation of events and there is a hint that the long overdue process of mourning can now take place.

CONCLUSIONS

By drawing on the works of Catherine Malabou and other scholars on trauma, this essay has revealed another layer to the complexity of Ishiguro's writing on the themes of memory and trauma beyond those currently found in critical literature. Central to this analysis has been Malabou's argument

that only literature can capture the extremity of the traumatic experience. That is, a neurobiological approach to literature incorporates the clues given in the texts, illustrating the manifestations of the post-traumatic brain, with knowledge of the workings of the wounded traumatized brain. Moreover, through this approach, we can analyze memories described as guilt-ridden; in the case of *Artist*'s construction of traumatic experience, those experiences go beyond victimization to include "the doing of ill" to others.

This analysis naturally accommodates Malabou's broader approach to literature: that of a plastic reading. According to Alexander Galloway, such an approach to reading does not perform a critique, but "seeks to be a witness to this event and reconstruct the metamorphosis taking place beyond it all" (12). Where this article has borrowed from Malabou's writing to formulate interpretations, the results do not form a *critique* of these Ishiguro works in the traditional sense of *critique*, as the plasticity of the brain suggests there is no one critique. Rather, Malabou's ideas complement current psychological approaches, offering us interpretations at this point in time and illustrating literature's ability to enter these "unthinkable spaces."

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