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Living in the “Enchanted World” of Childhood Fantasy: Mimetism and Literary Illusion in Kazuo Ishiguro’s *When We Were Orphans*

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I

When Kazuo Ishiguro published his fifth novel, *When We Were Orphans* (2000), following his enigmatic and recondite fourth novel, *The Unconsoled* (1995), many readers, who had perhaps expected the author to return to the more realistic style characterizing his first three novels, appeared to feel betrayed and held that Ishiguro had failed to communicate himself with his new novel. In *When We Were Orphans*, the first three parts of the story, set in 1930s London, seem to be based on classic English detective fiction and superficially narrated in a more realistic mode; however, Ishiguro, who refused to return to the familiar territory of his earlier novels, presents a hallucinatory and dreamlike world in an experimental style, similar to that in *Unconsoled*, especially in the latter parts of the novel, which is set in late-1930s Shanghai, during the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-45). As Maya Jaggi astutely observes, the narrative style used in *When We Were Orphans* is a meld of Ishiguro’s previous works: while the narrative prose is “exquisitely restrained and limpid,” just as in his first three novels, the fictional world presented by his characteristic prose is “recondite” and “dreamlike,” evoking his fourth, highly experimental novel (8). This hybrid style of writing prompted starkly contrasting responses from early literary reviewers. While most reviewers positively evaluated the novel, citing, for example, its capacity (Iyer 4) and “surpassing intelligence and taste” (Oates 22), there were seriously dissenting viewpoints represented by Michiko Kakutani and Brian Bouldrey. The former begins her review by calling the novel “disappointing” (E7), and the latter

regards it as “less ambitious” than the author’s previous experimental work. Both the reviewers, in light of the lack of coherence in the novel, problematize and criticize the hybrid style of writing as a style of “patch[ing] together” (Kakutani E7).

Although the hybrid narrative style has not been appreciated by reviewers and critics, Ishiguro uses it to foreground the important themes of the novel, those of “hybridity” and of being an “orphan.” The orphan-detective, Christopher Banks, with his hybrid identity, who was born in the International Settlement of Shanghai—a place representing cosmopolitanism—and feels a pressing need to become more English, continuously observes and mimics the mannerisms of other English people, from reality and fiction to assimilate into the English society. One prominent figure who plays an important role in Banks’ imitation learning is Sherlock Holmes, a fictional detective in Arthur Conan Doyle’s works. Because Banks behaves as if he lives in a fantastic world of classic English detective fiction, where reason and logic always triumph over evil and disorder, the fictional world of the novel reconstructed by his subjective narration begins to work according to the logic and principles of English detective fiction. This fictional world, hovering in a peculiar space “between straight realism and that kind of out-and-out fabulism” (Ishiguro, “Stuck” 16), invites allegorical interpretations and allows the readers to reflect on important aspects of the novel, such as Banks’ traumatized psychology, embodied by the war-torn cityscape of Shanghai, and the author’s criticism of our own ignorance of global inequality and exploitation, which are reflected in the Shanghailanders’ curious ignorance of the war conditions and the sacrifice and suffering of the Chinese. Accordingly, this study analyzes the hybrid narrative style in relationship to the novel’s major motifs, Banks’ hybrid identity and his orphaned condition, and then reveals how the fictional world reconstructed through the first-person perspective is governed by the logic of detective fiction from which he learns Englishness.

II

The story of *When We Were Orphans*, narrated by Banks, a celebrated detective, gives Ishiguro’s readers the first impression of being a conventional English detective fiction. In fact, the story opens with a description of his newly

rented flat in London, which seems to have been carefully chosen to allude to Sherlock Holmes' famous rooms at "No. 221B, Baker Street" (Doyle, *Study* 10); "It was the summer of 1923, the summer I came down from Cambridge, when despite my aunt's wishes that I return to Shropshire, I decided my future lay in the capital and took up a small flat at Number 14b Bedford Gardens in Kensington" (3). Banks, who was born in Shanghai but moved to England after the mysterious disappearance of his parents at the age of ten, becomes a detective to find his parents and boasts his achievement as a private detective solving a number of cases, such as "the Mannering case" (9) and "the Studley Grange business" (31), which have the police shaking their heads.¹⁾

Ahead of him, however, lies the biggest mission, namely a mission to find and rescue his parents. From his investigations, the detective comes to believe that his parents, who had objected to the British opium trade, were kidnapped by villains involved in the trade and are now held captive in a house of the Chinese district in Shanghai. At last, he returns to his birthplace to embark on his lifelong mission in 1937 just after the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War. He undertakes an extended trek all by himself through the slum warrens of the Chinese district, however, he gets caught up in the fighting between China and Japan. When he wanders in and out of ruin, he miraculously finds his old Japanese friend Akira Yamashita, now a Japanese soldier, injured and alone. He saves him from a Chinese mob and finds the house where he absurdly believes that his parents are still held captive. However, there is no trace of his parents. His mission turns into a debacle. After returning to the International Settlement with a sore heart, he finally meets Uncle Philip, an old friend of his parents, now called Yellow Snake. Although the scene is equivalent to the disclosure scene of a detective novel, it is not Banks, or the detective, but Uncle Philip, or the traitor and confederate, who teaches the detective and the readers what really happened to his parents. From Uncle Philip, Banks learns that his father absconded with his mistress and then his mother, who hid the truth from him, was kidnapped by a Chinese warlord Wang Ku and became a concubine as part of a "financial arrangement" (292). More shockingly, Uncle Philip helped the kidnapping to save the child Banks. The detective is now forced to acknowledge "how the world really is" and the fact that he was long living in his "enchanted world" (294), where a detective bravely gets rid of all evil prevailing in the world. Although at first the

story purports to be a classic English detective fiction, Ishiguro betrays his readers' expectations of genre conventions and forces them to see what the narrator cannot see, or the irrationality of the real world.

The “messy hybrid” of the narrative style (Kakutani E7), a style reminiscent of the ostensibly realistic tone and voice characterizing Ishiguro's first three novels, combined with dreamlike elements and an absurdity evoking *Unconsoled*, should be carefully analyzed. More than one critic indicated that the turning point of the narrative modes is in Part Four—titled “Cathay Hotel, Shanghai, 20th September 1937” (151)—when Banks finally returns to Shanghai on his lifelong mission to investigate the mysterious disappearance of his parents, who are presumed to have been kidnapped over 25 years previously.²⁾ As Elke D'hoker suggests, Banks' conviction that his mission to rescue his parents single-handedly is the only way to avert an impending global catastrophe can be read as “a clear sign of the narrator's increasing madness” (163). In Part Four, however, not only the protagonist but also the characters surrounding him seem to foolishly believe that he can find his parents in spite of such a long gap of time and that he is a solitary hero who can save the world from an impending global crisis. One elderly female guest, for example, expresses her gratitude to Banks, saying that all Shanghailanders are “relieved” because he is with them (159). Even in the face of the serious predicament of the Shanghainese, who are exposed to the threat of bombing by Japanese troops, the elite Shanghailanders living in the International Settlement gather as usual in the ballroom of the Palace Hotel for a cocktail party and enjoy watching the conditions of war through “a pair of opera glasses,” as if they were “watching shooting stars” (160). Ishiguro's readers are now wandering around a surrealistic, nightmarish, and implausible world.

At this stage, the readers may realize that the storyline of Banks' childhood drama seems to have become reality. Even before Banks' resolution of the case, Mr. Grayson, a member of the Shanghai Municipal Council, proposes to hold a “welcoming ceremony” to celebrate the release of his parents after their long years of captivity at Jessfield Park (158-59). This ceremony is a key moment in Banks' childhood detective narratives. In Part Two, “London, 15th May 1931” (49), he recalls the regular storyline of the narratives, which “always conclude with a magnificent ceremony held in Jessfield Park, a ceremony that would see [him, his parents, Akira, and a Chinese inspector], one after the other, step out

on to a specially erected stage" "to greet the vast cheering crowds" (111-12). After his father's disappearance, the child Banks and Akira used to play rescue games, and now these narratives of their games have become reality. With each turn of the page, the story reported by the detective himself seems to veer further away from reality, and reality itself seems to melt into his childhood fantasy. In Part Six, Banks finally and dramatically reunites with Akira when wandering around the war-torn Chinese district Chapei. As Barry Lewis aptly points out, this dramatic reunion "can only happen in dreams or in Dickens" (149). However, there is a real possibility that this Japanese soldier is not Akira. Banks may be forcing himself to believe that he is Akira to transform their childhood rescue game into reality. In fact, this Akira-like figure does not recognize Banks or speak English (he seems just to repeat what Banks says). It is unclear, therefore, how Banks is able to recognize him as Akira "with no difficulty" even though he knows Akira only during his distant childhood (249). Moreover Akira's "eyes were closed" and "[h]is face and hair were covered in dust and speckled with blood" (249). For Banks, it is not important that the Japanese soldier really is Akira; rather, it is important that he joins hands with the Akira-like Japanese soldier "to solve the case together," just as in his childhood detective dramas (252). Consequently, after his mission ends in complete failure, Banks can easily deny his previous relationship with the Japanese soldier. When he learns from Japanese Colonel Hasegawa that the soldier perhaps gave information to the enemy, he says to the colonel, "I thought he was a friend of mine from my childhood. But now, I'm not so certain. I'm beginning to see now, many things aren't as I supposed" (277). While the surface detective story at first conjures images of traditional English fictional detectives, such as Sherlock Holmes, the fictional world gradually becomes hallucinatory and metamorphoses into a dreamlike "expressionist" world, where "everything is distorted to reflect" the narrator's emotion (Ishiguro, "January"). As the plot progresses, the reality of the narrative becomes blurred, and the reader wanders off into a labyrinthine reality, in contrast to classic detective fiction, which generally offers its reader a sense of satisfaction with the truth revealed at the end of the book.

In *When We Were Orphans*, Ishiguro actually does not intend to offer realistic portrayals of the historical and cultural settings of the novel even though the novel has more detailed descriptions of real geography, namely, that of the

real London and Shanghai cityscapes, than his previous works, in which there is more emphasis on fictional settings, such as the unnamed Japanese city in *An Artist of the Floating World*, the fictional country house Darlington Hall in *The Remains of the Day*, and the unnamed mid-European city in *Unconsoled*. Ishiguro's descriptions of Shanghai come across as a hodgepodge of images and stereotypes. For example, the Chinese characters are represented as stock figures. One English character comments that a "typical Chinaman" does not "say a word in apology" (181). Even Banks, who seems to be freer from prejudice toward the Chinese and demonstrates sympathy with their suffering, execrates a Chinese driver, calling his actions "typical of you Chinese": "A fool! You told me the house was very near. Now we're lost. . . . You're what I call a proper fool" (226-27). When he learns that he has passed beyond the borders of the International Settlement, a kind of sanctuary in Shanghai, he loses his temper and rebukes his Chinese driver. A similar episode appears in the book *On a Chinese Screen* (1922) by English novelist Somerset Maugham, who visited China in 1919 and 1920 (57; ch. 17). According to Stella Dong, Westerners viewed Chinese people from their position as conquerors, judging them as "morally and mentally inferior people" (31). Ishiguro's description of the Western view of the Chinese characters reflects the actual mentality of Western settlers in Shanghai at that time. Although for most of the novel Banks carefully hides his prejudice against the Chinese, he finally reveals it, as demonstrated above, in his own time of crisis. The world as reconstructed through his narration must therefore be distorted to some extent by his superiority complex as a representative of the Western conquerors.

In addition to stereotypical descriptions, Ishiguro seems to violate the principles of historical realist fiction by interpolating into the story a fabrication about a historical event that occurred during the war. In Part Four, Banks arrives in war-torn Shanghai immediately following an awful event that has taken place, "Bloody Monday" (159), which we can assume to be a reference to the historical events of August 14, 1937, commonly known as "Bloody Saturday." According to historian Bradford A. Lee, the "battle for Shanghai was a horror from the start. On August 14, which came to be called Bloody Saturday, inexperienced Chinese pilots dropped bombs into the crowded streets of the International Settlement and the French Concession, killing almost two thousand civilians and wounding

many more" (36). This event and its name later became popularized by means of a photo entitled "Bloody Saturday," which showed a Chinese infant abandoned on railway tracks. In *Unconsoled*, Ishiguro uses this same technique in establishing the difference between the fictional world and the actual world by presenting a fictional version of *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), starring "Clint Eastwood and Yul Brynner" (93-94). By employing this fabrication about the film, Ishiguro indicates that the fictional world in *Unconsoled* is slightly and uncannily different from the readers' actual world and that he is actually dealing with a kind of dream world. In consideration of this, the distorted historical information in *When We Were Orphans*, although subtler than that in *Unconsoled*, also implies that the novel is not designed to present the historical actuality of Shanghai in a realistic way and is not a condition-of-Shanghai novel purporting to offer a faithful representation of the external world. This technique has been used by postmodern novelists to convert a historical novel into a medium for raising ontological questions (McHale 17). While the traditional historical novel strives to suppress the violations of ontological boundaries between its fictional world and the real world by using historical events and figures without contradictions, postmodern novels foreground the violations to show that the fictional world is governed by fantastic norms (McHale 16-17). In that respect, the distorted information, or the violation in *When We Were Orphans*, suggests that the fictional world, reconstructed by the first-person narration, differs from the readers' actual world and is governed by fantastic norms.

Most of Ishiguro's novels are not presented by omniscient narrators but recounted from the perspective of an unreliable first-person narrator who endlessly recalls his or her past and confesses to uncertainty and haziness concerning his or her memory. Banks, the protagonist of *When We Were Orphans*, is also one such narrator. When recounting his childhood memories, the narrator Banks frankly confesses their haziness, saying "I cannot remember," "I am not sure," or "I cannot be sure today":

For the truth is, over this past year, I have become increasingly preoccupied with my memories, a preoccupation encouraged by the discovery that these memories—of my childhood, of my parents—have lately begun to blur. A number of times recently I have found myself struggling to recall something

that only two or three years ago I believed was ingrained in my mind for ever. I have been obliged to accept, in other words, that with each passing year, my life in Shanghai will grow less distinct, until one day all that will remain will be a few muddled images. (67)

In the above scene in Part Two, Banks, who is now around thirty, confesses that he cannot bring to mind his memories of his Shanghai days, when he was not more than ten years old. However, his distant and fading memories of the past are the main sources of the information through which he is attempting to deduce where his parents are now held captive. Because the materials for the investigation of his vanished parents mainly lie in the past, or his memory of the past, the outcome of this search must be ambiguous and uncertain. Banks' deductive method stands in great contrast to the method of the character he admires, Sherlock Holmes, who only admits things that exist in reality as evidence. Banks' magnifying glass, which he uses to investigate many cases (9, 31, 272), is used as a metaphor for the subjectivity of his perspective. Through his subjectivity, Banks observes and reconstructs the world around him. The stereotypical descriptions and intentional violations of the principle of realism indicate that the novel is intended to foreground the narrator's subjectivity and inner psyche and that the author is utilizing the fictionalized settings of London and Shanghai as reflections of his emotions, such as anxiety, fear, and desire. In fact, Ishiguro reveals in an interview his intention to present the distorted world, which is governed by the logic of the narrator and reflects his feeling and emotion, thereby describing the technique as expressionistic ("January").

Although many critics have considered Part Four of the novel to be the turning point in the shift in the narrative modes, arguing that the war-torn Shanghai in Part Six is, in some way, a representation of the narrator's deep trauma of being orphaned in childhood (D'hoker 163; Wong 87), even in the first three parts, which are set in 1930s London, there are descriptions just as unrealistic as those in the latter parts of the novel. For example, in Part One, "London, 24th July 1930" (1), there is a description of a party held at the Charingworth Hotel, which seems to be "exaggerated" and "unnatural" because it is affected by his feelings at that time:

I am sure this same agitated frame of mind accounts for the fact that when I now think back to that evening, so many aspects seem somewhat exaggerated or unnatural. For instance, when I now try to picture the room, it is uncommonly dark; this despite the wall lamps, the candles on the tables, the chandeliers above us—none of which seem to make any impression on the pervading darkness. The carpet is very thick, so that to move about the room, one is obliged to drag one’s feet, and all around, greying men in black jackets are doing just this, some even pressing forward their shoulders as if walking into a gale. The waiters, too, with their silver trays, lean into conversations at peculiar angles. There are hardly any ladies present, and those one can see seem oddly self-effacing, almost immediately melting from one’s view behind the forest of black evening suits. (12-13)

As this scene suggests, Banks’ “annoyance” greatly affects his observations and transforms his impression of his surroundings into something “exaggerated” and “unnatural.” In fact, the narrator himself indicates that many descriptions in his story are only because of his “impressions” or the “picture” in his mind, which are influenced by his feelings, just as in the above scene. Accordingly, the narrative must be unreliable because Banks, who continuously expresses his anger (13, 28, 103, 241), annoyance, (5, 12, 32, 104, 115, 153, 177, 196, 256), and irritation (6, 27, 29, 78, 138, 153, 177, 271, 286), is far from the ideal detective as a personification of rationality. In addition, in the party scene, there is a man sympathetic to Banks’ childlike idea of “evil” just as in the latter parts of the novel. This man shows up at just the right time, when Banks is growing tired and angry with his friend Osborn, who is ignoring him and conversing with other guests. He shows understanding for Banks’ childish dream of becoming a detective, saying, “a lot of young men dream of becoming detectives” or “One feels so idealistic at your age. Longs to be the great detective of the day. To root out single-handedly all the evil in the world” (15-16). The man’s ideal of a detective who should root out all evil by himself is the same as that of Banks, which is regarded by Ishiguro’s readers as the most unrealistic idea in the novel (D’hoker 163). From the beginning of the novel, therefore, there are unrealistic, or novelistic references. Ishiguro cunningly hides the exact point of this shift or gap in the narrative and leaves unanswered many questions, such as, “Was he really a de-

tective? Was he just a fantasist? Was he really in Shanghai? Why was there this apparent connection between his solving his personal case and his saving the world?" (Ishiguro, "Interview" 6). The narrative, in a hybrid mode, is neither fully realistic nor completely unrealistic, being rather a seamless fusion of these two modes.

III

Although the hybrid narrative style was not appreciated by literary reviewers, it has, in fact, a profound, crucial relationship with important themes of the novel, namely, "hybridity" and being an "orphan." Not only the narrative technique but also the diegetic setting of Shanghai, which represents the hybridity of the West and the East, "[h]alf Oriental, half Occidental; half land, half water; neither a colony nor wholly belonging to China" (Dong 2), is effectively used by the author to enhance each of these two interrelated themes. The modern city of Shanghai was, in fact, an orphaned and hybrid city. It was orphaned in terms of its history and culture. As Yingjin Zhang shows, the popular image of Shanghai in modern Chinese literature and film is that of an "orphan," isolated from other areas of China and its traditions (qtd. in King 262) because first Western and later Japanese settlers transported their own lifestyles and cultures to the new land. It was hybrid and cosmopolitan in terms of its apparent condition at that time, in which various national groups—"English, Chinese, French, American, Japanese, Russian"—lived together in seeming peace (153). In an interview, Ishiguro describes Shanghai in the 1930s as "a prototype for the cosmopolitan city of today, with all these racial groups in their little sectors" ("Art" 50). Banks, born and raised "with a lot of different sorts" in the International Settlement in Shanghai, until his parents disappeared, is bound by his hybrid identity and his obsession with how to "become more English" (76). By setting half of the story in Shanghai, Ishiguro addresses a global issue in the contemporary world concerning whether people who are racially or ethnically different can mingle and live together without abandoning their sense of belonging to their blood, race, community, or nation. Although Banks believes that the International Settlement, his "home village" (256), is an ideal place where people of "every race and class" live together (166), it was, in fact, not such an idyllic place. On the contrary, it origi-

nated during the Opium Wars, which represent the narrow-mindedness and greed of the British Empire. After defeating China, the Western powers and Japan partitioned Shanghai into their own small concessions, as the West had done with the African continent, defining particular areas inhabited by their own citizens. Ishiguro’s readers are expected to see from their vantage point and realize that there are ironic gaps between what the detective innocently believes and the real, darker history the author uses.

As Dong points out, it was “a form of shanghaiing”—the act of drugging or otherwise rendering someone insensible and shipping that person on board a vessel wanting crew hands—that created modern Shanghai (3). Ishiguro sets the story in Shanghai and uses the history and images of the city to effectively dramatize his themes. Just as Banks actually owes his existence and education to dirty money from the opium trade (his father’s company deals with Indian opium and his real benefactor, Wang Ku, is an opium bandit), the modern city and its development were likewise profoundly related to this addictive drug. Britain, which wanted tea, silk, and porcelain from China but had nothing to offer in exchange, set its sights on Indian opium for export in order to prevent silver from flowing into China. However, the Daoguang emperor of the Qing Empire, who feared the outflow of Chinese silver to the British Empire, issued edicts against opium, sending Lin Zexu to Guangdong as a special commissioner to halt the opium trade. These actions incurred the wrath of British merchants and traders, finally triggering the First Opium War in 1839. A flotilla of Her Majesty’s gunboats invaded China, and three years later, the door of China was open to a century of exploitation by outsiders when the Treaty of Nanking was signed on August 29, 1842. According to this treaty, which called for the payment of 21 million silver dollars as an indemnity, the cession of Hong Kong, and a reduced tariff on foreign goods, China was forced to open up five treaty ports to Western trading and financial interests. Among these was Shanghai. Soon after the completion of the British triumph, other Western powers, led by France and the United States, also demanded similar treaties and obtained their own distinct areas in Shanghai. Although Banks idealizes the International Settlement, where people from various countries live together in seeming peace, the reality was far more complex than he believes. The birth and development of the International Settlement were closely associated with the British opium trade in China. Moreover, peace could

be maintained because the Shanghailanders never tried to mix each other but “rigidly maintain[ed] their ‘home’ identities” and “stayed resolutely apart” (Dong 224). The serious gap between the idealized picture Banks has and the reality is apparent.

The historical background of Shanghai is significant to understand the novel. Banks’ parents are somewhat involved in the British opium trade. While his father works at a “great trading company,” called Morganbrook and Byatt (24), which has wreaked “untold misery and degradation” on China by “importing Indian opium” into the country (60), his mother, although her life and existence owe much to the company “whose activities she ha[s] identified as an evil to be scourged” (68), campaigns against the British opium trade, driven by a philanthropic ideal. Along with this fictional trading company, another company in the novel appears to draw its name from history: the Jardine Matheson Company, whose proprietors, William Jardine and James Matheson, were known as the most vociferous agitators for the First Opium War. For example, the child Banks and his friend Akira often play by the canal behind “some storehouses belonging to the Jardine Matheson Company” (98), and the adult Banks is invited out to enjoy the nightlife in Shanghai (166) or to dinner (208) by the chairman of Jardine Matheson, Mr. Keswick. There is an episode that indicates Ishiguro conducted significant research before writing the novel. In the first hardcover edition of the novel, published by the London publisher Faber and Faber in 2000, the name of the fictional trading company for which Banks’ father works was different from the name given in the later paperback editions or the North-American edition published by the American publisher Alfred A. Knopf. The company name was Butterfield and Swire in the former publication (24), which was the name of a real company, now called John Swire and Sons. According to Cahal Milmo, the company protested that they “were never opium importers” and requested that the publishers change the name of the company in subsequent editions of the novel (5). Ishiguro seemed not to realize that the company he used in his work was still in existence. At first Banks believes the opium trade, led by British trading companies such as Butterfield and Swire or Jardine Matheson, to be the reason why his parents have disappeared, however, he later realizes that he has long gained a financial benefit indirectly from the hideous trade. Ishiguro highlights the indisputable connection between the prosperity of the

British Empire, exhibited by Banks' fashionable life in London high society and the sacrifice of its colonies, creating contrasting settings of London and the semicolonial International Settlement of Shanghai. Just as Banks' sheltered childhood and position in London high society were made possible by dishonest profits from the opium trade, the protected and privileged existence of the International Settlement came at the expense of widespread opium addiction and poverty among the Chinese population.

Ishiguro skillfully uses the diegetic setting of Shanghai, an orphaned and cosmopolitan city, to explore the themes of being an "orphan" and "hybridity." The Shanghai-born and English-raised Banks is both an "orphan" and a "hybrid," and he has been striving to "behav[e] sufficiently like an Englishman" since his childhood (73). It is his Japanese friend Akira who initially makes him aware of the possibility that he is "not enough [of an] Englishman" (72). According to Akira's childlike logic, Banks' parents sometimes stop talking as a way of expressing discontent with their son, who cannot behave sufficiently like an Englishman. Neither the child Banks nor his Japanese friend can comprehend the marital discord between Banks' parents, which, in fact, comes from their different opinions about the opium trade: while his father tries to justify his work and insists that they would "never get back to England" and would be "simply stranded" if he quit his job (86), his mother, who campaigns against the British export of opium to China, harshly criticizes him, saying, "Are you not ashamed to be in the service of such a company? How can your conscience rest while you owe your existence to such ungodly wealth?" (70). Believing Akira's explanation for his parents' behavior, Banks continuously tries to emulate the English people surrounding him and mingle with them so as not to be labeled as a strange person. For example, the child Banks asks his beloved father figure, Uncle Philip, whether he would allow him to observe and mimic his behavior as a model of the perfect Englishman:

'So you want to be more English. Well, well, Puffin. So what are we to do about it?'

'I wondered, if it's all right, sir, if you didn't awfully mind. I wondered if I might copy you sometimes.'

'Copy me?'

‘Yes, sir. Just sometimes. Just so that I learn to do things the English way.’
(77)

Even though his parents are English and he is also ethnically English, Banks cannot call himself English with confidence because he was raised as “a mongrel,” surrounded by people from other countries in Shanghai (76). For him, being English does not come from biological ancestry but is largely learned behavior.

Banks, who feels a pressing need to become more English to ease the strained relationship between his parents, tries to compensate for the presumed imperfection of his Englishness by observing and copying the behaviors of other English people. During his days in Shanghai, for example, the child Banks happily receives his family’s guests, the employees of Morganbrook and Byatt, who are newly arrived in Shanghai, because he can “study closely and emulate” them (52). For the child Banks, these young Englishmen from Britain are figures who remind him of “the air of the English lanes and meadows . . . from *The Wind in the Willows*” or “the foggy streets of the Conan Doyle mysteries” (52). He sees in the appearance and behavior of those Englishmen something that he has learned from English literature such as Kenneth Grahame’s *The Wind in the Willows* (1908) and Conan Doyle’s detective novels and stories. After moving to England, the teenage Banks continues to analyze and mimic the mannerisms of other English people. For example, he proudly recalls that when he moved to England and transferred to an English public school, St. Dunstan’s, he could “observ[e] a mannerism many of the boys adopted” and “reproduc[e] this mannerism” with “sufficient expertise”—a mannerism “of tucking the right hand into a waistcoat pocket and moving the left shoulder up and down in a kind of shrug to underline certain of their remarks” so that no one “noticed anything odd or thought to make fun” of his behavior (7). Perhaps it is Banks’ obsession with observing and reproducing the mannerisms of the English people around him that allows others to detect his strangeness. Contrary to his own account, which states that “my own memory is that I blended perfectly into English school life” (7), his old school friend Osborn reminds him that he was “such an odd bird at school” and implies that he behaved differently from his classmates (5). Although he imitates other Englishmen, Banks is perceived as an alien in England; he differs from those who were born and raised there. The subtle differences between Banks and

his other English classmates evoke Homi K. Bhabha’s remarks about the difference between the English and the colonized mimic, whom he describes as “*a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*” (86).

Banks’ strangeness and alienage, or his imperfect Englishness, can be discerned also in his “overformal English” (Iyer 4). According to Philip Hensher, Banks rarely uses phrasal verbs, which Hensher regards as “the heart of English” but something that is difficult to learn for nonnative speakers of English (“It’s” 11). This avoidance of phrasal verbs makes Banks’ narrative style more formal, and the “supposedly posh narrator” sounds like Leonard Bast in E. M. Forster’s *Howards End* (1910) (Hensher, “School” 32). Although Hensher criticizes Banks’ avoidance of phrasal verbs as a major problem in the novel (“It’s” 11), James Wood astutely points out that the artificiality of Banks’ language reveals his desperate attempt to “upholster his own artificiality” (46). In fact, Banks is a character similar to Leonard Bast, who strives to educate himself by reading English literary classics and take a step up the social ladder. Banks is not a child from an upper-crust family who can afford to put their son in public school like his schoolmates. Because he has learned Englishness mainly from his reading of English literature, the fictional world reconstructed by his narration “seems to have been borrowed from an English novel”:

Christopher’s London milieu is almost entirely stereotypical, almost generic, like the names of the places and people in his life: his boarding school, he tells us, was St. Dunstan’s, he goes to the Charingworth Club, he knows Colonel Chamberlain and Canon Moorly, he meets old school chums called Osbourne and Robert Thornton-Browne, he visits the Royal Geographical Society “to hear H. L. Mortimer deliver his lecture.” (Wood 46-47)

Banks performs as if he is a fictional character in English literature, from which he learns Englishness, and he also imitates the narrative voice in those writings.³⁾ His voice is thus no unique expression of personal genius but a bookish imitation of models, recalling Roland Barthes’ characterization of a text as “a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash” (146).

The flaw of Banks’ English identity is sometimes covered by the surround-

ings. It is not enough for him to reproduce the mannerisms of other English people to become more English. He also constantly surrounds himself with objects that evoke an English atmosphere. For instance, his new flat in London, which he rents soon after he graduates from Cambridge, contains “an ageing sofa,” “two snug armchairs,” “an antique sideboard,” and “an oak bookcase filled with crumbling encyclopaedias,” and he receives satisfaction from these objects because they evoke “an unhurried Victorian past” (3). As soon as he settles in, he rushes to acquire “a Queen Anne tea service, several packets of fine teas, and a large tin of biscuits” to win his visitors’ approval (3). Through the interior furnishings of his flat, Banks expresses a psychological attachment to the good old days of the Victorian age, when his beloved mother, “a beauty in an older, Victorian tradition,” was born and raised (56). In a discussion of the growing interest in the interior among the bourgeoisie during the Victorian period, when the genre of detective fiction appeared, Walter Benjamin noted that “[t]o live means to leave traces” in the interior; in other words, “[t]he traces of the occupant also leave their impression on the interior” and detectives follow these traces (155). In *When We Were Orphans*, the traces that remind visitors of the atmosphere of the Victorian age are deliberately constructed by the occupant of the flat, who is highly conscious of his imperfection in his lack of Englishness and who tries to disguise through his English-style furniture the fear that he might be recognized as an alien in England.

It is obvious that the targets whom Banks observes and imitates range from the real English people around him to fictional English characters in English literature. The child Banks seems to favor Grahame’s *The Wind in the Willows*, Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes series (52), and Walter Scott’s *Ivanhoe* (22), which serve him as textbooks on Englishness. For the child Banks, who did not learn about England through any firsthand experience, Englishmen from reality and from fiction act as role models of proper Englishness. Even in the process of building his professional career as a detective, Banks “scrutinis[es] the careers of various detectives who had established their names” (21), trying to follow in the footsteps of both real and fictional detectives. One prominent figure who plays an important role in Banks’ imitation learning is not a real person in the world of the novel; rather, it is Sherlock Holmes, the famous fictional sleuth in Conan Doyle’s detective fiction. Banks’ use of the term “private consultant” to describe

his ambitions for himself directly invokes Holmes’ words (15): in *A Study in Scarlet* (1887), the story that marks Holmes’ first appearance, the character boasts to Watson that he is the world’s only private “consulting detective” (17). As the narrator Banks indeed confesses that he had “aspirations to be a ‘Sherlock’” when he was a schoolboy (10), he examines crime scenes using the Holmesian method, that is, with a magnifying glass—a trademark of the famous private eye. For him, Holmes is the typical fashionable English detective found in popular detective mysteries as well as a representative of Englishness. In other words, becoming a detective like Holmes is equivalent to becoming more English. In Benedict Anderson’s sense, Banks imagines belonging to the community and the nation through English novels; therefore, he is an orphan who is nurtured by English literature.

IV

Because Banks’ investigative method owes much to his favorite English detective fiction, which functions as his textbook on Englishness, he appears to work according to the same logic as that found in such fiction. In an interview, Ishiguro admits that this novel was inspired by his discovery of “how different the English [detective] novels are from the American hard-boiled tradition of an urban purgatory” (qtd. in Mackenzie). The former presents an innocent world in which some things have gone wrong, such as a murder or a theft, and a detective from outside the community intervenes and magically reorders everything, making the community beautiful again. In classic English detective novels and stories, the “opaque complexity of modern city life is represented by crime” (Williams 227), and evil and corruption are reflected as wickedness and malevolence in individual humans, such as Dr. Moriarty in Conan Doyle’s works. Banks seems to behave as if he lives in this enchanted world of the classic English detective novels that flourished between the World Wars. For instance, he solves “the mystery of Charles Emery’s death” and receives “the deep gratitude” from not only the Emery family but also the whole community of the village Shackton (36). The detective appears to think that the various evils prevailing everywhere in the world can be traced to a lone murderer who can be uncovered by a genius just as the English detective novel of the golden age continued to deal with per-

sonal crimes even after the Great War. Although he promotes his intention to “combat evil—in particular, evil of the insidious, furtive kind” (21), this evil is always manifested only in the form of a murderer. In Part Three, “London, 12th April 1937” (125), when Banks finally decides to return to Shanghai to embark on the investigation of his parents’ case, he says that he intends to “slay the serpent,” quoting a police inspector’s words (145). This childlike ideal reveals Banks’ unintelligent perception of the logic of evil, which must be represented by uncomplicated crimes such as murder or abduction. However, the cause of the war actually lies in collective greed and folly, rather than individual crimes. Although Banks attempts to end the growing turmoil around the world on the eve of the World War II, he is obviously ignorant of the political complexity of Britain’s position in the Far East and cannot contribute to a discussion of “how the balance of power might be maintained” (138), in sharp contrast to Sir Cecil Medhurst, who is instrumental in building the League of Nations (42). Even when he returns to Shanghai to investigate his parents’ case and prevent war, he only investigates “three bodies” discovered in a “dark, creaking boathouse” (165). It is obvious that he believes that solving a murder case will lead to peace and tries to avert a global catastrophe with anachronistic and novelistic logic while his world is moving toward the World War II.

Just as the detective fiction of the golden age, which distracted readers from the social and economic malaise of unemployment, inflation, and economic depression after the Great War, has been characterized as “escape literature” (Auden 158), Banks finds a similar sanctuary in the cozy world of these fictional works, where reason and logic always triumph over evil and disorder. His escapism can be clearly found in his view of Uncle Philip: although he knows that Uncle Philip is a traitor who must have been closely involved in his mother’s disappearance, the child Banks forgets this fact and often “enact[s] again, in [his] imagination, all [their] old detective dramas” in just the way he and Akira had done in Shanghai (11). Even now that he is grown up, the adult Banks never tries to find Uncle Philip and comments that he “remain[s] a less tangible entity” in his memory (63).

Admiring detective writing, Banks inherits from those works not only their logic but also their perspective on non-European worlds. The portrayal of the Chinese district, described as a den of vice, indicates that the narrator shares the

same views toward non-European societies as those found in detective stories written during the Victorian and Edwardian periods, when the British Empire reached its imperial peak and gradually declined. For instance, Banks believes that his parents are held captive in Chapei, a Chinese district in Shanghai, after having been kidnapped by Chinese villains involved in the opium trade, because they made "a courageous stand" against the opium trade (286). Behind his belief, there lies the British Self as enlightened and sophisticated, in polar opposition to the Chinese Other, which is infantile and barbarous. Classic English detective fiction described the worlds of non-Europeans as sources of evil and native people as stock figures of villainy. According to Tsuneo Masaki, of the four novels and 56 short stories in the Holmes canon, 10 stories involve the relationship between the British Empire and non-European settings, such as India, Australia, Southeast Asia, or Africa (227-30). Those locations play a crucial role in these stories. A poison or an endemic disease that leads to murder or death usually comes from those regions. In "The Adventure of the Dying Detective" (1913), for instance, the communicable illness that Holmes appears to have contracted while investigating a case at Rotherhithe is referred to as "a coolie disease from Sumatra" (430), and he warns Watson, "[t]here are many problems of disease, many strange pathological possibilities, in the East" (431). Just as those stories portrayed the East as a place of danger, the child Banks likewise thinks that in the Chinese areas of Shanghai, there are "all manner of ghastly diseases, filth and evil men," compared with "the relative safety of the International Settlement" (54). In addition, English people in high society in London believe with oddly assured confidence that the catastrophic situation that led to the World War II stemmed from local problems in Shanghai. One character asserts that the "poison" in Shanghai is spreading across the world, "right through [Western] civilization" (138). In other words, evil is brought into the British Empire from the outside. Banks thus endeavors to "slay the serpent" in defense of the empire in Shanghai, where the "heart of the serpent" (136) or "the eye of the storm" (138) can be found, just as Holmes tirelessly fights against the foreign menace threatening to corrupt metropolitan London. In Conan Doyle's works, which Edward W. Said relegates to "the genre of adventure-imperialism" (188), Holmes plays a crucial role as an antigen against the fatal infection coming from the colonial. This inflection erupts in crime in the metropolis. The xenophobic view that

Banks shares with the other characters in *When We Were Orphans* evokes that of Conan Doyle's works, reflecting the British anxiety for otherness, which arises from its colonial connections.

At first, Ishiguro's readers are able to pinpoint the absurdity of Banks' words and actions, which essentially accord with the logic of English detective fiction. This confusion between reality and fantasy implies the narrator's traumatized psychology. Colin McGinn explains that some children who are exposed to intolerable situations such as "intentional abuse, abject poverty, conditions of war" often perceive the real world as unwanted and prefer an imaginary world; "He may well become 'fixated' on his imagination, unable to detach his beliefs from the wished-for imaginary world and attach them to the perceived real world. A kind of 'reality inversion' occurs" (125-26). The orphaned Banks, traumatized by the disappearance of his parents, remains "confused about the difference between reality and imagination" like many traumatized children to escape from the harsh world of reality (McGinn 125-26). With each turn of the page, however, Ishiguro's readers gradually become aware that the fictional world has been metamorphosed into an implausible world, where the narrator's childhood make-believe becomes a reality and that now everyone in the novel behave according to the narrator's novelistic logic. In fact, Ishiguro has admitted that he has attempted to "paint a picture according to what the world would look like according to someone's crazy logic": "a lot of the time the world actually adopts the craziness of his logic. It's not full of people doing surprised double takes when he comes out with certain statements. On the contrary, they go along with it. They all seem to support these weird notions" ("January").

Ishiguro presents what happens when the narrator's childhood fantasies intrude into reality. At first, the intrusion of fantasy seems to allow Banks to embark on his mission just as he and Akira always dreamed. However, his long-surviving fantasies are finally destroyed by the intrusion of the reality at the end of Part Six, the penultimate chapter. After failing in his mission to rescue his parents, Banks meets Uncle Philip and learns from him that his long-held belief regarding the disappearance of his father was a false idea planted by his mother and Uncle Philip:

'My conjecture has been that my father made a stand, a courageous stand,

against his own employers concerning the profits from the opium trade of those years. In doing so, I supposed he set himself against enormous interests, and was thus removed.'

Uncle Philip nodded. 'I'd supposed you believed something like that. Your mother and I discussed carefully what to have you believe. . . . So we were successful. The truth, I'm afraid, Puffin, was much more prosaic. Your father ran off one day with his mistress. He lived with her in Hong Kong for a year, a woman called Elizabeth Cornwallis. . . . They were a scandal, and in the end they had to rush off to Malacca or some such place. Then he got typhoid and died, in Singapore.' (286)

Banks believed his parents were heroes actively involved in the anti-opium campaign, however, the truth is that his father abandoned them to live with his mistress. When his mother came to know the fact, she lied to him by saying that "in a city like this, from time to time, people do get kidnapped. In fact it happens rather often, and a lot of the time . . . the people come back perfectly safely" and that "the city's very best detectives have been assigned to the case" of his father (108). Believing innocently in his mother's words, Banks continues to make a desperate and impossible attempt to find and rescue his parents. Uncle Philip then goes on to explain the truth of Banks' mother; one day she was forced to become "a concubine" of Wang Ku in return for the financial support of her son (291). According to Uncle Philip, the Chinese warlord, who dealt with British trading companies such as Morganbrook and Byatt and Jardine Matheson, was "one of the more powerful of these bandit lords" (289), such that no one, not even the police, could protect her against his will (291). Here, Banks' as well as English detective fiction's faith that justice will always be done is completely destroyed. Owing to his mother's sacrifice and the drug warlord, Banks has long been protected from a harsh reality and able to live in his own "enchanted world" of childhood fantasies and detective fiction (294).

Ishiguro parodies the conventions of classic detective novel and criticizes its escapist aspect. Unlike the classic detective, Banks is not able to solve the mystery. Moreover, Uncle Philip scorns the position and role of detectives in the actual world:

'But now do you see how the world really is? You see what made possible your comfortable life in England? How you were able to become a celebrated detective? A detective! What good is that to anyone? Stolen jewels, aristocrats murdered for their inheritance. Do you suppose that's all there is to contend with? Your mother, she wanted you to live in your enchanted world for ever. But it's impossible. In the end it has to shatter. It's a miracle it survived so long for you.' (294)

When Banks learns the alarming facts from Uncle Philip that detectives are nothing before the worldwide contamination, he has "an odd feeling" that "behind [his] back the darkness had grown and grown, so that now a vast black space had opened up there" (290). This darkness symbolically means the unknown depths of the real, complicated world, which the narrator cannot comprehend. Ishiguro, while presenting a fictional world that appears to work in accordance with the logic of detective fiction, finally shatters the narrator's supposed reality and implies the complicated reality of the world that is in stark contrast to Banks' as well as a classic detective fiction's simplified vision of it. In that respect, Ishiguro's use of detective plot is similar to that of postmodern novelists who use it "to express not order but the irrationality of both the surface of the world and of its deep structures" (Waugh 83).

While the ending of the classic detective novel offers the triumph of reason, logic, and order over evil and disorder, that of *When We Were Orphans* presents prevailing evil. Uncle Philip, who had launched the anti-opium campaign with Banks' mother, realized that their action was useless because British people "not only liked the profits very much" but "actually *wanted* the Chinese to be useless" to make the natives "unable to govern themselves properly" (288). By doing so, "the country could be run virtually like a colony, but with none of the usual obligations" (288). After realizing his scheme to appeal to British people's conscience as naive, Uncle Philip began to collaborate with Wang Ku to stop the opium trade until it was finally abolished by Chiang Kai-shek's government. After this abolishment, however, he saw that nothing had changed; the opium trade was now run by the Chinese government itself, with "[m]ore addicts than ever" (293). Moreover, the detective-protagonist Banks also involves himself in crimes even though it is not his intention. His career of detective and position in Lon-

don high society were possible only due to the financial support from the Chinese warlord and opium trade. Ishiguro blurs the borders between Britain and China, West and East, and the innocent, sophisticated world and that of crime, which the English detective novel of the golden age presupposed. By deconstructing the formula of classic detective fiction, Ishiguro tries to foreground the chaotic and unpredictable nature of the contemporary world, where evil is no longer local and private like a murder and a theft but it is now global and public.

V

Ishiguro's *When We Were Orphans* is written with the hybrid style and hovers in a peculiar space “between straight realism and that kind of out-and-out fabulism” (Ishiguro, “Stuck” 16), so that it invites allegorical interpretations and allows the readers to reflect on important aspects of the novel, such as Banks' traumatized psychology, embodied by the war-torn cityscape of Shanghai, and the author's criticism of our own ignorance of global inequality and exploitation, which are reflected in the Shanghailanders' curious ignorance of the war conditions and the sacrifice and suffering of the Chinese. For the Shanghailanders, who never acknowledge the suffering of the Chinese as being part of their own reality, seeing the conditions of war from their vantage point is the same as watching “a cricket match” (159). Setting half of the novel in cosmopolitan Shanghai, Ishiguro explores the collision between the West and the East, the distance separating “us” from “them” and “our reality” from “their reality,” and fiction and reality. The above-mentioned party scene might be read as the most unrealistic, implausible one, however, the elite Shanghailanders, who treat “with such contempt the suffering of their Chinese neighbours” as merely a fire on the other side of the river (in fact, the battlefield is on the other side of a canal), seem to mirror, in a peculiar way, contemporary people in the First World, who safely and cozily watch predicaments in the Third World on television and cannot perceive them as part of their own reality (162). Although the story is set in the early 20th century and not the contemporary world, Ishiguro implies that it is the very ignorance and blindness toward the predicaments of others, exhibited by the elite Shanghailanders, that maintains the community of the International Settlement and perhaps our world.

[Notes]

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- 1) Hélène Machinal points out that Banks' reference to other undocumented investigations is "another Holmesian trait" (81). For the more detailed, comparative analysis between Banks and Holmes, see Machinal 80-84.
 - 2) For example, Barry Lewis suggests that "the atmosphere of the book changes" around Part Four (148).
 - 3) Jean-Pierre Naugrette also points out that Banks behaves as if he was a character in Victorian novels, such as *David Copperfield* (1849-50), *Great Expectations* (1860-61), and *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) (71).

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(Graduate Student)

SUMMARY

Living in the “Enchanted World” of Childhood Fantasy:
Mimetism and Literary Illusion in Kazuo Ishiguro’s *When We Were Orphans*

Ayaka NAKAJIMA

Kazuo Ishiguro’s fifth novel *When We Were Orphans* (2000) is a story narrated by Christopher Banks, a celebrated detective in London high society, and gives his readers the first impression that the story is a conventional English detective fiction. However, Ishiguro cunningly betrays his readers’ expectations of genre conventions and metamorphoses the fictional world into a hallucinatory and dreamlike world. The narrative style is a hybrid style which combines the ostensibly realistic tone characterizing Ishiguro’s first three novels with dreamlike elements that evoke his fourth novel, *The Unconsoled* (1995). Although the hybrid style of writing has been harshly criticized by literary critics for its lack of coherence, Ishiguro uses it to foreground the novel’s central themes, those of “hybridity” and of being an “orphan.” The orphan-detective Banks with his hybrid identity, who was born in the International Settlement of Shanghai and feels a pressing need to become more English, continuously observes and mimics the mannerisms of other English people, from reality and from fiction. One prominent figure who plays an important role in his imitation learning is Sherlock Holmes. Because Banks behaves as if he lives in a fantasy world of classic English detective fiction where reason and logic always triumph over evil and disorder, the fictional world of the novel, reconstructed by his subjective narration, begins to work according to its logic and principle. This diegetic world, hovering in a peculiar space “between straight realism and that kind of out-and-out fabulism” (Ishiguro, “Stuck” 16), invites allegorical interpretations and allows readers to reflect on important aspects of the novel, such as Banks’s traumatized psychology caused by the past experience of being an orphan, and the author’s criticism of our own blindness and ignorance of global inequality and exploitation. Accordingly, the study analyzes the hybrid narrative style in relation to the novel’s major themes and also reveals how the fictional world is governed by the logic of classic English detective fiction from which he learns Englishness.