

**How Banks' "Enchanted World" Is Constituted:
Ishiguro's Narrative Techniques for Challenging the British
Bildungsroman and Detective Novels in *When We Were
Orphans*¹**

バンクスの「魔法がかけられた世界」はいかに構成されて
いるか:『わたしたちが孤児だったころ』における教養小説
と探偵小説に挑戦するイシグロの語りの技法

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Abstract

Kazuo Ishiguro's *When We Were Orphans* (2000) has been regarded as a hybrid of his previous four novels. Among seven parts, in the first three, set in 1930s London, Christopher Banks, a private detective, recounts his previous life and career, particularly his childhood in Shanghai. Several features in these parts, such as the seemingly realistic settings, the form of memoir, Banks' poised voice, and the historical details behind his personal life, may remind readers of Ishiguro's first three novels. However, in the middle parts, Banks' narrative becomes irrational after he returns to Shanghai in 1937 to rescue his parents. These parts bear some resemblance to Ishiguro's fourth novel, *The Unconsoled* (1995). However, the fictional world of *When We Were Orphans*, which hovers between the seemingly realistic worlds of his first three novels and the dreamlike one of *The Unconsoled*, has been denounced for lacking coherence. This study, focusing on Ishiguro's narrative techniques, discusses *When We Were Orphans* as his challenge to British detective novels and the *Bildungsroman*, especially written during the Victorian era, by illuminating that some implausible descriptions in the novel are partly based on elements and conventions of these precursory novels rather than on social and cultural norms of London or Shanghai in the early 20th century.

Keywords / キーワード Kazuo Ishiguro, *When We Were Orphans*, the *Bildungsroman*, detective novels / カズオ・イシグロ、『わたしたちが孤児だったころ』、教養小説、探偵小説

1. Introduction

Kazuo Ishiguro's fifth novel, *When We Were Orphans* (2000), has been regarded as a hybrid of his previous four novels (Jaggi, 2000; D'hoker, 2008; Fonioková, 2015). Among seven parts, in the first three, set in 1930s London, Christopher Banks, a private detective, recounts his previous life, focusing on his childhood in Shanghai, against the historical backdrop of Britain and its semicolonial relationship with China in the early 20th century. Several features in them, such as the seemingly realistic settings, the form of memoir, Banks' poised voice, and the historical details behind his personal life, may remind readers of Ishiguro's first three novels. However, in the middle parts, Banks' narrative becomes irrational after he returns to Shanghai to rescue his parents following the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945). As Brian Finney (2006) observes, in these parts, “the improbable becomes the norm,” or more precisely, the narrative world pivots on the logic of Banks' “wish-fulfillment” (p. 142). This bears some resemblance to the dreamlike world of Ishiguro's fourth novel, *The Unconsoled* (1995). Consequently, one critic wonders whether Banks is “writing his memoirs from the day-room of some sort of mental institution” (McNett, 2000). However, Ishiguro never confirms this possibility. At the end of Part 6, he suddenly makes Banks' accounts plausible again. By “blending fact and fantasy into a seamless, hallucinatory whole” (Tonkin, 2000, p. 9), he creates a fictional world that is neither fully realistic nor completely fantastical, raising certain questions, such as “Was [Banks] really a detective?,” “Was he just a fantasist?,” and “Was he really in Shanghai?” (Shaffer, 2001, p. 6).

This fictional world, which hovers between the seemingly realistic worlds of Ishiguro's first three novels and the dreamlike one of *The Unconsoled*, has been denounced for lacking coherence (Kakutani, 2000; McNett, 2000; Whitaker, 2000). Although “[t]he precise purpose behind [*When We Were Orphans*] is never easy to pinpoint” (Barrow, 2000, p. 44), it is not merely to recycle his previous novels as some believed. However, most studies bypassed this controversial matter, instead devoting their efforts to exploring Banks' traumatized psyche and nostalgic memories of his childhood, the historical backdrop, and Ishiguro's biographical elements.² They carefully examined the contents of the novel, but disregarded the form, the way Ishiguro represents these subjects.

There are several studies which addressed this central proposition by discussing the “improbable” narrative world as Ishiguro's challenge to detective novels (Spark, 2008; Machinal, 2009; Rajtak, 2014). However, they overlooked another literary genre whose tradition Ishiguro explores along with that of detective novels: the *Bildungsroman*.³

This study, focusing on Ishiguro's narrative techniques, discusses *When We Were Orphans* as his challenge to British detective novels and the *Bildungsroman*, especially written during the Victorian era, by illuminating that some “improbable” descriptions are partly based on “elements and . . . traditions of past literature,” rather than on the “social and cultural norms” of London or Shanghai in the early 20th century (Iser, 1978/1994, p. 79).

2. Banks' Pseudo-Bildungsroman

Ishiguro's characterization of Banks as an orphan and a detective indicates two literary traditions that he investigates in *When We Were Orphans*: the British *Bildungsroman* and detective novels. While the former often features orphans as protagonists, traces their growth, and gradually uncovers the mysteries of their origins, as in Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist* (1837–1839) and Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), the latter highlights a detective's investigation to discover the identities of perpetrators of crimes. Ishiguro fuses the two traditions, describing Banks' personal developments and attempts to resolve his orphaned condition by solving the mystery of his parents' disappearance.

On first glance, among all seven parts, the first three describing Banks' successful integration into society seem to serve as his *Bildungsroman*. In them, he recalls that after his parents mysteriously disappeared in Shanghai when he was ten years old, he was dispatched to England, where he received his education at St. Dunstan's and the University of Cambridge. Despite his disadvantage that he does not have "any close kin in England except [his] aunt," by the diegetic present of Part 1, July 1930, Banks, around 30, fulfilled his childhood dream to "be a 'Sherlock,'" successfully establishing good reputation as "the most brilliant investigative mind in England" (pp. 6, 10, 33).⁴ In the same fashion as autobiographical narrators in the Victorian *Bildungsroman*, such as *Jane Eyre* and Dickens' *David Copperfield* (1849–1850), Banks describes in these parts how he has adjusted to society, by demonstrating his intellectual, social, and moral developments.

To demonstrate his acquired intellectual ability, Banks begins the story by recounting his memory of "the summer of 1923," when he "came down from Cambridge" (p. 3). When James Osborn, an old peer at St. Dunstan's, visited his flat, they enjoyed "discussing the activities of the workers' unions," "German philosophy," and "poetry" (p. 4). This episode illustrates Banks' "intellectual prowess," which must have contributed a foundation for the later successes in his profession (p. 4). In fact, he boasts of solving "many challenging cases" (pp. 29–30), explaining, for example, that "the conclusion of the Mannering case" represents his "first public triumph" and signifies "the self-evident brilliance of [his] investigation" (pp. 19–20). Although he never explains the details, the inkling of his undocumented cases, which H el ene Machinal (2009) regards as a "Holmesian trait" (p. 81), are indicative of his professional achievements.

Additionally, Banks demonstrates his social and personal developments. In Part 1, he remembers how he "could not bring [himself] to leave Osbourne's side" and displayed "the awkwardness" when he debuted in London society (pp. 12, 18). However, as he attended "other smart social events on a fairly regular basis," his "manner at these events grew steadily more assured," and before long, he "came to occupy a place within one of the fashionable London 'sets'" (p. 18). Here, the narrator describes his successful adaptation to society, whereas elsewhere in the same part, he tries to impress his spiritual development as well. In his critical observation of his old "foolish arrogance," "smugness," and "inconsideration" from his current perspective (pp. 11, 20, 23), he foregrounds the assumed difference between the narrating, sophisticated Banks and the narrated, naïve Banks, which are presumed to be separated by "difference in age and experience that authorizes the

former to treat the latter with a sort of condescending or ironic superiority” (Genette, 1972/1995, p. 252).

Banks’ characteristic narration that emphasizes “an ironic distance between the perspectives of narrator and protagonist” is “a defining feature of the *Bildungsroman*” (Felski, 1989, p. 136). In classic texts of the genre, such as *David Copperfield*, autobiographical narrators review their own lives from a fully matured perspective. From the privileged position of knowing the entirety of his life history, the narrating David often intervenes in the course of the story, and using prolepsis, evokes “in advance an event that will take place later” (Genette, 1972/1995, p. 40). For instance, when he remembers his visit to the house of Peggotty’s brother, he makes an ominous prediction. That is, when he returned home, he found that his mother had married Mr. Murdstone, his later tormentor: “It touches me nearly now . . . to recollect how eager I was to leave my happy home; to think how little I suspected what I did leave for ever” (Dickens, 1849–1850/2008a, p. 26). In a similar way as David, in the first three parts, Banks employs this technique to foreground his act of narration. When he remembers a party held at the Charingworth Club where he first met Sarah Hemmings, he says, “the evening turned out to be a major disappointment—even if, as you will presently see, it was to prove particularly significant for quite other reasons” (p. 12). Here, he not only explains that he was disappointed to learn that “detectives tend not to participate in society gatherings” but also foretells his first encounter with his secret love interest (p. 12). This gives readers the false impression that Banks’ perspective is, like David’s, broad enough to control the narrative of his life history.

However, while David recounts his entire life from a panoramic viewpoint and provides a sense of control to his own story, Banks narrates the early parts in the middle of his life, being oblivious to what awaits him in the future. In this sense, Ishiguro places Banks in a totally different situation from David and other autobiographical narrators in the traditional *Bildungsroman* to express “the chaos and confusion” of life (Wachtel, 1996/1997, p. 30). In an interview conducted in 1995, he confesses that he came to realize that life is “more complicated” and “chaotic” than previously expressed in his first three novels, or in *David Copperfield*, which proceeds “chronologically” from David’s birth “through childhood to adulthood” (Wachtel, 1996/1997, pp. 30–31). To express the unpredictability of life, not only at the level of plot but also at the level of narration, he undermines Banks’ previous statements and speculations in the later parts of *When We Were Orphans* after he describes in the early parts how he has accustomed himself to London society and become a successful detective, using the narrative technique and plots frequently employed in the classic *Bildungsroman*.

In Part 2, Banks reports that he researched at the British Museum “material on the history of the opium trade in China,” “the affairs of Morganbrook and Byatt,” a British trading company for which his father worked, and “the complex political situation in Shanghai at that time” to solve the mystery of his parents’ disappearance (p. 113). Here, he suggests that this is an “attempt as an adult to grasp the nature of those forces which as a child [he] could not have had the chance of comprehending,” emphasizing the gap between the child and adult selves (p. 113). As a result of this research, he becomes convinced that his parents are “being held captive in Chapei” because his father “made . . . a courageous stand, against his own employers

concerning the profits from the opium trade” (pp. 288, 286). In Part 6, however, Uncle Philip, a friend of Banks’ parents, reveals the truth: His father “ran off one day with his mistress,” feeling the burden of his morally sensitive wife, who campaigned against his company’s opium trade (p. 286); although knowing this, she told Banks that his father was kidnapped; later, she was actually abducted by Wang Ku, a Chinese warlord, and became his concubine in return for financial support for her son. Here, Ishiguro reveals that Banks has “been too busy following a false trail” to ridicule his previous statement, “I left England only once I’d formed a clear view of this case” (pp. 288, 155). By employing the narrator, whose vision is not broad enough to control the narrative of his life history, Ishiguro provides readers with the sense that life is more uncontrollable and unpredictable than expressed in the Victorian *Bildungsroman* previously.

Although Banks tries to dramatize his personal developments in the first three parts, as Mitoko Hirabayashi (2011) suggests, he has never grown as he has claimed (p. 283). In Part 6, this is exposed by Uncle Philip, who says that Banks “[hasn’t] changed so much,” and it is “[e]asy to see the boy in [him], even now” (p. 284). However, before this, Ishiguro implies this fact through Banks’ way of recounting his “little theft” (p. 93). When Banks was a child, he and his friend, Akira Yamashita, believed that Ling Tien, a Chinese servant, had the ability to “turn severed hands into spiders,” and they stole a bottle of “magic lotion” from his room (pp. 91, 95). This was the day before Banks’ father disappeared. Although these events are not interrelated, the narrator thinks they are. Before explaining his robbery, he hints that it led to his father’s disappearance, one of the “wider repercussions” that he “failed entirely to anticipate” at that time (p. 93). Just as the child Banks and Akira feared the “awful repercussions” of their theft—the possibility that their parents would send them to England or Japan to punish them (p. 99), the narrator regards his departure from Shanghai as the “repercussions” of his mischief. This reveals that he still maintains his childlike qualities and that his dramatization of his development is merely a linguistic façade to disguise his naïveté.

By eventually revealing that the first three parts are intended as a pseudo-*Bildungsroman*, not as a *Bildungsroman*, Ishiguro rebels against the genre’s convention, which is especially used in the mid-19th-century *Bildungsroman*, following Dickens’ *Great Expectations* (1860–1861). As Henry Carrington Cuninghame III (2004) suggests, Ishiguro indicates the source of his inspiration with his characters and plots. For example, many characters address Banks as “old chap” or “old fellow,” which conjures up Joe Gargery, who refers to Pip as “old chap” and “old fellow” (Dickens, 1860–1861/2008b). Sarah is a character corresponding to Estella, an orphan adopted by Miss Havisham, a wealthy spinster. Just as Pip wishes to pursue a life as a gentleman to suit Estella, Banks desires to succeed in his occupation “to impress” Sarah, who is an orphan and eager to marry a distinguished man (p. 20). In addition, Ishiguro describes a plot inspired by Pip’s discovery that his anonymous benefactor is not Miss Havisham but rather Abel Magwitch, an escaped convict. From Uncle Philip, Banks learns that his allowance was not from his aunt, but rather from Wang, who was involved in the opium trade. This disproves what is previously narrated. In Part 3, Banks buys a “tall narrow house” with his aunt’s “inheritance” and adopts Jennifer, a ten-year-old orphan (p. 127). As Jean-Pierre

Naugrette (2004) notes, Banks “seems to be acting out a series of Victorian novels” (p. 71). If he were a protagonist in a *Bildungsroman* written before the late Victorian period, such as *Oliver Twist* and *Jane Eyre*, which emphasize “the inheritance plot” as a central action on the ground that “the social and economic solutions and the personal achievements were in a single dimension” (Williams, 1973/1975, p. 175), this event must function as a symbolic sign of his personal growth. However, Ishiguro subverts “the inheritance plot” as in *Great Expectations*, foregrounding the connection between Banks’ “schooling” and “place in London society,” the British opium trade, as well as the poverty and opium addiction among Chinese people in Shanghai (p. 293). Although readers would initially think that Banks’ self-cultivation is completed in Part 3, with the succession to his aunt’s bequest, Ishiguro eventually shatters the belief in “assumed relations between property and human quality” postulated by “the inheritance plot” in the mid-Victorian *Bildungsroman* (Williams, 1973/1975, p. 175).

3. Banks’ Childhood Fantasy Comes True

If Banks were in a *Bildungsroman*, his story would end in the middle of *When We Were Orphans*, when he establishes his reputation as one of “the celebrated detectives of the day” (p. 12). However, the attainment of his present position is a passing point because his ultimate goal is to locate his parents. Around the time when Banks embarks on this mission, however, readers would begin to doubt his self-created image as a rational detective. For instance, his childish aspect is implied by the fact that he continuously believes his mother’s comforting words: Although “from time to time, people do get kidnapped” in Shanghai, “most of the time, the people come back perfectly safely” (p. 108). Thus, he never considers the possibility that his parents, who vanished over 25 years ago, may have already died. Moreover, he illogically believes that because the Shanghainese people “failed so dismally over the years to rise to the challenge of the case,” the Second Sino-Japanese War broke out as one of “its huge ramifications” (p. 162). There is no connection between them. However, this indicates that Banks interprets Colonel Chamberlain’s figurative phrase in a literal way: “First your father. Now your mother. Must feel like the whole world’s collapsed around your ears” (p. 25). Believing the colonel’s figurative words have become a reality, Banks thinks “the whole world’s on the brink of catastrophe” because “the whole affair concerning [his] parents . . . has remained unresolved to this day” (pp. 212, 113).

More bafflingly, however, other people accept Banks’ absurd ideas. For instance, a female Shanghailander says the “news of [Banks’] impending arrival . . . was the first good news” after the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War, regarding him as a messiah who can curtail the war, whereas Mr. Grayson, an official from the Shanghai Municipal Council, proposes to hold a “welcoming ceremony” to celebrate the release of his parents in “Jessfield Park” before he rescues them (pp. 158–159). With this scene in Part 4, readers come to realize that the storyline of Banks and Akira’s games of rescuing his father is actually going to become reality: “after the chases, fist-fights and gun-battles around the warren-like alleys of the Chinese

districts, . . . our narratives would always conclude with a magnificent ceremony held in Jessfield Park” (p. 111). Later in Part 6, Banks actually becomes involved in “gun-battles” between Japan and China in Chapei during his trek in search of his parents and encounters a Japanese soldier whom he identifies as Akira. As in his childhood games, they search a “house where [his] parents are being held” (p. 255). As Barry Lewis (2000) notes, “This is the sort of coincidence that can only happen in dreams or in Dickens” (p. 149). As the story progresses, the fictional world reported by the detective, an embodiment of rationality, becomes unlikely and seems to melt into his childhood fantasy. However, Ishiguro never allows his readers to detect easily how much of what Banks recounts is from his memories of actual events and how much is from his dreams or illusions. This “inextricable fusion of memory, imagination and dream takes [them] down into the labyrinth of reality” (Carey, 2000, p. 45).

4. Ontological Differences between the Actual and Fictional Worlds

Ishiguro explains that *When We Were Orphans* presents a “distorted” world according to “the logic of” Banks (Richards, 2000), rather than portraying “a fantasist or a mad person going through a normal, realistic world” (Hogan, 2000). In fact, even in Chapter 1, which seemingly describes the story in a plausible manner, Ishiguro indicates a slight difference between the actual world and its fictional projection. At a party, Banks meets a man who exhibits a deep understanding of his ambition to become a detective, stating, “a lot of young men dream of becoming detectives” “[t]o root out single-handedly all the evil in the world” (pp. 15–16). His ideal image of detectives is like that in fiction but is the same as what Banks believes, which would be considered “surreal” by many readers (D’hoker, 2008, p. 163). Although most readers would realize the queerness of Banks’ world in the later parts of the novel, in the opening chapter, Ishiguro suggests the gap between this and the actual world by describing the scene “in which detectives are celebrated in a fairly everyday manner and people talk about becoming detectives as if it were some kind of normal career move” (Shaffer, 2001, pp. 3–4).

To imply Banks’ world is an alternative one, Ishiguro violates a principle of historical novels by misrepresenting the Battle of Shanghai (August 13–November 1937), the first major battle of the Second Sino-Japanese War. In Part 4, Banks implies that he arrived in Shanghai at the end of August, following “Bloody Monday,” which seems to refer to the historical event, commonly known as Bloody Saturday (p. 159): “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” (Lee, 1973, p. 36). Previously in *The Unconsoled*, Ishiguro (1995/2013) employs this technique of slipping false information and mentions “the science fiction classic, *2001: A Space Odyssey*” (1968) with incorrect cast members, “Clint Eastwood and Yul Brynner” (pp. 93–94). In this way, he foregrounds “the ontological ‘seams’ between fictional projections and real-world facts” to indicate that the projected world is not governed by real-world norms (McHale, 1987/2001, p. 17). Although Ishiguro’s

violation of “real-world facts” in *When We Were Orphans* is less overt than in *The Unconsoled*, he implies here that Banks’ world “is governed by fantastic norms” (McHale, 1987/2001, p. 17).

By indicating that the narrative world is different from the actual one, Ishiguro raises ontological questions, such as “What is a world?,” “What kinds of world are there, how are they constituted, and how do they differ?” (McHale, 1987/2001, p. 10). Therefore, what is required for readers is not only to ponder on epistemological questions about the reliability of Banks’ perspective and narration but also to identify “fantastic norms” that render the diegetic world “surreal.” Through Grayson’s proposal of the ceremony in Jessfield Park, Ishiguro indicates that Banks’ childhood imagination partly constitutes “fantastic norms.” In addition, through Banks’ desire “to combat . . . evil of the insidious, furtive kind” (p. 21), Ishiguro suggests that the “norms” also stem from British detective novels.

5. Banks’ Imitation Learning of Englishness

To indicate how the strangeness of the diegetic world partly comes from Banks’ admiration for British detective novels, Ishiguro characterizes him as a mimic man who continuously struggles to copy others in reality and in fiction to behave “sufficiently like an Englishman” (p. 73). While Banks lives in Shanghai, Akira makes him aware of the possibility that he is “not enough Englishman” because he has been grown up surrounded by Chinese, French, American, and Japanese people (p. 72). Since then, he attempts to “become more English” (p. 76). For example, he asks Uncle Philip to allow him to “copy [him] sometimes” so that he can “learn to do things the English way” (p. 77). Even after moving to England, Banks continues to imitate others’ behaviors:

(1) On my very first day, . . . I recall observing a mannerism many of the boys adopted when standing and talking—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. I distinctly remember reproducing this mannerism on that same first day with sufficient expertise that not a single of my fellows noticed anything odd or thought to make fun. (p. 7)

Although the narrator proudly claims that he “blended perfectly into English school life,” his obsession with copying others allows people to detect his strangeness, as Osborn states, “you were such an odd bird at school” (pp. 7, 5). For Banks, being English is not just about being born from English parents and instead something he has to acquire through his imitation learning.

It is significant that Banks learns “the English way” from not only real people but also from literature, especially during his childhood in Shanghai:

(2) [F]rom time to time, we would have boarding with us a “house guest”—some employee newly arrived in Shanghai who had yet to “find his feet.” . . . I did not mind at all, since usually a house guest would be some young man who brought with him the air of the English lanes and meadows I knew from *The Wind in the Willows*, or else the foggy streets of the Conan Doyle mysteries. . . . But to me at

the time, they were all of them figures to study closely and emulate. (pp. 51–52)

As Benedict Anderson (1983/2006) suggests, “print-capitalism,” the mass production of print materials, including novels and newspapers, allows people to envision a nation as “an imagined political community” and feel a sense of belonging to it (pp. 36, 6). Through reading British literature, the child Banks can obtain a sense of being an Englishman, even though he lives far from the center of the empire.

As Banks confesses his “aspirations to be a ‘Sherlock’” (p. 10), the most prominent figure who serves as a role model for his occupation is the fictional detective in “the Conan Doyle mysteries.” In fact, Banks’ use of the term “a private consultant” to describe his ambition invokes Holmes’ words (p. 15). In *A Study in Scarlet* (1887), Holmes proclaims himself to be “the only” “consulting detective” “in the world” (Doyle, 1887/2003b, p. 17). Moreover, following Holmes, who uses his “knowledge of the history of crime” and “magnifying glass” to solve cases (Doyle, 1887/2003b, pp. 17, 29), Banks studies “notable cases from the past” and investigates crime sites with his “magnifying glass” (pp. 21, 9). Ishiguro indicates their relationship by noting that Banks’ magnifying glass “was manufactured . . . in 1887,” the year when Holmes came into the world (p. 8). For Banks, who has a fear of not being seen as an Englishman, Holmes, who is “not only the quintessential detective but the quintessential Englishman” (Berberich, 2019, p. 55), serves as a role model for becoming “more English” as well as for establishing his career.

6. Ishiguro’s Challenge to the British *Bildungsroman* and Detective Novels

As the child Banks searches in real people for something he has learned from British literature, he cannot perceive the boundary between fiction and reality. Even after becoming an adult, however, Banks cannot draw this line as he imitates Holmes to establish his career. His attitude is what Edward W. Said (1978/1994b) calls “a *textual* attitude,” an attitude of people who “assume that the swarming, unpredictable, and problematic mess in which human beings live can be understood on the basis of what books—texts—say” (pp. 92–93). While learning Englishness from “the Conan Doyle mysteries,” Banks not only inherits their norms and worldview but also seeks to apply them literally into reality. To caricature the “fallacy” of his attitude (Said, 1978/1994b, p. 93), Ishiguro has the diegetic world operate in accordance with the generic norms and values of British detective novels and with Banks’ childhood imaginations. In this manner, while encouraging readers to doubt the reliability of Banks’ narrative, he draws their attention to the genre’s characteristics and its historical and ideological backgrounds.

British detective novels that affect the fictional world can be divided into two groups. One is “the Conan Doyle mysteries,” while the other is the so-called “golden age” detective novels, which were developed by writers such as Agatha Christie, Dorothy L. Sayers, and Anthony Berkley during the interwar period. Although earlier studies have either focused on one or bracketed them together, it is necessary to consider the internal difference and development within the genre.⁵ Ishiguro suggests the influence from the former by describing Banks’ respect for Holmes and that from the latter in a less overt way by implying its contemporaneity

with his protagonist.

From the Holmes series, Banks inherits a partial view of the non-Western world. According to Tsuneo Masaki (1995), among four novels and 56 short stories in the Holmes canon, 32 stories highlight the relationship between Britain and the non-Western world, especially its colonies (p. 227). These places outside Britain serve as sources of crime, providing treasures, poisons, weapons, diseases and shields for criminals (Masaki, 1995, pp. 227–228). In “The Adventure of the Dying Detective” (1913), for instance, when Holmes pretends to investigate a case at Rotherhithe “among Chinese sailors down in the docks” and contract “a coolie disease from Sumatra,” he warns Watson of “many problems of disease, many strange pathological possibilities, in the East” (Doyle, 1913/2003a, pp. 438, 430–431). Ishiguro foregrounds this dichotomy between the enlightened Britain and the barbarous East found in the Holmes stories by setting part of *When We Were Orphans* in its semicolonial city, Shanghai. For example, the child Banks thinks that “all manner of ghastly diseases, filth and evil men” can be found in the Chinese areas “beyond the boundaries of the Settlement,” which is a guarded enclave for the city’s foreigners, mostly British and American (p. 54). Despite being an adult, Banks retains his prejudiced attitude to the East. For instance, he presumes that his morally superior English parents were kidnapped by Chinese villains and are being held in the Chinese districts because they made “a courageous stand” against the opium trade (p. 286). Due to the dichotomous view, he fails to notice, or refuses to acknowledge the fact that Uncle Philip, his model for a perfect Englishman, was involved in the abduction of his mother, instead shifting the blame onto his Chinese “*amah*” and calling her “an impostor” (pp. 69, 123).

Since Ishiguro twists the diegetic world according to Banks’ view influenced by the Holmes series, other people also believe the dichotomy between evil China and righteous Britain. For example, Canon Moorly claims on the eve of World War II that “the eye of the storm is to be found not in Europe” but “[i]n Shanghai” and that “its poison” has spread “over the years ever further across the world, right through [their] civilisation” (p. 138). As in “the genre of adventure-imperialism” (Said, 1993/1994a, p. 188), Holmes tirelessly fights against criminals who have imported poisons, treasures, or weapons from the colonies into Britain, Banks lands in Shanghai to remove “its poison” and protect the imperial center from threats stemming from its colonial connection.

While the Holmes stories in which “[t]he opaque complexity of modern city life is represented by crime” usually revolve around London (Williams, 1973/1975, p. 227), golden age detective novels prefer a more “closed, aristocratic society,” such as English villages and country houses (Grella, 1970, p. 34), “so that the possibility of an outside murderer . . . is excluded” (Auden, 1948, p. 407). To concentrate on the battle of wits between author and reader, these novels set rules about milieu, plots, and characters. Following their conventions, Ishiguro describes Banks’ investigation. For example, he alludes to the “pastoralism” of these novels, favoring “rural settings and rural (though upper-class) people” (Grella, 1970, p. 46). Banks always investigates cases of “[s]tolen jewels” and “aristocrats murdered for their inheritance,” which happened in

seemingly idyllic English villages (p. 294). For instance, he investigates “the mystery of Charles Emery’s death” “in the village of Shackton, in Oxfordshire” (pp. 36, 31). As with the usual settings of these novels, Shackton appears “to be an innocent society” (Auden, 1948, pp. 407–408). However, once the body is discovered, it is soon revealed that the “happy and thriving market town” has “started to rot” (p. 33). Now, people “barely meet each other’s eyes” and get stuck in “a mire of suspicion” (p. 33). Therefore, once Banks resolves the case and the murderer is expelled, he receives “the deep gratitude of the Emery family—indeed, of the whole community of Shackton” (p. 36). In short, he saves not only the family but also the entire village. Here, Ishiguro implies that, as in interwar detective novels, through “the miraculous intervention of” Banks, who comes “from outside” and “removes guilt by giving knowledge of guilt” (Auden, 1948, p. 412), Shackton becomes “cleansed of guilt, free of complication and obstacles, recreated anew from the shambles of a temporary disorder” (Grella, 1970, p. 44).

By describing Banks’ investigation, Ishiguro implies not only conventions but also a “cosy” worldview of golden age detective novels (Horsley, 2010, p. 31), which always end when “the detective’s rationality restores the order violated by the murder (the culprit is discovered and punished and the status quo reestablished; the mystery can be understood and solved, if not prevented)” (Tani, 1984, p. 21). However, their representations of “the staid, comfortable, secure society” are quite different from the reality in Britain after World War I (Paterson, 1953, p. 7). Interwar detective novels, while never mentioning “the tensions and dangers that threatened the precarious stability of the Twenties and Thirties” (Grella, 1970, p. 47), such as “urban squalor, restless lower-classes, industrial spoliation and the rise of totalitarianism” (Burrow, 2019, p. 24), continuously recall “the sober gentility and crude optimism of an earlier and more complacent generation,” asserting “the triumph of a social order and decorum that have all but passed away” (Paterson, 1953, p. 7). Accordingly, these novels are often criticized as being “the ‘literature of escape’” (Nicolson, 1929, p. 484).

To dramatize the gap between interwar Britain and its representations in golden age detective novels, Ishiguro forces Banks to confront a global crisis leading to World War II with the help of their fictional norms and values. However, since his cases are always about crimes motivated by “personal” reasons, rather than by “[i]nternational plottings and war politics,” as in these novels (Van Dine, 1928, p. 131), when he wanders about the warren in Chapei to search his parents, he finds himself helpless in the face of the Battle of Shanghai. During his trek, he hears the scream of dying soldiers (pp. 243, 259), and witnesses “blood—sometimes fresh, sometimes weeks old” and “piles of human intestines in various stages of decay” (p. 264). When Banks, wearing a “light flannel suit,” travels through the war zone and examines the corpse of a war victim “through the [magnifying] glass” (pp. 244, 272), “[h]is hope of solving the world’s problems” by methods of detective novels “is reduced to farce” (Carey, 2000, p. 45). To reveal the absurdity of Banks’ way of preventing global war through these novels’ norms and values, Ishiguro inserts the scene in which Uncle Philip, a former anti-opium campaigner and a current communist informer, ridicules his work as useless: “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?” (p. 294). In this manner, Ishiguro indicates that Banks and these novels’ simplified concept of good and evil, which are embodied by the detective and the criminal, respectively, is useless as a way of understanding the real, more complicated world.

After Banks fails to rescue his parents, when he realizes he has “continued to live” in his “childhood” “all [his] life,” the fictional world appears realistic again (p. 277). This indicates that Ishiguro makes Banks’ world “surreal” to stress the point that his traumatic experience of becoming an orphan has undermined his sense of reality (Wong, 2000/2019, p. 87). As many children “will remain confused about the difference between reality and imagination” when they are under “intolerable” conditions (McGinn, 2004/2006, pp. 125–126), Banks has long lived “in [his] enchanted world,” nurtured by his childhood imaginations and British detective novels, and has attached his beliefs from the wished-for imaginary worlds to the perceived real world to turn his face from the unwanted possibility that his parents cannot be rescued (p. 294). In short, Ishiguro creates a “distorted” world and foregrounds the ontological gap between this and the actual world to dramatize the epistemological themes of Banks’ inner psyche and trauma while examining the genre’s characteristics and its historical and ideological backgrounds.

Banks’ “enchanted world” shatters after he learns from Uncle Philip “how the world really is,” “what made possible [his] comfortable life in England,” and how he was “able to become a celebrated detective” (p. 294). For the first time, Banks acknowledges the fact that evils reside even in Britain: Philip allowed Wang to abduct his mother because she never regarded him as a “successor” of her husband (p. 295); Banks owed his allowance to the profit made from the opium trade, which turned “millions of Chinese into helpless addicts” (p. 288); British people, including his father’s company, “*wanted* the Chinese to be useless,” “drug-addicted,” and “unable to govern themselves properly” so that “the country could be run virtually like a colony, but with none of the usual obligations” (p. 288). Although Banks has previously emphasized his mother’s anti-opium campaigns rather than his father’s business, or the reason why her campaigns were required, Philip’s remarks reveal Britain’s greedy colonial schemes and undermine his nostalgic image of the International Settlement, established after the First Opium War (1839–1842), as his “home village” (p. 256). As Monika Rajtak (2014) suggests, “Even though Banks’ involvement in crime is unintentional, Ishiguro blurs the border between the innocent world and that of crime” (p. 137). When Banks understands this, he has “an odd feeling” “that behind [his] back the darkness [has] grown and grown, so that now a vast black space [has] opened up there” (p. 290). This darkness symbolizes the unfathomable depths of the actual world, which he could not comprehend and which the Holmes stories simplify through the dichotomous worldview that distinguishes between the superior order and rationality of Britain and the supposed inferior disorder and irrationality of the East.

After disclosing the mystery of Banks’ parents’ disappearance, Ishiguro includes one part to describe his reunion with his mother in Hong Kong for the first time in over 40 years. Although she cannot identify him as her son due to her mental illness, she understands his childhood nickname, “Puffin” (p. 305). Then, he realizes that her feelings for him are “always just *there*” and “they [don’t] depend on anything” (p. 306). Interpreting

this scene, Maya Jaggi (2000) claims that Ishiguro signals Banks' growth more than in his previous novels (p. 8). However, if this is Banks' true growth (and the first half of the novel is a pseudo-*Bildungsroman*), it is psychological and has nothing to do with his society. This contrasts to the development of a protagonist in the Victorian *Bildungsroman*, which focuses on the incorporation of him into society, as Thomas L. Jeffers (2005) observes “[h]e is decidedly part of his social milieu, and his social milieu is part of him” (p. 36).

The difference between *When We Were Orphans* and the traditional *Bildungsroman* primarily derives from Ishiguro's distrust of ideas, such as soaring human progress and social evolution, supported by the latter. This is well demonstrated by the ending of his novel, in which after failing his mission in Shanghai, Banks returns to London. By the diegetic present of Part 7, November 1958, he has glided to his mid-50s, moved to a “stuffy little flat” from his tall house and now suffers from “rheumatism” (p. 309). These days, he often spends time “sifting through old newspaper reports of [his] cases in the Reading Room at the British Museum” to feel “a foolish pride” at his former achievements (p. 313). His situation contradicts to that of Pip, who has an opportunity to start “his new career as colonial businessman” in the East (Said, 1993/1994a, p. xvii), even after giving up his life as a gentleman. Although *Great Expectations* subverts “the inheritance plot,” a major convention in the mid-Victorian *Bildungsroman*, it concludes the story in the same manner as numerous texts of the genre by implying the protagonist's promising future. Conversely, Ishiguro emphasizes in the final part Banks' physical and economic decline and the pastness of his reputation, demonstrating the decisive break with Dickens' *Bildungsroman*.

Banks' past-oriented attitude is paralleled with the eclipse of Britain, which is symbolized by the decolonization of the British Empire after World War II. This is again in contrast to the fact that Pip's 19th-century Britain is in the process of colonization and expansion. While Pip finds his way into the East outside of Britain, Banks remains in London and receives immigrants from its colonies and former colonies. In the last part, Banks and Jennifer argue that London is “much too crowded now” and “not like it used to be,” looking over “the view . . . over the Windrush valley” (pp. 306–307). As Motoko Sugano (2009) argues, Ishiguro's reference to the valley would remind readers of the *Empire Windrush* (p. 7), which brought West Indian immigrants to Britain on June 22, 1948, after the Nationality Act of the same year allowed people from the colonies and former colonies to migrate to the imperial center. When Ishiguro wrote his novel in the late 1990s, this event had just become “a key moment in the modern development of Britain” through the celebration of the 50th anniversary of its arrival in 1998 (Marks, 2018/2019, p. 11), although before this it “had practically slipped from Britain's historical consciousness” (Korte & Pirker, 2011, p. 27). While employing the legacies of the Victorian *Bildungsroman*, Ishiguro sets his novel after the period when both these novels and the empire flourished. In this way, while indicating the collusive ties between these writings and Britain's colonial projects and expansion, Ishiguro explores their historical and ideological backgrounds by connecting the decline of Banks with that of the old empire and by dramatizing how their values and ideas have become anachronistic in the latter part of the 20th century.

7. Conclusion

Given the fact that the traditional British *Bildungsroman* and detective novels are usually characterized by the realistic mode of representation, Ishiguro's "surreal" descriptions in *When We Were Orphans* can be seen as his challenge to them. He characterizes Banks as an orphan and a detective and exploits literary conventions to evoke readers' expectations associated with the genres. However, he eventually upsets their traditions to critically review their historical and ideological backgrounds, such as the collusive ties between these writings and Britain's colonial projects and expansion. Superficially, this seems to have nothing to do with Ishiguro's contemporary world. However, his novel was actually inspired by events of his present-day world, especially the reversion of Hong Kong to China in 1997. This symbolizes not only the end of the British Empire but also "[t]he eclipse of British global power" (Marks, 2018/2019, p. 45). By employing this last major colony in the Far East, along with its "cousin" city, Shanghai, and the center of the empire, London, and by describing the relatively long span of the last century, Ishiguro recounts Banks' long journey from his childhood against the historical background of Britain and its relationship with half-colonized China (p. 299). He does so to encourage his readers to review the dark history of colonialism and to ponder how "Britain at the end of the twentieth century was a profoundly different nation from that which had ruled much of the world at the beginning of it" (Bradbury, 1993/2001, p. 513).

Notes

1. This is a revised version of my paper, entitled "Living in the 'Enchanted World' of Childhood Fantasy: Mimetism and Literary Illusion in Kazuo Ishiguro's *When We Were Orphans*."
2. For studies focusing on Banks' memory and psyche, see Zinck (2005); Drag (2014). For studies from historical or postcolonial perspectives, see Webley (2011); Pérez (2015). For studies from Ishiguro's biographical viewpoint, see Morikawa (2010).
3. From a broader perspective, Finney (2006) discusses *When We Were Orphans* as Ishiguro's challenge to realist novels of the 19th century. In his study, Kajiyama (2002) treats two genres. However, he confines his attention to Dickens' *Great Expectations* (1860–1861) and Agatha Christie's *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* (1926) to explore the mode of autobiographical confession common to these novels. Conversely, this study examines how Ishiguro, while exploiting the generic characteristics of the British *Bildungsroman* and detective novels, explores their historical and ideological backgrounds.
4. Hereafter in this paper, for citations from *When We Were Orphans*, only page numbers will be given in parentheses.
5. Machinal (2009) focuses on the Holmes series. Spark (2008) addresses the golden age detective novels. Rajtak (2014) treats the genre collectively.

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