



A Pale View of Hills

Kazuo Ishiguro

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In his highly acclaimed debut, *A Pale View of Hills*, Kazuo Ishiguro tells the story of Etsuko, a Japanese woman now living alone in England, dwelling on the recent suicide of her daughter. Retreating into the past, she finds herself reliving one particular hot summer in Nagasaki, when she and her friends struggled to rebuild their lives after the war. But then as she recalls her strange friendship with Sachiko - a wealthy woman reduced to vagrancy - the memories take on a disturbing cast.

A Pale View of Hills Details

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From Reader Review A Pale View of Hills for online ebook

Sue says

I've been thinking for 24 hours now about what to say about this book. I'm still not sure. Not sure how I feel, not sure exactly what Ishiguro was saying or intending with his characters, what the point of the entire narrative was.

Well my decision is: displacement. The novel introduces us to a Japanese woman who has lost her older daughter to suicide and is being visited by her younger, very independent daughter. She lives in a bucolic setting in England but flashes back throughout the novel to her life in post-war and post-bomb Nagasaki and the various people in her life there.

I frequently became confused early in the book as to whether I was reading the past or present as Ishiguro does not provide easy landmarks. Why? So I felt that sense of displacement.

In post war Nagasaki, there is much talk of the disruption, or destruction, of the old ways, the old Japanese traditions of country and family. In addition a new city is being built where so much has been physically destroyed. Also, so many people were lost, killed. The people have been displaced, even if they are in the same city. The city is not the same.

Even in the present, there are no answers for how life has reached this point, not for the reader, and one wonders about the inhabitants of the story. They do not seem to feel truly right with their lives.

I'm glad I waited a bit to think more about this rather than sloughing it off as an inscrutable book. I know there are many theories about what the author was attempting here, but even without them, I believe I have arrived at my own comfort level with the book.

As for a rating, I have been going back and forth between 3 and 4, Somehow it would seem that any book that can keep me thinking this long, be the first thing on my mind when I awake, probably should be given a 4. (3.5 official)

Nishat says

On the surface, Ishiguro's characters are in control. They have repressed their emotions and unknowingly in that attempt, prolonged the process of healing after loss. The war has left them numb and bereaved of loved ones. And in this remarkable debut, we listen to one of these survivors.

Etsuko's daughter hanged herself in England. Etsuko, our leading character is somewhat in denial, but nevertheless means to develop intimacy with grief, with her old wounds. Through her recollections, we go back to a summer in postwar Nagasaki where Etsuko has to scan her past for signs that may restore meaning in her present, solitary life.

Ishiguro's prose here exuding elegance is restrained, effective. He takes us on a morbid ride and discusses memory that constitutes who we are. Recommended.

Aubrey says

4.5/5

The English are fond of their idea that our race has an instinct for suicide, as if further explanations are unnecessary; for that was all they reported, that she was Japanese and that she had hung herself in her room.

I had forgotten what an Ishiguro novel is like. Of course, it is customary to treat first works as trial runs in the vein of Icarus, so I wasn't expecting another *The Remains of the Day* or *Never Let Me Go*. While my star rating for this doesn't match up to the other two, it is my discomforting awareness of my inherent unfamiliarity with the subject material that prevents me from "liking" it any more. I do not trust my current understanding of what I have just finished reading enough, and so I will leave the four stars where it is until I can return with a firmer grasp on things.

But then again, Etsuko, no one knew what a war was really like, not in those days.

It is only recently that I started paying more attention to the divide between how much of my food, literature, and media is Japanese in origin, and how little I can conceptualize living there. I touched upon the effects of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in my review of *The Sailor Who Fell from Grace with the Sea*, but that was a piece that didn't pull its punches, and thus is very different from this subtle hydra interplay of many tragedies in a single life. Here, the dominating lighthouse of EuroAmerican sensibilities wins, in a certain sense, if only due to the fundamental differences between Japanese society's treatment of women and men. I do not judge with this statement, as the all inspiring "business woman" goal touched upon the mothers in this book has its own garrote to pay in the land of the free murderers and the home of the brave sadists.

What I enjoy most about Ishiguro is this intangible sense of bitter nostalgia that mixes sadness and respite in equal measure. He takes a great deal of time and patience and is far from obvious about any of it, but once the context sinks in it weighs on your heart for months. The themes are simple enough: death, memory, the choices we make and the results we live by, but Ishiguro is one of the few who refuses to make human beings an equation for these modes of story to solve. It doesn't make for light reading, so it's a wonder that he's as popular as he is. Then again, McCullers and Stoner are doing just fine, so some measure of the public eye craves a more soul-wrenching breed of entertainment.

P.S. Much as I've grown to dislike my ham-fisted intercultural studies class, one of the assigned readings on conflict helped my understanding of this book immensely. It can be found here, if anyone's interested in that sort of thing.

Sidharth Vardhan says

A Pale View of Hills

"Niki, the name we finally gave my younger daughter, is not an abbreviation; it was a

compromise I reached with her father. For paradoxically it was he who wanted to give her a Japanese name, and I — perhaps out of some selfish desire not to be reminded of the past — insisted on an English one."

Etsuko doesn't like to talk or even think about her past, the time of world war 2, when she was in Nagasaki. It is the central theme of the book having to deal with gloomy and dark past (the world war and nuclear bombs) while building the future, whether you are talking about Japan or at individual level:

"That's no way to bring a child into the world, visiting the cemetery every week."

This is just one of the ways the people in the novel deal with the past - her friend, Sachiko, must keep on reassuring her that she has nothing to feel guilty about in marrying an American man and leaving for States (which she too is doing for her daughter's future). Her father-in-law is troubled by the Japanese adoption of American values. There is that whole generation gap thing - but I guess nothing widens that gap like war, from a generation of old ways (father-in-law) to a generation lost to war (Etsuko and Sachiko) to the generation that was born in or around war times (Keiko) to the generation that is alien to their parents' sufferings (Nikki).

This is difference between dates of generations is common motif (though not most obvious) in all Ishiguro books I have read but this one also shows characters who have other forms of prejudice then prevalent whether it be Japanese prejudice against women:

"My wife votes for Yoshida just because he looks like her uncle. That's typical of women. They don't understand politics. They think they can choose the country's leaders the same way they choose dresses."

Or western prejudice against Japanese (arising out of Kamikaze strikes?):

"The English are fond of their idea that our race has an instinct for suicide, as if further explanations are unnecessary; for that was all they reported, that she was Japanese and that she had hung herself in her room."

There are usual 'memory' tricks that only Proust and Ishiguro can pull as far as I am concerned (Banville and Barnes failed to impress).

"Memory, I realize, can be an unreliable thing; often it is heavily coloured by the circumstances in which one remembers, and no doubt this applies to certain of the recollections I have gathered here."

And finally, my favorite quote:

"I have found myself continually bringing to mind that picture — of my daughter hanging in her room for days on end. The horror of that image has never diminished, but it has long ceased to be a morbid matter; as with a wound on one's own body, it is possible to develop an intimacy with the most disturbing of things."

Fabian says

Surprise, surprise! The brilliant mind that concocted “Never Let Me Go” (which is, by the way, indubitably on my top ten list) first brought this masterpiece to a readership whose last brush with (this is no exaggeration:) PERFECTION was reading Mr. Graham Greene (“The Quiet American”). The novel is tight, 75% dialogue, exquisitely concise, devoid of flowery sentences/descriptions, no bullshit and beautiful. Ishiguro is a (n enviable) genius, a poet, one capable of expelling tears and tugging at heartstrings. Now I have two books on my list of superlatives by a single author. EVERYONE, GET YOUR HANDS ON THIS: for THIS, ladies & gents, is how IT'S DONE!

Bookdragon Sean says

Ishiguro's first novel is an intriguing read. If anything, it shows how much promise he had as an author and how much he could offer the literary world as he honed his skills.

The Pale View of Hills is a very implicit book, and the conclusions I took from it may not even be conclusions at all. It's a story that made me think, and it even made me re-read it when I finished. And that's the problem: the cleverness of this is not revealed until the very end. There are three paragraphs in the penultimate chapter that (perhaps) change the entire story.

"Memory, I realize, can be an unreliable thing; often it is heavily coloured by the circumstances in which one remembers, and no doubt this applies to certain of the recollections I have gathered here."

Up to that point it all seemed rather ordinary. I was waiting for something big to happen and it came far too late. By the time it did, I was already quite bored with the story and ready to move onto a new book. For me, it was a real shame. I would have liked more suggestions through the book. On my second read, I found not a single shred of evidence or hint about what we learn at the end. It came rather quick and stopped me dead in my tracks even if it is a very, very clever device.

If I'm being cryptic, it's because I don't want to ruin the it all for you though I do really think Ishiguro learnt from this book. All the major themes he replicates across his writing are here in a very early form. He explores memory and regret in a way no other writer can. It's the things he doesn't say that make his writing so powerful. We can imply from it that the characters are full of regret, we can assume, but he does not state it anywhere: he doesn't need to. And this is something he delivered with a masterful stroke in *The Remains of the Day*. He really grew as an artist.

So I recommend this to those that like his later books and really want to see how far he has come, though I do warn you this is not executed with the same level of skill he would later wield.

Deniz Balç? says

Kasuo Ishiguro bilindi?i üzere Japon kökenli olmas?na rağmen; İngilizce yazan, İngiltere'de ya?ayan ve İngiliz vatanda?? olarak hayat?n? sürdüren bir yazar. Haliyle bu durumda asl?nda İngiliz Edebiyat? yapmas? beklenebilir. Ancak İngiltere'nin, malum tarihi politikalar?ndan dolayı, eskiden beri sahip oldu?u çok İngiliz olmayan gayrikökenli yazarlar? mevcut. Bu yazarlarda ilginç bir ?ekilde, İngiltere'de ba?ar?l? olma yolunun, farklılı??n? kullanmak bundan beslenmek oldu?unu dü?ünüyor san?r?m. Bu çerçevede Kasuo Ishiguro'nun eline ald??? konu ve i?leme ?ekli bir Japon yazar?nkinden çok farklı de?il.

Eser çok çabuk okunabilecek, ak???n içerisinde güzel tespitler s?k??t?r?lm?? bir kitap. Yazar?n ilk roman?. 1993 senesinde İngiltere'de yay?mlanm??. Kitap, ikinci evlili?ini İngiliz bir adamla yapm??; biri vefat etmi? Japon kocas?ndan di?eri İngiliz kocas?ndan iki tane çocuk sahibi; İngiltere'de ya?ayan, II. Dünya Sava?? sonrası Nagasaki'de ya?am??; İngiltere'de ilk e?inden olan çocu?u Keiko'yu intiharla kaybetmi? bir annenin; geçmi?e dönük yolculuklar?yla, çocuklar? ve hayatla kurdu?u ili?kiden bahsediyor.

Böyle uzaktan bakt???m?zda konu çok zengin. Birçok kod var yazar?n i?leyebilece?i. Hepsini de bir ölçüde kar??lamaya çal??m?? zaten. Ama çok ba?ar?l? oldu?unu dü?ünmüyorum ben. Bu bir kitaptan ziyade film gibi akan romanlardan. Kitab? okumad?m, izledim. Mesle?im senaryo oldu?undan da böyle bir izlenime kap?lm?? olabilirim bilmiyorum ama genel yap?, kurgu, ak??; bir sinema filmi olu?turmak için muazzam uygunlukta.

Bunun d???nda di?er tak?ld???m bir ?ey samimiyet. Sava? sonrası de?i?imi Japon yazarlar eserlerine çok farklı ve özgün ?ekillerde eserlerine yedirmi?ken, İngiltere'de büyümü? birisi için fazla kesin hüküm veririci gibi geldi. Bu da bende samimiyet durumunu sorgulatt?. O yüzden biraz soru i?aretleri oldu?unu söyleyebilirim bu aç?dan.

Ancak okuma zevki olarak oldukça tatmin oldu?u için tavsiye edebilirim.

7/10

Brinda says

This is my third Ishiguro and at the risk of sounding presumptuous, I think I'm beginning to detect a pattern. His works so far have been mysteries and thrillers, but not in the traditional who dunnit sense. As a reader, the mystery lies in trying to figure out the true motivation of the narrator, since one is never really certain whether to trust them or not because they appear to make such odd choices. The mystery also lies in figuring out what the "it" is, ie, the nugget, the game-changer, the reason why all the characters are behaving somewhat strangely, not saying exactly what they mean because they all understand the implications of a certain unspeakable factor. And it's thrilling because of the buildup and the moment where he reveals the answers to these questions, reminiscent of an Agatha Christie novel, where all the guests are gathered in the parlor room and either Miss Marple or Hercule Poirot start to unpeel the layers revealing the murderer - who is in that very room with them.

And therein lie both the wonder and the disappointment of Ishiguro's novels for me - the wonder, because mysteries are always fun to read and it always keeps the reader hooked to find out a reason why a particular character is making choices that you find totally bizarre or tragic. But disappointing because, like in "A Pale

View of Hills", I get the sense that Ishiguro relies too much on these interesting literary devices, and not enough on the literature part, so that the devices are exceptionally presented and engaging, but once they reveal the "it", you begin to feel cheated. I don't want to beat this point to death - it just seems to me that the novel was written in this haunting, ethereal, and slightly creepy style...but for no real good reason. Why was Etsuko so obsessed with Sachiko and her daughter? The obsession part was great, but as reader, I was not satisfied with the WHY. Why did Jiro leave Etsuko? I can guess, but unlike other novels, I don't get the sense that "there are no wrong answers." Why did Keiko kill herself? Are she and Mariko the same person? Is this whole novel a dream sequence of Etsuko where she is actually Sachiko and imposing her own thoughts and regrets onto a second character?

The novel was beautifully written, in terms of tone, word choice and topic. I love that Ishiguro sets his novels amidst world-altering events - whether it be WW2, or the discovery of human cloning, or the atomic bomb destroying Nagasaki. But what I liked about "Remains of the Day" is that he used the event magnificently in the plot, revealing how Lord Darlington was actually a Nazi sympathizer but the butler did not really want to see that because he was such a subservient person. In "Pale", I wanted him to use the backdrop of the bomb drop more powerfully. It seemed that he was trying to draw a link of the Japan of the past with the Japan of the now, describing that tug of remaining a traditional, proud, and proudly Japanese society, against the desire of the younger generation to explore beyond Japan's borders and re-build post-war, and not focus its energies on making Japan a great military power. But where "Remains" was a mystery of the soul, of the character, of love, with the butler's relationship to his master serving as a perfect allegory for fascism and the war, this book - as well as Never Let me Go - for me did not do enough with the amazingly rich backdrops in which the writer decided to set these stories. He wrote fairly mundane plot lines set in completely life-altering time periods and topics, without giving enough of a nod to those explosive times and subjects.

That said, Ishiguro's greatest gift as a writer, in my view, is in setting the tone. The tone of all three novels I have read - Remains of the Day, Never Let Me Go, and A PaleView of Hills - were positively gorgeous in their overarching sense of dread without ever quite becoming truly dreadful, and description of characters' expressions and interactions with each other. It's the plot development that I had an issue with in this novel. But I still want to read more of this truly gifted author.

Fiona says

Interesting from a historical point of view, this novel is set in 1951/2 at the end of the American occupation of Japan post WWII. It shifts between then and the 1970s when the main character, Etsuko, is living in England. So many questions about the storyline are left unanswered but somehow it doesn't matter. Its main point is, I think, to show how times change and how generations mourn the passing of their old ways.

Conversations between the Japanese characters is so controlled and couched in politeness and cultural rules. It seems that each person is constantly trying not to upset the other but there are so many underlying issues that this makes conversation almost sinister at times. Only occasionally do people move outwith these constrictions to make their true feelings known.

Women were expected to kowtow to their husbands, serving them tea and meals without thanks, even voting the same way as them. The American occupation clearly led to many of the younger generation seeing

alternative ways of life to that they had experienced before the war. Some were happy with the 'old' constrained way of life and were less eager to change, however.

A quick, satisfying, yet odd read. 4 stars because it intrigued me.

AC says

What an utterly tender, moving, lovely book...! Even more astonishing is that Ishiguro was so young when he wrote it... Such emotional depth and confidence as a writer....

Ahmad Sharabiani says

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William1.2 says

This is a beautiful novel that calls for patient and careful reading. I admire the way it's constructed. The cares and concerns of three pairs of mothers and daughters are refracted off one another. The first two pair live near a resurgent Nagasaki sometime toward the end of the American Occupation of Japan, about 1951-52. Here the pregnant Etsuko, who narrates, lives with her husband Jiro, in a new concrete residential building along the river. From her window, across a stretch of wasteland, Etsuko can see, much closer to the river, an old cottage built in the traditional style. It is there that Sachiko and her daughter Mariko live. The third mother-daughter pair are in England of about 1980 or so. This pair is comprised of an older Etsuko and Niki, a daughter Etsuko has had by a second English-born husband. Another daughter, Keiko, fathered by Jiro, presumably the child Etsuko carries in the earlier timeframe, has recently committed suicide in her Manchester flat. Moreover, Etsuko's second husband has also died. (We never learn what became of Jiro.) So one can see why Etsuko would be unreliable--reasons too traumatic to face. She has lived through the American bombing of Nagasaki, but her wounds are entirely psychological. She has lost much, but specifically what she has lost is never described, only intimated. Ishiguro's elliptical style seems fully mature here in his first novel. It's unquestionably the same one he uses in later works. The penultimate page contains what we might call the narrative atomic-bomb. On reading it this second time--my memory of the subtle story had grown hazy over the intervening years--I all but jumped from my chair. Brilliant stuff, highly recommended.

nettebuecherkiste says

Cooooooooo! ?

Großbritannien in den Achtzigern. Seitdem die Japanerin Etsuko Japan mit ihrem inzwischen verstorbenen britischen Ehemann Japan verlassen hat, lebt sie in England. Sie bekommt Besuch von ihrer gemeinsamen jüngeren Tochter Niki. Die ältere Tochter Keiko, die aus einer früheren Beziehung mit einem Japaner stammt, hat sich kürzlich das Leben genommen. Vor dem Eindruck ihres Todes und des Besuchs ihrer Schwester beginnt Etsuko, sich an ihre Zeit in Japan zu erinnern.

Damals kam das von der Atombombe erschütterte Nachkriegs-Nagasaki wieder auf die Beine, Etsuko war schwanger, ihr japanischer Mann versuchte, seine Karriere voranzutreiben und ihr Schwiegervater war zu einem längeren Besuch da, als in ein Häuschen gegenüber die rätselhafte Sachiko mit ihrer Tochter Mariko einzog. Sachiko ist keine Mutter aus dem Bilderbuch, sie lässt Mariko häufig unbeaufsichtigt, um in der Stadt mit ihrem Freund, einem amerikanischen Soldaten, um die Häuser zu ziehen. Etsuko freundet sich mit Sachiko an und achtet auch ein wenig auf Mariko.

Von den drei Büchern, die ich bisher von Kazuo Ishiguro gelesen habe, beeindruckte mich dieses – sein Debütroman – am meisten. Das liegt einmal daran, dass es um ein bevorzugtes Thema von mir geht, die Unzuverlässigkeit von Erinnerungen, andererseits an der meisterhaften Komposition des Romans. Für mich schreibt so ein echter Könnner. Es ist sehr schwierig, dieses Buch ohne Spoiler zu besprechen, deshalb folgt unten ein Spoiler-Abschnitt. Der Plot-Twist verbirgt sich tatsächlich hinter einem einzigen Wort, weshalb ich empfehle, das Buch vor allem in der zweiten Hälfte sehr aufmerksam zu lesen, denn die ganze Bedeutung hinter dem Buch hängt an diesem Twist. Deshalb muss aber niemand das Buch scheuen, denn es ist, wie es sich für Ishiguro gehört, sehr gut lesbar und angenehm geschrieben. Lasst euch diesen kleinen Geniestreich von Ishiguro nicht entgehen!

SPOILER!!!

Es geht also um die Unzuverlässigkeit von Erinnerungen. Diese machen Etsuko zu einer unzuverlässigen Erzählerin, die ihre eigenen Erinnerungen daran, wie schlecht sie sich selbst als Mutter ihrer älteren Tochter verhalten hat, verdrängt hat. Denn Mariko ist niemand anderes als Keiko und Sachiko ist eine Figur, auf die Etsuko sich selbst und ihr Verhalten projiziert. Dies erschließt sich in der letzten in der Vergangenheit in Nagasaki spielenden Szene, als Etsuko Mariko nachläuft und sie besänftigen will:

„In any case,“ I went on, „if you don’t like it over there, we’ll come straight back. But we have to try it and see if we like it there. I’m sure we will.“ (Seite 173)

Die plötzliche Verwendung des Pronomens „we“ statt „you“ ist ein entscheidender Hinweis. Ein so feinsinniger und raffinierter Plottwist ist mir noch nicht untergekommen und hat in mir große Begeisterung für das Buch ausgelöst. Ich muss darauf hinweisen, dass es noch eine andere Interpretation gibt, nämlich dass Etsuko eine Kindsmörderin ist, die Mädchen erhängt, was Marikos Entsetzen über das in Etsukos Sandale

verfangene Seil erklären würde. Meine eigene Theorie ist die gängigere und ich habe mich entschieden, dabei zu bleiben, es spricht mehr dafür. Aber vielleicht bietet uns Ishiguro, der sich wohl nicht über die richtige Interpretation geäußert hat, seinen Lesern auch beide Interpretationen ermöglichen? In jedem Fall handelt es sich um einen meisterhaft gestalteten Roman.

K.D. Absolutely says

I have a friend here on Goodreads who reads the books of the authors he fancies *chronologically*. I admire his tenacity and discipline. Even if I have all the author's works in my bookshelves, I still always pick first his most famous work. My reason is that if I die soon, at least, I've already read the author's masterpiece.

I think I liked Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* (4 stars) and *Never Let Me Go* (4 stars) that almost all of his other works seem to be mediocre. It's like that I've fallen in love with a beautiful woman and all of the other girls around are incomparable if not downright ugly. I know I should have stopped after reading his collection of short stories, *Nocturnes: Five Stories of Music and Nightfall* (3 stars) but his other 3 books are also 1001 and many of my friends in my book club are raving about *Remains* as it is our book for this month, July 2012, so I resumed reading his other works.

I am not pulling your leg. Check my profile. Among my favorite ever books are *Lolita*, *The Golden Notebook: Perennial Classics edition*, *The Wars* and *Embers* and I have many of those authors' (Nabokov, Lessing, Findley and Marai respectively) other books in my tbr piles at home. However, I am afraid that I would dislike those other books because I liked their masterpieces very much.

This is not the first time this happened. I used to adore Haruki Murakami, C.S. Lewis, and Ken Follett, until I read many of their books and now I am losing my interest on their other works. I think the only ones who have so far survived this feeling are **Ian McEwan** (5 books and still to disappoint), **Gabriel Garcia Marquez** (4 books and still among my favorites), **J.R.R. Tolkien** (4 books if LOTR is counted as 3), **Paul Auster** (4 books and still hangs there) and **John Steinbeck** (3 books and I am still insatiable).

For me, Kazuo Ishiguro, unfortunately, is not among them. This book, *A Pale View of the Hills*, in my opinion, is not at par as his more famous works. The only reason why I am not rating this with 1 star is that some of my friends (who still admire Ishiguro) will definitely find my above reason flimsy and I don't want to lose them. However, I know what I feel as a reader and I am entitled to my own opinion and they are my friends and true friendship is not measured by how many books they both liked or disliked.

You see, this book was Ishiguro's first and this won the 1982 Winifred Holtby Memorial Prize (that has been superseded by Ondaatje Prize). I would imagine Ishiguro's feeling then. His first novel immediately winning an annual literary award given by Royal Society of Literature. He must have said to himself: "It worked! They liked my style! They liked my formula! I should use it again!"

And so he did.

Based on the first 5 books I've read this is his *ta-da!* formula: (A) first-person *unreliable* narrator **plus** (B) open-ended almost absent denouement **plus** (C) narrator recalling the past **plus** (D) interplay between past and present **plus** (E) detached and quiet narrative **equals** Kazuo Ishiguro's style.

There's nothing wrong with having a distinctive style, right? Dickens has his fondness for details, Steinbeck

always has his dear California as setting and J.M.Coetzee has his Costello as his favorite recurring character. It's like the authors establishing their trademark and making it their competitive advantage, i.e., something that when you read their work, even if you cover all the titles and the author's name on the book, you would still easily identify who wrote it.

Overall, this is an okay book. Not bad for a first book. I just can't help myself to like it because of the following reasons:

1. **Many loose ends are not explained.** Examples: Why did **Keiko** kill herself? When did Etsuko get married to her second husband? Others may say that these are inconsequential but these, in my opinion, are vital to the story to establish what kind of wife and mother Etsuko was. Ishiguro made use of her *unreliability* as an excuse for his style. When I closed the book I had the feeling that he did not know how to end his book that was why he left it open ended. But it worked, it won an award. So, from then on, he made sure all of his succeeding books are open ended.

2. **Even when the characters are Japanese and have never been to Britain, they talk like British.** I have been to Japan thrice and as part of my work for so many years, I have been communicating with Japanese. In this book, the characters say "certainly", "lovely", "wonderful" or "*Why, of course, Etsuko.*" That "Why" that starts a response caught my attention while reading. Japanese do not use that. They normally just say "Yes" (like when they snappily say "Hai!"). They normally don't use flowery words. Think about Haruki Murakami's novels, and you know what I mean.

3. Although I liked the overall style of the book: the hallucinatory guilt of the mother whose elder daughter Keiko killed herself presumably because she was uprooted from her native land, I've read and loved two **more powerful depiction of extreme sadness and loneliness of women** who have just lost their loved ones in Janice Galloway's *The Trick Is to Keep Breathing* and Lydia Davis's *The End of the Story*. Even my brother's favorite book, Jean Rhys's *Good Morning, Midnight* has captured better the melancholy emotion of a woman in the height of her sadness and despair over a loved one. For me, Ishiguro is better when his first person *unreliable* narrator is a male instead of a female. There are just some emotions that fail to transfer to me when a male author is trying to make me believe that the female narrator is sad, hallucinating and probably contemplating on suicide. I could taste a tinge of deception and dishonesty at the tip of my tongue.

However, I do not blame others for liking this book. Ishiguro's style is his and who am I to challenge it. It's just that I'd rather have variety in my reading. I do not want to keep on reading the same plot with only few of the elements changed. When I open a book, I would always like to be engaged and if this is not asking for too much... to be surprised. Beautifully surprised.

Asako says

I'm Japanese and I have read many books about WW2 so far. However, I haven't read a book like this one before-one that follows the life of people AFTER WW2.

Overall it was a wonderful book, beautiful, mysterious and intriguing. The plot itself isn't too complicated either; a Japanese woman called Sachiko is dwelling on her old memories in Nagasaki after her daughter

commits suicide. The story goes back and forth between 'then' and 'now', but that doesn't get too complicated, either.

Ishiguro managed to weave in a essence of the darkness of the time and people in Nagasaki after the atomic bomb was dropped. This book was probably set in the 1950s, and at that time, Japan hadn't exactly got back on its feet yet (though it was a lot better than right after the bombing, of course).

I would have given this book 5 stars if not for the too-unclear ending. It seems to me that just about nothing was solved at the end. Of course, some people may enjoy this, but it just didn't suit me.

Kornela says

First, if you haven't read Kazuo Ishiguro, go and do it. Right now. One of the best writers working right now, I can't recommend him highly enough. Start with *The Remains of the Day*, a quiet, haunting novel that packs a punch and will have you thinking about it long after you've finished its pages.

Second, *A Pale View of Hills* confused me. What the hell happened? Don't get me wrong, Ishiguro is a master storyteller and has an eloquent way with words. This novel was lovely, absorbing, and immensely readable. It just asked more questions than it answered. And for someone that likes their mysteries nicely resolved with a bow on top, this was a bit frustrating.

A Pale View of Hills tells the story of Etsuko, a Japanese woman now living in England. Dealing with the recent suicide of her oldest daughter, Etsuko attempts to reconstruct events and figure out what happened by dwelling on her past and the time when she was living in war-torn Nagasaki. She recounts being pregnant with her daughter, living with a cold, domineering husband, and her strange friendship with a mysterious woman and her young daughter.

Strange things happen, not everything is as it appears, and the past and the present blur until they are indistinguishable. By the end of the novel, few things are answered and nothing is certain.

On the flip side, the book does make you think and I'm fairly sure that readers will all have different theories and interpretations of the novel's meaning and events. This is a very interesting, positive quality but I like a little more closure with my story.

Anne says

This book was so creepy and confusing that I opted to read it again. Not just because it is short, but because it is well written and it weaves a very intriguing mystery.

Our narrator Etsuko's oldest daughter recently hung herself in her apartment. Nikki, Etsuko's daughter with her second husband, visits Etsuko at her home and Etsuko recounts to her a brief friendship she had with a single mom named Sachiko back when she still lived in Nagasaki. I believe that Etsuko is an unreliable narrator and she and Sachiko are the same person. I also believe that Keiko, Etsuko's deceased daughter, is remembered as Mariko, the young daughter of Sachiko.

I love an unreliable narrator. The second time I read the book, I did find some clues. In telling her story, Etsuko remarks that her memory is "hazy" regarding her time in Japan. She also says toward the end of the book that "Memory can be unreliable...heavily coloured by circumstances...no doubt this applies...here."

At the beginning of the flashback, Etsuko makes an abrupt shift from how she felt living in Nagasaki during the years immediately following WW2 to how Sachiko felt about it within the same paragraph.

Niki, Etsuko's surviving daughter visited her mom to reassure her that she should have "no regrets for choices (you) once made". This refers to Etsuko/Sachiko moving her young daughter away from her life and father in Japan to England so that her daughter would have more opportunities and a better life.

In the flashback, Etsuko's father in law remarks, "Children become adults but they don't change much." This supports the theory that Keiko is Mariko – the daughter was troubled as a child and troubled as an adult.

There is also a key scene at the end of the book when the narrator shifts from neighbor to mother of Mariko mid-paragraph.

The two women's histories are intertwined. Etsuko/Sachiko lost a boyfriend and her family in the war. Etsuko married a man in a caretaking role. A distant, controlling husband who didn't seem to care or notice when Etsuko, several months pregnant, left their apartment many a night to hang out with Sachiko. Not likely. Sachiko briefly lived with an uncle after the war. After moving out, he asked her to return but she didn't want to. Her feelings toward the uncle are likely the same as Etsuko felt about her first husband: "It was nice of him to have invited me into his household. But I'm afraid I've made other plans now. " "There's nothing for me at my Uncle's house. Just a few empty rooms, that's all. I could sit there in a room and grow old."

Years later, Etsuko's surviving daughter, Niki, echoes these sentiments. "Sometimes you've got to take risks. You did exactly the right thing. You can't just watch your life wasting away." Earlier in the story Etsuko snaps at Niki, resenting her need to reassure her mother about the decisions she made back in Japan. Etsuko remarks that her daughter has little understanding of what happened "those last days in Nagasaki".

And what happened those last days in Nagasaki? Etsuko decided to leave her husband and move out of Japan. She tells Niki that she knew that Keiko/Mariko would be unhappy but she moved her out of Japan anyway. This is the most haunting part of the story – Keiko/Mariko's suicide. Keiko hung herself in her apartment. In the flashbacks of Nagasaki, there were two instances where Etsuko/Sachiko was coming toward Keiko/Mariko holding a rope that she says she found caught on her sandal. In both instances Keiko/Mariko ran away, frightened. Etsuko also remembers that there was a child killer hanging kids in the neighborhood back in the day. I feel that by Etsuko unreliably remembering these instances, it indicates that she blames herself for her daughter's suicide. Her neglectful mothering and her moving her daughter out of Japan caused her daughter to lead a thoroughly unhappy life. Throughout the flashbacks Keiko/Mariko is in danger of being hung.

Another disturbing scene is when Etsuko/Sachiko drowns Keiko/Mariko's only playmates – her beloved kittens. I believe that this is another metaphor for the damage done to Keiko/Mariko by her mother moving them away from Japan – solving a problem in a selfish, lazy way under the guise of doing what's best for Keiko/Mariko. Etsuko later tells Niki, "nothing you learn at that age is totally lost".

During much of the dialogue in the flashback between Etsuko and Sachiko, they are debating a topic or trying to make a decision. To me, it looks like the thought process one person would have when trying to solve a problem.

Some of the topics they discuss:

-Should I leave my young daughter home alone? Sachiko thought it was fine but Etsuko didn't agree.

-Should I move to America? Sachiko thought it would be better for Mariko but Etsuko thought living with her uncle would be a more stable choice.

-Should I go look for the American sailor who I thought was my ticket out of Japan? Sachiko decided to but Etsuko was skeptical.

-Should I go after my daughter when she runs out of the house upset in the night? Sachiko didn't want to but Etsuko would go looking for her.

-Will the American Sailor really move me to America? Sachiko felt that he would but Etsuko doubted it.

-Do I really have to drown these kittens? Sachiko felt she had to but Etsuko offered to care for them.

-Does the noodle lady who lost most of her family in the war have anything to live for? Sachiko felt that the noodle lady had lost everything worth living for when she lost her family in the war but Etsuko thought she had a content enough existence, considering.

This book gave less than the bare bones of the story to the reader but was intriguing enough for me to stick with it. Twice.

Barry Pierce says

My first Ishiguro. This is such a quaint and quiet novel. Inane to the point of enjoyability. I look forward to more monotony.

Annet says

She came to see me earlier this year, in April, when the days were still cold and drizzly. Perhaps she had intended to stay longer. I do not know. But my country house and the quiet that surrounds it made her restless, and before long I could see she was anxious to return to her life in London. She listened impatiently to my classical records, flicked through numerous magazines. The telephone rang for her regularly, and she would stride across the carpet, her thin figure squeezed into her tight clothes, taking care to close the door behind her so I would not overhear her conversation. She left after five days. She did not mention Keiko until the second day. It was a grey windy morning, and we had moved the armchairs nearer the windows to watch the rain falling on my garden. 'Did you expect me to be there?' she asked. 'At the funeral, I mean.'
'No, I suppose not. I didn't really think you'd come.'
'It did upset me, hearing about her. I almost came.'
'I never expected you to come.'

This is another Ishiguro story (his debut) full of mystery and questions, what's happening and what is at the heart of the matter? Beautifully written, as I appreciate Ishiguro. Stories are 'mingled' and all has a subfeeling of sadness, melancholy and 'something is not quite right here...'.

When I finished the book, I started again right at the beginning, to see if the circle was complete. Not quite sure. But I love Ishiguro's brooding and 'still' writing, a dark and lyrical poet. Loved reading Ishiguro again...

It's the story of Etsuko, a Japanese woman, now living alone in England, dwelling on the recent suicide of her eldest daughter. She finds herself reliving one particular hot summer in Nagasaki, when she and her friends struggled to rebuild their lives after the war. But then as she recalls her strange friendship with Sachiko - a wealthy woman reduced to vagrancy - the memories on a disturbing cast.

Interesting Wikipedia bit about the plot:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Pale_...

Michele says

Every once in a while, a book surprises you on the way to its ending. After the first few pages of this book, I figured I knew what to expect - a well written realist novel about a displaced Japanese woman in England who reminisces about her youth while contemplating the choices her children have made. And for most of the book, that impression is borne out. It nicely describes the two countries, how people act and react, and what life has been like for this character throughout her time in both places.

The novel even does a very good job of replicating the varying syntax between English and Japanese - in the reminiscences, the dialogue does not flow as it would in English, and the translation is in some cases very literal, which makes the dialogue reflect the difference in thought patterns that speaking (and thinking) in another language requires.

Then, only ten pages from the end, the pronouns change. Where you expect 'she' there is 'the child' and where you expect 'you' there is 'we'. And all of a sudden you're unsure who is talking to whom, and when, and you start to realize that you have been taking what your narrator says at face value when perhaps you shouldn't have.

After all, the narrator of the story tells us more than once that perhaps her memory is faulty, perhaps she is mixing things up. But such a confession, such reluctance to appear certain, such a recognition of the false nature of memory, does the opposite of what the words should do. Instead of making the reader doubt the narrator, such qualification about the haziness of memory leads the reader to trust the narrator, after all, she has recognized that she's telling a story, and because she's telling a story, we're willing to give her the benefit of the doubt.

Then suddenly, the pronoun shift at the end introduces the possibility that not only did the narrator perhaps get some details wrong, leave some things out, change some names, be not as innocent as she seems, but maybe these omissions and alterations weren't accidental and we've been led to believe her a good person when perhaps she was lying about those details because she wasn't such a nice person after all, in fact, maybe she was a really nasty person.

I'm sure if you haven't read the book, all this sounds a bit confusing, and you might be wondering what the deal is anyway, but from a narrative theory point of view, the ability of such a small thing - a few pronouns - to throw the entire preceding narrative into doubt is pretty impressive.

I think I will need to reread this book to figure it out.
