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Revision of Visions Past, or "the Texture of Memory."

Kazuo Ishiguro's *An Artist of the Floating World*

In an interview with Gregory Mason, Kazuo Ishiguro declares unambiguously that he is not interested in "the kind of book whose *raison d'être* is to say something about literary form," which indeed he finds "very tedious" (Mason 346). Writing then is not to be expected as an explicit issue in his books. But on the other hand revision is a predominant feature of his fiction as his narrators, like Ono in *An Artist of the Floating World*, my main concern here, forever "find [themselves] remembering" (75), going over their past in a process of revising or reviewing it. Now, this process, like any psychical process—as Derrida claims in "*Freud et la scène de l'écriture*"—involves textuality, a writing process—which Ishiguro unwittingly suggests in referring to "the *text*ure of memory" (Mason 336; italics mine) or in comparing Ono's narrative, in *An Artist of the Floating World*, to a diary, a rough approximation to the novel's narrative frame (Mason 343). So that in the end the attention given to the workings of memory, to the narrators' compulsion to revise and to review, situates the issue of reflexive writing at the centre of Ishiguro's novels—but not... reflexively. The narrators rarely look back on their writing *qua* writing. The fiction's insistence on the vagaries of remembering, illustrates writing-as-revision—indeed as a dramatic stake, since speaking out is such an issue—but never to the benefit of its protagonists who seem stuck in their (re)visions. Briefly stated then, my argument will be that, with Ono, Ishiguro stages a character unable to begin the process of re-writing History or his own story, so as to be free of his

compulsion to repeat past failures. His attempt at redeeming past mistakes, by recalling them publicly to memory—as he will actually do—is just meant as a return to the past, in an effort to stabilise or erase it, a revision of past visions, instead of facing the odds of re-writing—to be understood, with Jean-François Lyotard, as working-through.

Ono, a painter that rose to fame during Japan's heights of military nationalism, in the 1930s, has a lot to do, willy-nilly, to come to terms with that period or, as he puts it, "with the mistakes one has made in the course of one's life" (125). In his far from rectilinear reviewing, history seems to repeat itself with the stammer of personal story. A first instance of this can be found in the October 1948 section, when the narrator twice (28, 48) admits he has lost track of his first purpose and drifted to earlier memories—and from them to earlier ones. His avowed purpose had been "to recall details of Setsuko's [his elder daughter] stay with us last month" (28). The cause of his departure from his first intent, we are gradually made to understand, is caused in part by an uneasy recollection of a remark by his daughter, whose import he at that time apparently failed to grasp adequately. She had urged him to "take certain precautionary steps," to "ensure misunderstandings [about the past] do not arise" and ruin—yet again, as we will soon learn—the negotiations for the marriage of younger daughter Noriko. The implication in Setsuko's suggestion is that Noriko's previous *miai*—a formal engagement dinner—fell through because of her father's former collusion with the militaristic regime before and during the war. This is what forces him again and again to think back to past events to turn them over "from yet another perspective" (54)—for instance to that meeting with young Miyake, Noriko's intended, just prior to the *miai* that was not to be, and their conversation about the suicide of a prominent firm manager, in an act of atonement for, to borrow Ono's phrase, the mistakes he made in the course of his life.

One can readily glimpse in this exchange the seeds for further regression to the past, which eventually, step by haphazard step,

will lead the narrator-cum-painter to a more complete picture of the repercussions of his former allegiances. So that to describe the text(ure) of Ono's memory, it is tempting to evoke both a reluctance and a compulsion—the latter looking stronger than the former—to go back in time towards the source of all subsequent ills. Thus the main drive would be backward, and the main resistance aimed against that drive. Yet there is as much claim to the opposite argument—that there exists a tendency to shirk the more recent memories, because they are teeming with potential conflicts, particularly in the perspective of Noriko's future. Significantly, when Ono admits to having digressed, the recollection he has strayed from is more often than not related to the recent past, more precisely a recent conversation—the one already mentioned with Setsuko, a later one with the same after Noriko's eventual marriage (134) or, on the same day, with his grandson Ichiro (151). Such exchanges, it must be noticed, have one thing in common: they are all disturbing experiences—the second one with Setsuko is said to be "annoying" (151)—, that is to say they are events one would rather not call back to mind.

The two arguments need not be seen as cancelling each other out, especially if one considers how difficult it can be, for a given memory, to tell what—as to form or content—is due to the past from what is due to the present or, to put it differently, to ascertain the proportion of sincerity and secrecy that goes into it. As a matter of fact, there seems to be as much effort and pain involved in revising the past to understand the present—or a more recent past—as there is in understanding the present to revise the past, as if indeed the present stood as much in need of revising as the past. But of course, in any particular instance, depending on the stakes, the relative weight of past and present may vary.

In the case of the first talk with Setsuko, it is the present the narrator is rather shyer of—it is the first time that he has really felt the urgency of going out of his way to prevent his daughter's marriage prospect from being ruined again. Things are more complex when he returns to his original recollection of the second talk. On the second occasion of his taking up again the thread of his

recalling, he has been remembering in quick succession his last interview with his teacher Mori-san and his witnessing the *auto-da-fé* of Kuroda's—his most talented pupil—paintings, following Ono's denunciation—while his own works had been threatened with the same fate by Mori-san, which is, as we shall see, a repetition of an earlier scene with his father. The narrator's denial—"But this [his pupil's story] is all of limited relevance here." (185)—may strike one as a good instance of the way the present or the recent past is used to screen off a shameful past. However, one should not overlook the fact that it will take three attempts—it took Peter as many to deny Christ—and about fifty pages for the narrator to give, a mere sixteen pages from the end of his narrative, a complete relation of the conversation he had in mind to retell. To say nothing of his inserting at the last minute the story of—what else?—a conversation about Japan's future with Noriko's husband at the supper table on the night before.

A vision, it appears, never remains stable for very long. On whichever date the narrator sets the time-machine's dial, be it far or near, his memory is sure to flicker back and forth through time with little hope of resting—*i.e.* staying and relaxing. If revision then happens to be such an arduous task, the reason for this may well be that revision implies the existence of an original vision—or, in psychoanalytical terms, a primal scene—which is nowhere to be found. In other words, the nature of revision depends on the quality of vision, and not the less so, as I intend now to show, since the narrator is a painter.

Bluntly stated, Ono is a man of vision and limited insight—and, to be complete, average hindsight. The first gift will, as expected, come in handy in his professional occupation. His own depiction of it bears an extended quotation:

> My respect for reception rooms may well appear exaggerated, but then you must realize that in the house I grew up . . . I was forbidden even to enter the reception room until the age of twelve. That room being in many senses the centre of the house, curiosity compelled me to construct an image of its interior from the occasional glimpses I

> managed to catch of it. Later in my life I was often to surprise colleagues with my ability to realize a scene on canvas based only on the briefest of passing glances; it is possible I have my father to thank for this skill, and the inadvertent training he gave my artist's eye during those formative years. (41)

The coincidence of the father figure, a forbidden interior and stolen glances, all of which might hint at a primal scene of sorts, will retain us later. My present concern is with what this fable of origins can reveal about Ono's (visual) memory. The same pattern—a brief glimpse of something disturbing that later finds its way on canvas—is going to be repeated. A case in point is his famous painting "Complacency" which has at its centre three figures based on three boys he saw in a slum, to whom he gave "little further thought at the time" (167). Furthermore, at the centre of what will become the centre of the scene—in the middle of the circle formed by the boys—something unspecified and implicitly forbidden is taking place: "although I saw nothing, something in their manner told me they were torturing some animal" (167). It would be difficult to overemphasise the significance of the latter admission. Beside being a direct though unconscious acknowledgement that the most accurate vision has a blind spot at its core, it is bitterly ironic—of an irony which the teller is unable to discern even with hindsight—since the urchins will not be represented in the painting with "the defensive scowls of little criminals caught in the act" (168) but will impersonate the painter's *vision* of a rising nation of young warriors—who will prove guilty of atrocious acts of brutality, and in particular on Ono's rebellious disciple, Kuroda.

This also replays the situation outlined in relation to the reception room, in that the forbidden interior will be *constructed* as an image, a "scene on canvas" whose "reality" supersedes the inaccessible reality to which it is indebted. Therefore the artist's ability to realise a scene is matched by his incapacity to realise its import, much as his gift of vision is matched by his lack of insight. And this goes as well for the many scenes he will try to depict verbally, including the seemingly more innocuous ones. To take just one instance, the encounter with Miyake, like the scene with the

three boys, is at first barely recorded—"But even then, only a week after the actual encounter, I could hardly recall the conversation I had had with young Miyake" (54)—and yet the narrator will manage to recount it later on with precision—although even he will have doubts as to how much of later construction enters the recollection. So his effort to revise that encounter, "searching it for significance" (53) is really a reviewing process to realise—in his memory—what was missed at the time.

An Artist of the Floating World may in general terms be construed as the story of a painter that happens to be, as it were, history-blind. Even though his career took off following his decision to make his art part of the process of history, by turning it into propaganda—a word he is careful never to use—his vision of that process lacks *perspective*, of the kind that is needed to get a grasp on history *in progress*. His is only a belated grasp, that is why he is drawn to revise the past. This is not to imply that he is an exceptional being. On the contrary, as Matsuda, his political mentor, not long before his death, points out:

> It's just that in the end we turned out to be ordinary men. Ordinary men *with no special gift of insight*. It was simply our misfortune to have been ordinary men during such times. (200, italics mine)

At stake here is the elusiveness of the present. It is no fortuitous coincidence if Augustine's great classical text on memory—*Confessions*—should also meditate on time aporias—both issues being woven together in the experience of confession. In Book X, Chapter xiii, Augustine implicitly binds the act of recalling to intellection. What I store away in my memory, to paraphrase him, is the memory of having understood such or such things, so as to be able to remember I understood them at the time. If this is true, then an insufficient "gift of insight" means a poor or, rather, limited memory. What Ono, therefore, is able to remember is his incomplete understanding of the present *as* present. Or we might say—which sometimes amounts to the same thing—that he is unable to remember what he had confusedly understood but refused at the time to look more deeply into—for instance, the true nature of the boys' game.

Augustine's conjecture—especially separated as it is from his theory of imagination and perception—seems concerned predominantly with memories that can, as it were, be summoned up in tranquillity, and as such can be opposed to those that constantly drift up, unbidden or even forbidden, from the marshes of the past and bespeak—in ciphers—unassimilated experiences that tend repeatedly to infiltrate the mind of the man lured back to his past, in various guises. Those may be termed imperfect memories, since in them vision is dissociated from understanding—hence, as Freud taught us, the compulsion to repeat them unless one succeeds, though never completely, to master them or, to be more precise, master, through revision, the painful experience at their core, thanks to transference and working-through. Ono's recollections being of that second kind, one could as a consequence of this opposition object to coupling Augustine and Freud in the same argument. But, as I would contend briefly, Augustine and Freud do not make such strange bedfellows after all.

The paradox I want first to underline is that memory's dependence on intellection means that I can only remember what I have always already, in the act of understanding it, re-membered. One cannot, in this sense, remember the past if one did not re-organise it into a meaningful text when it was (the) present—in other words if one did not re-organise the *membra disjecta* of the present, which is, by the very nature of time, something of an impossibility. Freud's theory of trauma tells a similar story. Traumas can be considered as painful experiences in the present which escape symbolic organisation—and which are never thoroughly remembered, as Freud was led to admit. The paradox that he evolved from the first is that because they cannot be fully remembered, neither can traumas be forgotten. The compulsion to endlessly repeat—painful things—is but one facet of the same paradox.

In this reading of *An Artist of the Floating World*, I am not interested in traumas in the specific psychoanalytic sense, but rather—in a more sweeping use of the concept—in these painful and symbolically slippery experiences that manifest themselves in

repetition. Recurrence of patterns or incidents is so prevalent in the book, that a whole list would make tedious reading. Instead I will focus on what might well be the most fully "realised" traumatic scene in the narrator's recollection, one which will return several times in different contexts. The recalling of that holy of holies, Ono's father's reception room, quoted above, prompted by the memory of Setsuko's irruption in a room where he was, as was his wont, "*drift[ing]* through the day at my own pace" (40; italics mine), was in fact introducing to a lengthier retelling of the evening in which his father burnt all his paintings, to smother—or so he thought—his budding vocation.

While the interview with Mori-san repeats the scene, it is difficult to decide whether it is only the outcome of a compulsion—Ono having unconsciously placed himself in a similar situation—or, on the contrary, a successful revision of the primary confrontation with the father—which may be substantiated by the fact that Ono escapes unscathed and has learned in particular not to hand over the paintings he stored separately, because they are dearest to his heart (178-79, 180; 43).[1] However, the *auto-da-fé* of Kuroda's paintings—in which Ono had the whip-hand—casts doubts about the latter explanation, for even if he hadn't consciously imagined the consequences—for want of foresight—they have about them a disturbing air of parapraxis. In fact, everything that pertains, however remotely, to the highly recurrent issue of obedience, authority or influence, is bound to be uncomfortably reminiscent of the burning scene in the reception room.

It is time then that we in turn revised the episode more closely. I will not dwell on the obvious sexual symbolism of that dark room "lit by a single tall candle" (41) which only the father—and then the son at puberty—is allowed to enter. This of course permeates everything that is related to the room, but I wish to draw attention to a less obvious but no less momentous feature: the fearful vacuity of (male) power. Once in the long forbidden room,

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[1] Which reflects interestingly on the importance he still attaches to his war paintings, which are "tidied away for the moment" (32, 79).

indeed, the awed son can see nothing in the phallic light but still more symbols of authority, such as a Buddhist altar or, designating dark interiors within a dark interior, "hangings [*what a word!* R.P.] adorning the alcoves" (42), and the symbolic performance of his father's power when he does his accounts or, more significantly, when he "questions" him, before destroying his works—an anticipation of Kuroda's fate, barring physical violence. So that in the end, the glimpse the young man could catch of the room before becoming an "insider" is no different from the vision he will have afterwards: it is the representation of a (theatrical) representation of an empty centre, though one which has enough force to make him—"during those formative years"—confuse, possibly for ever, dread and respect.

Immediately after the *auto-da-fé*, Ono is briefly able to offer a slighting and for once clear-sighted diagnosis of power as being nothing more than "the counting of loose change" (48). Nevertheless, this exceptional lucidity will not come to anything in the long run, if we are to judge by the uneasiness the smell of burning still elicits in him, towards the end of his account. When he explains this to Matsuda on their last encounter, he will not manage, after all these months of repentance, to bring himself to refer explicitly to Kuroda, but will talk in more general, ambivalent terms: "It's not so long ago it meant bombings and fire" (200). The impulse to hide his personal guilt of violence within the collective madness of war indicates that he has not completely come to terms with his mistakes. The dark secret in the vacant interior of power will not be solved and let go of him. As a result, neither will the murky relationships between all his great or small acts of allegiance be clarified.

Reaching the end of Ono's narrative, one has in fact the feeling that the process of revision has hardly begun. Looking back with hindsight, the rebellion against Mori-san reads like an escape that will take him deeper into Oedipal submission, despite an obvious gain in authority. What was given up then was an "endeavour to capture the fragile lantern light of the pleasure world" (174), to try and represent "those pleasurable things that disappear

with the morning light" (180). Being an artist of that floating world had meant in fact much the same effort as conjuring up an image of the reception room: an attempt at representing some undefined and forbidden thing one can get only passing glimpses of. Turning his back on this, Ono is heeding, albeit belatedly,[2] his father's warning of that fateful night against "a world which gives them [painters] every temptation to become weak-willed and depraved" (46). Instead, he will settle for a more defined vision, becoming aesthetically and ideologically a hard-liner: "my technique made extensive use of the hard outline—a traditional enough method, as you will know, but one whose rejection was fundamental to Mori-san's teachings" (174). Better a well-circumscribed image of the world than an upsetting approximation of the fleetingness of desire, but this is no cause for rejoicing since if Ono now is, superficially, no longer the young boy or man threatened with the burning of his creation, it is because he has nothing to offend the father/Emperor, or the always vigilant Superego. The pattern of Oedipal submission is only repeating itself and will do so over and over again, not less when the former son/disciple has taken up the—performing—role of the father/master to suppress the "treachery" of a new "maturing talent" among his pupils (142).

Given the numerous occurrences of this pattern in Ono's narrative—whenever the issue of authority is raised—it would seem to constitute its navel,[3] that is constantly being recalled, one way or the other, but never re-membered or re-written—that is to say, understood—while paradoxically the narrator is constantly writing about it, or again is forever about—just about—to write of it. The "aboutness" of the recalling accounts for the endless repetitions and illustrates the dissociation which for Freud ("Remembering, Repeating, and Working-through") characterises the puzzling

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2 But rather definitely, if one considers the thorough repression of anything sexual in Ono's recalling, and this despite his connection with the pleasure world. A more detailed study of this aspect of the narrative would require more than the allotted space.

3 In the sense of Freud's navel of the dream, an inextricable knot of dream-thoughts that reach into the unknown (*The Interpretation of Dreams*).

conjunction of forgetting and remembering in the experiences of the analyst's patients—usually resulting in the patients' exclaiming "I'd always known it!" when "remembrance" comes. Freud offers several examples of the form this strange proximity of amnesia and memory can take. One is the possibility to remember events of one's childhood that were "forgotten" because the then child did not understand their significance, which will emerge, helped by the analysis of dreams or free association, *nachträglich*, after the event. Related to this, screen memories carry the same ambivalence, being both a token of resistance to anamnesis, and a means to preserve the memory of a meaningful event—thus, for instance, making up, according to Freud, for childhood amnesia.

Among the many illustrations that could be found of memories used both to hide and seek (some obscure meaning), and beside all those that have been already alluded to, I choose to concentrate succinctly on Ono's allusions to the question of his alleged influence. The first extended reference, fairly early in the novel, concerns a letter of recommendation that helped secure a job for fellow painter Shintaro's brother. That was 1935 or 1936, but the episode is called to mind by Shintaro's allusion "just the other evening" (19) to Ono's in his eyes still considerable social standing. All this is, for the narrator, to protest that: "Indeed, I have never at any point in my life been very aware of my own social standing" (19). But it must be added that this protestation comes in the wake of the conversation with Setsuko about the true reasons of the Miyakes' withdrawal—the narrator inclining to put it down to his family's superior standing. So we might suspect that this *retelling* of Shintaro's talk and the memory it is associated with somehow serves as a ploy to *overwrite* the negative side of social clout, which in Ono's case is the explanation for the breaking-up of Noriko's previous engagement, and before that brought about more than its fair share of misery—including, however indirectly, his own son's death, in Korea. But the hiding of secret shame in the habit of the Good Samaritan will not prevent the seeking of the repressed truth, hiding and seeking both producing the numerous repetitions of the fable of the influential artist until—repetition, Freud tells us, being

eine Art zu errinern, a way to remember—the painful story of denunciation surfaces, without however putting an end to bad conscience.

To sum up our findings up to now, Ono's memory as a text is an interweaving of replicas of painful events from the past. In this respect, it is rewriting in the first, weak sense Jean-François Lyotard gives the word in "Réécrire la modernité" (Lyotard 35): it consists in an effort to go back to square one and take stock—or come to terms with one's destiny—in other words: revision in the narrowest sense. But for a clearer view of how revising and rewriting interact in the narrative, we need now to take a look at another category of screen texts or images than the one we have explored, mostly based on an avoidance of the past. The strategies of avoidance and duplication will now concern the present which, we have already claimed, is no less a source of discomfort than the past, and—this is indeed obvious, but far from innocent in the context of a confessional narrative—is the time of the telling/writing.

Psychoanalysis has made us familiar with the way the past—especially as a source of discomfort—is reduplicated in memories, dreams, fantasies or symptoms. But there is also a similar tendency, as we recoil before its potential hostility, to split the present in two and—vision and understanding parting company, just as in what we called imperfect memories—find refuge in some illusion—the commonest form of duplication, indeed our common lot.[4] For Ono, whose sense of guilt is not a little permeated with nostalgia, the past, whether remote or fairly recent, can serve as such a shelter.

As a matter of fact, shame present is no weaker than shame past, they might be said to thrive on each other. So past episodes can be conjured up as duplicates to, in a way, "come to terms" with the present uneasiness, which narrating—the very act of remembering, and the very fact of *having* to remember—is a source of, as well as a potential remedy to. For instance, one may at first question the relevance of the long disquisition—in view of the most

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[4] See C. Rosset's *Le Réel et son double*.

serious topic of the ongoing marriage negotiation—on the purchase of the house that opens the book and will occupy a not inconsiderable chunk of its first section. But then one realises that the comparison of the preliminary inquest to choose the buyer on moral rather than on financial grounds to being involved in *a* marriage negotiation (9) rather ambiguously alludes to *the* negotiation that must have been foremost in the narrator's mind. The key to both transactions is his reputation, "one's moral conduct and achievement" (10), but in radically opposed ways: being deemed the most worthy candidate by the Sugimaras, the house's owners, had been a proud confirmation of status, while the same status caused the first marriage deal to flounder and might as well put the second at risk if no steps are taken. The pattern is close to that in the story of the good turn done to Shintaro's brother, and could also be detected in the allusions to suicide in connection with Ono's own "dishonour."

A self-portrait by a former colleague of the narrator's is another occasion for an oblique reflection on his own enterprise. While conceding the remarkable honesty and truthfulness of the painting, the narrator notes that it nevertheless did not resist a temptation to embellish, and his conclusion rings as a reflection on his own narrative:

> I cannot recall any colleague who could paint a self-portrait with absolute honesty; however accurately one may fill in the surface details of one's mirror reflection, the personality represented rarely comes near the truth as others would see it. (67)

In an illustration of what Freud called dissociation, remembering the portrait then becomes after a fashion a (self-)portrait of remembering. Another emblematic moment of dissociated reflection on the narrator's endeavour occurs at the beginning of the second section—narrated after Noriko's *miai*, during which Ono offered his public *mea culpa*. The meditation revolves around a bridge, called "the Bridge of Hesitation" because in the past "conscience-troubled men" (99) could be seen lingering there, unsure whether they should plunge into the pleasure district

on the other side or go home. But, the narrator quickly protests, if he for his part comes here every other day, it is not because he is hesitating, but "it is simply that I enjoy standing there as the sun sets, surveying my surroundings and the changes taking place around me" (99). In other words, if the image of that ageing man on the bridge taking stock of changes between now and then mirrors the narrative frame, it is only after denying—lack of hesitation being implicitly equated with a clear conscience—what brought the same narrative into existence: shame, or "the truth as others would see it" (67).

This is about as near as we will come to meta-reflexivity. There are, it is true, more pointed allusions to the art of reminiscing or, more generally, story-telling. Stories, when repeatedly told, are incidentally considered as apt "to take on a life of their own" (72). And memories of distinct episodes of life are allegedly prone to merge into one (25). Lastly, each renewed awareness that the narrative has drifted briefly requires a restatement of what the narrator was—still is—intent on doing, in formulae such as: "However, I see I am drifting [*note the progressive aspect*—R.P.]. My intention had been to record..." (48). But for all those self-references—of which one is given "only the briefest of passing glances" (41)—the narrative barely touches on itself reflexively, at least to any degree that might shake its frame. The latter never emerges as a device worth pondering about from within. It remains an unchallenged perspective or, more accurately, unchallenged as a perspective.

One is led therefore to wonder if this blindness as to narrative perspective—the process of narrating—could in any way be connected to the narrator's political lack of insight and, by the same token, foresight. Writing, never thinking back on the slipperiness of its grasp on ongoing events, including itself, never acquires the second, strong sense of rewriting (Lyotard 35).[5] It remains synonymous with a return to origin, but never with an effort to

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[5] Which Lyotard uses as an argument against literary or architectural postmodernism, but I am focusing here on writing and rewriting, not on the issue of literary genres.

reflect upon what we are bound to miss—in other words fail to (re)read or to (re)write—of what happens—*l'événement* (Lyotard) or the elusive present—not only on account of past prejudice but also of projections on the future, in short, of all the stories with which we overwrite what forever eludes our grip in the moment we experience it.

Two versions of Ono's kind of rewriting can be found in the novel. One is the erasing of past writings, possibly to rewrite them "from another perspective." The original text might be the letter of recommendation for Shintaro's brother which, in a sense, Shintaro will want Ono to cancel when he asks the latter to pen another one dissociating him from his colleague's influence (103). Ono bluntly refuses, but he has actually done something of the kind by proxy with his similar request—to Matsuda—that he avoid certain references to the past when questioned as a former acquaintance by the detective hired by the bridegroom's family, prior to Noriko's *miai* (94)—all of which is also a way of erasing the epistolary correspondence between the two men or other patriotic letters to the authorities (63-64). There may be one letter yet that refuses more stubbornly than any other to be erased and rewritten, and that is the one written in the capacity of official adviser to the Committee of Unpatriotic Activities giving Kuroda away: one can hardly see how the "friendly and conciliatory" tone (114) of the letter to re-establish contact with him—still with a view to ensuring the success of the *miai*—could in the least rescind the former missive.

The second, complementary, version of rewriting, on which I would like to conclude, is intricately tied with the idea of coming to terms. Revision here can be taken to mean: learning a lesson by going over it repeatedly. The most striking instance of this is related to the moment when Ono at last came out of the closet. He later on reflects on the bridegroom's father's reaction to his sudden confession:

> Perhaps I was mistaken about this, but I thought Dr Saito was watching me rather *like a teacher waiting for a pupil to go on with a lesson he has learnt by heart.* (123, italics mine)

Coming to terms, it is implied, is having successfully learned the expected terms—vocabulary and syntax—to replace the older ones which have turned offensive, having learned the new terms for a new lease of life. This even involves imitating, like Ichiro, the former enemy's language, eating habits and cultural standards. And actually the grandfather will treat his grandson—in emulation of Popeye—to a meal of spinach in a department store and also, in those benighted times before pizza-guzzling Ninja turtles, to a monster film featuring a huge lizard wreaking havoc in a city. This explains the bitter-sweetness one surmises despite the proclaimed gladness in the novel's explicit—"One [why not Ono? R.P.] can only wish these young people well" (206). The old and often expressed belief of being able to rise above the sway of things has proved to be an illusion to hide the narrator's still extant submission to the law of the father—it will have been a surrender to a vision of the world he has his father, among others, to thank for. But going all-American does not sound such an alluring alternative. Admittedly, Ono has come to terms, but has he completely come to terms with new Japan? No more, certainly, than Stevens, in *The Remains of the Day*, has done with bantering, following the example of his—yes—*American* master.

For Jean-François Lyotard, what brings together rewriting, in the strong sense, and working-through has to do with the representation of time past (*le temps perdu*):

> "Time past," he writes, "is not [in working-through] represented as in a picture [*un tableau*], it is not even presented. It is what presents the components of the picture, an impossible picture. To rewrite is to record these components" (Lyotard 40).

The desire to come to terms with the past is built on the illusion that one can paint the impossible picture, the impossible revision. It is that combination of the urgency and the incapacity to revise fully which, challenging writing to live up to rewriting, makes Ono's narrative so arresting. But the achievement may ironically enough look very much like Mori-san's whose traditional device was of "expressing emotion through the *textiles* which the woman holds or

wears rather than through the look on her face" (141, italics mine). A similar attention to *texture* in the process of revision is what makes Ishiguro an artist of the fleeting world of memory.

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