“Father” in Kazuo Ishiguro’s Novels: a Comparison of a Father-and-Child Relationship and Grandfather-and-Grandchild Relationship Focusing on The Unconsoled

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Introduction

Kazuo Ishiguro was born in Nagasaki, Japan, but when he was five years old, he moved to England with his family and has been living there ever since. Ishiguro, who has grown up in this rare background, became one of the inspiring British novelists. There are many studies regarding Ishiguro’s persistent urge for “home” or “sense of belonging” due to his experience of being separated from his home country in childhood days. However, there are few that consider the relationship between the family members who live in the same dwelling.

Barry Lewis says that in four of Ishiguro’s novels, A Pale View of Hills, An Artist of the Floating World, The Remains of the Day, and The Unconsoled, the protagonists talk about episodes with their fathers, but they all are separated by death or living separately. Lewis points out that the absence of a father is one of the characteristics of Ishiguro’s novels. He also states that in The Unconsoled, “Estrangement between father and son is rife in the relationship between Ryder and Boris. They cannot communicate with each other in a family way.”(118) One of the reasons why a father and a son fail to communicate without hesitation is the father’s verbal abuse on the son. Brian Shaffer takes notice of the conflicts between a father and a son or a master and his apprentice in An Artist of the Floating World and says, “This conflict between teacher and student, superior and inferior, parent and child is a major concern of the novel and lies at the heart of Ono’s progress from child to adult, follower to leader, and student to Sensei (teacher or master).”(49) The repetitive conflicts between Ono and Ono’s father and Ono and Ono’s master, Moriyama, stem from Ono’s trauma from his father’s verbal abuse, “[Masujil had been born with a flaw in his nature. A weak streak that would give him a tendency towards slothfulness and deceit.”(45) Many scholars look at the conflicts as Ono trying to prove that his father was wrong. During World War II, Ono thought that being a war propaganda artist for Japan would prove that he was not a slothful person, but rather he was somebody who was useful and respectable to the country.

Moreover, Wai-chew Sim sees this as Ono being caught in a trauma of an Oedipus
struggle and explains as follows:

Ono successfully defies his father to become a painter, the novel suggests that he remains locked in a quasi-Oedipal struggle, a fixation on his father’s allegation that artists are invariably ‘weak-willed and depraved.’ The roots of that fixation stem from the verbal violence enacted on the young Ono by his father when he discovers his artistic ambitions. Angered by the development, he recounts how a wandering monk, telling the boy’s fortune at birth, had predicted a ‘tendency towards slothfulness and deceit,’ for Ono even now was proving the monk right and threatening to ‘grow up to be a good-for-nothing.’(83)

Adelman states that “The heart of The Unconsoled is the story of a son driven by a hunger for love from hateful parents, especially his father, which is one interpretation of The Trial.”(169) Pierre Francois calls Ryder’s trauma, “a ‘father complex’.”(77)

In this paper, however, I am not going to base my argument on the Oedipus struggle or father complex as many scholars have mentioned. Instead I will compare the father-and-son relationship with grandfather-and-grandson relationship and try to clarify what Ishiguro wants to convey. In addition, I will use the father-and-son and grandfather-and-grandson relationships from other novels beside The Unconsoled to describe the relationship in details. In Chapter One, I will focus on the common characteristics of fathers as well as their sons in “A Family Supper,” A Pale View of Hills, An Artist of the Floating World, The Remains of the Day and The Unconsoled. In Chapter Two, I will consider the grandfather-and-grandson relationship in “The Summer After the War,” An Artist of the Floating World, and The Unconsoled. In Chapter Three, I would like to consider the meaning of “Father” in The Unconsoled.

1. Father and Child

Many of the fathers and children in Ishiguro’s novels have things in common. The fathers have control over their sons and careless about how their children feel. I would like to randomly list some episodes that describe the father figure in “A Family Supper,” A Pale View of Hills, An Artist of the Floating World, The Remains of the Day, and The Unconsoled. Then, I will list some episodes of their children to point out their characteristics. After that, I will summarize the common father and son figures in Ishiguro’s novels.
The protagonist reminisces about his boyhood and talks about his father in “A Family Supper” as follows:

[My father’s] general presence was not one which encouraged relaxed conversation; neither were things helped much by his odd way of stating each remark as if it were the concluding one. In fact, as I sat opposite him that afternoon, a boyhood memory came back to me of the time he had struck me several times around the head for ‘chattering like an old woman.”(2)

We can conceive that the protagonist’s father dislikes the child being talkative from the above. In the latter part of A Pale View of Hills, the father makes a similar remark to his son, Jiro, “Come on, Jiro,” he said, “we’re shouting at each other like a pair of fishermen’s wives.”(130) In The Remains of the Day, there is a scene that Stevens has to deliver Mr. Darlington’s message of “retirement” to his father. Stevens enters his father’s room, but Stevens cannot say the words out. Then his father admonishes him saying, “[R]elate it briefly and concisely. I haven’t all morning to listen to you chatter.” or “Come to the point then and be done with it. Some of us have work to be getting on with.”(68) Here, again, the father is described as a bigoted character who gets upset if the child is not brief and clear with his message.

Further, fathers are apt to be impatient and irritable. There is a symbolic scene where Sophie, Ryder’s wife, tells Ryder that Boris, their son, is upset so he should sit and talk with him. Ryder enters the room where Boris sits. Boris is reading a used handiwork manual which Ryder gave it to him as a birthday gift. Ryder does not say a word to Boris. Then Boris starts by talking to Ryder: “I really like this book. It shows you everything.”(470) However, Ryder decides not to respond and continues to wander around the room. Boris repeats twice more the same phrase out loud, but still Ryder does not respond. After a while, Boris says, “Mother gets so upset sometimes,”(471) Then all of a sudden Ryder gets furious and walks over to Boris, slams his hand down on the desk and says, “Look, why do you keep reading this thing? […] Look at it! Look at it! […] it’s just a useless old manual someone wanted to throw away.”(471) The reason why Boris carries around the manual is clear. Boris told Ryder that he wanted to know how to tile a bathroom earlier in the novel. He also said that he failed to do so correctly because no one actually told him how: “If someone had shown me, I could have done them all right.”(61) Learning how to tile the bathroom is a symbolic father-and-son group work, typical work that a little boy would learn during childhood
days. Boris has been showing signs. He wants to get involved with his father more, but Ryder never gets the message. Boris is learning through the manual some masculine work which his father never taught him. That is why he keeps on saying, “I really like this book. It shows you everything.”(287, 470, 471) In other words, the handiwork manual is a substitute father for Boris.

Just like Boris, many sons are timid or obedient to their fathers, they do not venture to talk back to their fathers, but instead try to oppress their emotions and get away from their fathers as fast as they can. In An Artist of the Floating World, the protagonist, Ono, reminisces about his boyhood days and remembers whenever his father says, “Masuji and I will be discussing business tonight,”(41) at the dinner table, he has to go to the guestroom later where his father awaits and has to listen to only father’s side of the story. Ono always thinks, “quite impossible for me to follow.”(42), but replies to him saying, “Yes, indeed.”(42) and tries to bear the scene by remaining quiet: “I did not answer immediately.”(43), “I did not answer.”(43), “I did not at first reply.”(44), “I lowered my eyes and remained silent.”(46) or “I remained silent, looking at the floor before me.”(46) When Ono turns fifteen years old, his father tells him to bring all the paintings he drew into the reception room. His father asks Ono if he wishes to “take up painting as a profession.”(44) He does not reply clearly. Then, his father says, “[Artists] live in squalor and poverty. They inhabit a world which gives them every temptation to become weak-willed and depraved.”(46) Later that night, Ono encounters his mother in the corridor. Ono tells her, “I smelt burning.”(47) This scene suggests that Ono’s father burnt Ono’s painting after Ono left the reception room. Ono then says to his mother, “The only thing Father’s succeeded in kindling is my ambition.”(47) He says this to his mother, but he never questions his father. Similar scene where the son oppresses his emotion is presented in A Pale View of Hills. The father, Ogata, tries to restart the chess with his son, Jiro, but Jiro shows no interest. However, without considering his son’s feelings, Ogata starts the game unilaterally. Ogata complains to Jiro that Jiro does not think, ”Three moves ahead.”(128) Then Jiro replies, ”Three moves ahead? Well, no, I suppose I haven’t. I can’t claim to be an expert like yourself, Father. In any case, I think we can say you’ve won.”(128) or “Very well, Father, I admit it. I’ve lost. Now perhaps we can forget about it.”(129), and he tries to get away from the scene. Still, Ogata continues to criticize his son’s character. Finally, Jiro shows a little resistance which is described in a comical way:

Quite suddenly, my husband[Jiro] flung down his newspaper and made a
movement towards his father. Clearly, what he had intended was to knock the chess-board across the floor and all the pieces with it. But he moved clumsily and before he could strike the board, his foot had upset the teapot beside him. The pot rolled on to its side, the lid fell open with a rattle, and the tea ran swiftly across the surface of the tatami. [...] he got to his feet, snatched up his newspaper, and left the room without a word.(131)

Jiro plucks up the courage to knock away the chess-board and tries his best to vent out his rage toward his father, but because he knocks over the teapot first, he runs away without saying a word. Again, the son carries anger within him towards his father like Ono in An Artist of the Floating World, but he never actually takes out his anger on or retort to his father.

To summarize, common characteristics of fathers in Ishiguro’s novels are reticence, doggedness, and clumsiness in communication with their children. The father figure is written in a very dominant way, and he does not listen to his child or careless how his child feels. The children on the other hand have a tendency of oppressing emotions. They hide or control their emotions in front of their fathers and try to get away from their fathers by remaining quiet. They both tend to avoid expressing their feelings openheartedly.

2. Grandfather and Grandson

The grandfathers that appear in Ishiguro’s novels are described as a strong, gentle, and dependable figure who would teach the grandson Judo (“The Summer After the War”), how to draw pictures (“The Summer After the War,” An Artist of the Floating World), and knock down the thugs (“The Summer After the War,” The Unconsoled). For example in “The Summer After the War,” the grandson, Ichiro, runs out into the garden where his grandfather finishes his morning Judo practice. Ichiro imagines a story as follows:

From out of the darkness would emerge figures, and we would be obliged to stop. [...] My grandfather and I would exchange an unworried glance, then take up positions back to back. Then they would come, an unlimited number from all sides. And there in the garden I would enact their destruction; my grandfather and I, a smoothly co-ordinated team, rendering them harmless one by one. Finally, we would survey with gravity the bodies all around us. He would then
nod, and we would go on our way.(19-20)

We can see here that the grandson and grandfather are communicating by exchanging a glance before fighting with the thugs. The similar motif is used in *The Unconsoled*. The grandson, Boris, explains his grandfather, Gustav, to Ryder as follows: “Grandfather’s very strong. He’s one of the strongest men in the town.”(36) Boris further describes his grandfather, “He’s a good fighter. He was a soldier once. He’s old, but he’s still a better fighter than most people. [...] ‘Before they know it, Grandfather’s got them on the ground.’”(36) and starts his imaginary story.

Boris and Gustav would allow the thugs all the time they required to take up their formation. Then once the wave came, grandfather and grandson, a smoothly co-ordinated team, would deal efficiently, almost sadly, with the assailants flying at them from all sides. Eventually the attack would be over—but no, one last thug might leap out of the dark wielding some hideous blade. Gustav, being the nearest would deliver a quick blow to the neck and then the battle would at last be over.(219)

We can confirm that Boris and Gustav have a strong tie; they can understand each other without conversing. Particularly, the imaginary thugs in *The Unconsoled* come and attack Boris’s “apartment.” Boris persuades the thugs to leave them by saying:

> These attacks of yours, your continual terrorizing of our apartment, has meant that my mother is crying all the time. She’s always tense and irritable, and this means she often tells me off for no reason. It also means Papa has to go away for long periods, sometimes abroad, which Mother doesn’t like.(220-221)

Further, he adds, “What it could come to sooner or later is that Papa won’t come back home at all.”(221) In other words, the most terrorizing threat for Boris is his father not coming back home. Boris tries to prevent that from happening with his grandfather. Gustav might be the strongest, most dependable and heroic person to Boris; however, the most important thing to him is that he wants to protect his father. This is why many scholars as well as Gary Adelman say, “*The Unconsoled* is the story of a son driven by a hunger for love from hateful—arents, especially his father,”(169) I couldn’t agree more. In addition, by drawing a more intimate relationship of the grandfather
and grandson than the father and son, the son’s yearning for his father’s love and understanding become conspicuous. The grandfather and grandson can communicate very well without even speaking a word, but on the other hand, the father and son can only converse clumsily.

Another characteristic of a grandson-and-grandfather relationship in Ishiguro’s novels is that they can physically express their emotions. For example, the grandson, Ichiro, in “The Summer After the War” practices Judo with his grandfather every morning, but one day Ichiro throws him easily. However, ever since that morning, grandfather becomes sick. Ichiro is told that he is not allowed to see his grandfather. One morning, when Ichiro wakes up and steps out into the yard, he sees his grandfather on the veranda. “[Ichiro] ran up to him and hugged him.” (43) In The Unconsoled, there is a scene where Boris and his grandfather, Gustav, get together at a Hungarian café in a square. Gustav is implored and cheered by everybody in the café to show “The Porters’ Dance.” (396) A fine porter is said to be able to carry many bags and boxes and dance well at the same time. Gustav dances on a table carrying boxes and golf bags with great effort, but as the loads of bags increase Boris gets anxious about Gustav’s condition. Boris shouts: “No! No! Grandfather!” , “No. Grandfather’s done enough” or “That’s enough! Grandfather! Stop! Stop!” (404, 405, 406) about seven times. However, Gustav does not stop. The next moment, though, Gustav freezes as if something has happened to him. When Gustav starts to descend the table, “Boris pushed through the crowd to where his grandfather was standing recovering his breath. […] grandfather and grandson embraced deeply, their eyes closed, making no attempt to hide from each other their immense relief.” (407) After this incident, however, Gustav gets sick and eventually dies.

The common point of these two episodes is both grandfathers in “The Summer After the War” and The Unconsoled show actions as if they had a stroke during or after taking some exercise and become ill in bed or die later. The relationship of a grandfather and grandson is written in a very affectionate way. It is obvious that the grandson can physically express his affection toward his grandfather. The child tries to suppress his emotion in front of his father, but he can jump into his grandfather’s arms and hug him without any hesitation.

The impressive scene where the grandfather and grandson work together is described in a picture drawing. For example, in “The Summer After the War,” when Ichiro is doing watercolor painting, it gets messy and he gets upset and tries to tear it up. Then his grandfather encourages him. Ichiro tries to hide his painting, but the
grandfather holds it up and says, “Not so bad. Why are you so angry?” (23) The grandfather tells the grandson, “You shouldn’t give up so easily. Look, Oji will help you a little. Then you try and finish it.” (23) and they finish up together. Then Ichiro feels better and thinks, “I did my best to look unimpressed, but my enthusiasm could not help being rekindled by such a feat.” (23) In An Artist of the Floating World, there is a similar scene. The grandson, Ichiro, is drawing a picture with crayons, but soon he gets distracted and starts mimicking “Lone Ranger.” Then his grandfather grabs the sketchbook and sees Ichiro’s pictures. Ichiro cries, “Oji can’t see those!” (31) and “Oji! Give me back my book!” (31) However, when the grandfather says, “Very impressive, Ichiro. Hmm. But you know, you could be even better if you wanted.” (31) or “Now, Ichiro, stop that. Let your Oji see. Look, Ichiro, bring me those crayons over there. Bring them over and we’ll draw something together. Oji will show you.” (31), the grandson becomes very obedient and brings the crayons to his grandfather and they start drawing together. We can see that both grandsons show similar reactions. In both novels, the grandfathers are gentle and do not forget to praise their grandsons. On the other hand, in The Unconsoled, there is a scene that Boris, is drawing a picture of superman in front of his father, Ryder. Ryder is observing his son thinking Boris should stop before it gets messy, but never says a word to him. At the end, Boris gets disappointed by his drawing and leaves the room. From these picture drawing scenes, we can clearly see the difference between a grandfather and grandson and a father and child. The former is described as if they are the real father and son, but the latter is described as if they are only relatives.

3. The Meaning of Father in The Unconsoled

As I stated in Chapter One, most of the fathers and sons in Ishiguro’s novels are reluctant to communicate with each other and hesitate to show their emotions. In The Unconsoled, however, the father-and-child relationship is described slightly different compared to Ishiguro’s earlier novels. There are still some similarities, but in The Unconsoled, Sophie and Gustav, a daughter and a father, have been communicating only through Sophie’s son, Boris, who is Gustav’s grandson. Sophie is reluctant to talk to her father even when he is dying in bed just like Stevens in The Remains of the Day. More interestingly, Sophie goes in front of the room where Gustav lies, but asks Boris to take the “coat” to Gustav. Boris goes inside the room and delivers it as he is told. Boris comes out with a message from Gustav, “‘Grandfather says thank you,’ [...] ‘He’s very happy now. He says he’s very happy.’” (468) Sophie gets upset and says,
“That’s all he said? Nothing about … nothing about if it fits him? If he likes the
colour?” (468) Boris goes back to the room again and asks the questions of his mother.
Every time Boris comes out of the room, Sophie shows resentment. This barren
discussion about the “coat” continues on for six pages.

Ishiguro admits that the major characters and landscape in The Unconsoled
represent Ryder’s past and present psychological states and events and anxiety of his
future.5 Ishiguro might have used the motif of the mechanism of Freud’s theories of
dreams and neurosis. Since Ishiguro spent six pages concerning the “coat,” I would like
to further consider the meaning of this “coat.”

There is a scene where a little Ryder plays with his plastic toy soldiers in the car.
While playing with them, he opens and closes the door of the car. Later, his mother
scolds him by saying the opening and closing the door of the car is noisy, and Ryder
remembers his mother telling him if he did it again she would, “skin me[Ryder]
alive.”(261) Why would she be so furious and tells her child she would “skin him alive”
because of the noise of opening and closing the door? I think the noise of opening and
closing the car door reminds her of her husband’s coming home and going out that gave
her mental anguish. She wants to even threaten her son to stop him from doing it. On
the other hand, to a child, this phrase of “skin alive” remained deeply in his mind.
Ryder recalls that moment and says, “[T]his threat […] would torment me throughout
the remainder of my time playing with the car, thoroughly poisoning my
enjoyment.”(262) This mental anguish is displaced in Sophie’s action of carrying the
“coat” of her father. The coat protects the body and prevents it from being cold like the
skin. However, this action of the child carrying the coat without giving it back to the
original owner can be interpreted as a reverse action of the child giving pain to his/her
parent. The act of not speaking directly to the father also inflicts pain on the parent.
Therefore, in The Unconsoled, unlike Ishiguro’s earlier novels, the father-and-child
relationship is written in a reverse way, a child is giving pain to his/her father. Sophie,
who has held the coat and given her father pain for a long time, thinks she should give
the coat back to her father before he dies. She says, “It’s time I gave it to him. I’ve had
it long enough.”(450) We need to keep in mind, though, the reason Sophie stopped
talking to her father in the first place is only because she yearned for her father’s love.
Unfortunately, her father, Gustav, did not understand the sign of his daughter and
ended up constructing a dehumanized cold relationship. Sophie and Gustav converse
directly before Gustav dies, but their conversations are pointless, and the story of the
“coat” never fits between them.
There have been some papers indicating Ryder's suffering trauma of parental abuse, or as Adelman states: “Ryder is driven by the fantasy of winning their favor and deserving their love, so that he can escape the fate of becoming what he is already in essence, the spitting image of his hated father.” (167) I agree with most of them. However, I would like to point out that in The Unconsoled, the existence of the “Father” has more meaning than just being the object of the child’s love. The power balance of a father and a child changes. Furthermore, all the characters in The Unconsoled show some sort of anxiety; such as, fear of “passing time” or “being too late” for something. For example, Ryder explains the reason he goes on the world tour using the term “too late” to Boris as follows:

I have to keep going on these trips because, you see, you can never tell when it's going to come along. [...] And you see, once you miss it, there’s no going back, it would be too late. It won’t matter how hard I travel afterwards, it won’t matter, it would be too late, and all these years I’ve spent would have been for nothing. (218)

Other characters show fear of “passing time” as well. Stephan talks about losing an important time between ten and twelve years old not practicing the piano: “I’d lost those crucial two years. The years between ten and twelve [...] it was just too late. I don’t think my parents really appreciated how damaging those missing two years would be.” (74) When Brodsky confesses to Miss Collins that he wants to get back together with her, Miss Collins replies to him by saying, “This is a nonsense. There’s no reason on earth why we should be discussing such matters. It’s much too late, there’s nothing for us to discuss, Mr. Brodsky. [...] It’s much too late for that, Mr. Brodsky. At least twenty years too late.” (315-316) Theo, who wants to save the city says to Ryder that “[I]t's too late. Things have just reached a point here, it’s just too late... [...] It’s too late. We’ve lost it. Why don’t we resign ourselves to being just another cold, lonely city? [...] The soul of this town, it’s not sick, Mr. Ryder, it's dead. It’s too late now.” (107) There are other scenes that characters use the term “too late”(133, 147, 273, 289, 424, 442, 457, etc). As mentioned earlier, characters in The Unconsoled are considered as displacement of Ryder himself. Therefore, the essential theme of The Unconsoled is implied in the term “too late.” When Gustav is dying in bed, he implores Ryder to bring Sophie to him and says:

Once I go to hospital, well, then it might all be too late. You see, it’s really time.
now I spoke to her. To Sophie, I mean. I really must speak to her. I know you’re very busy tonight, but you see, no one else knows. About the situation between me and Sophie, about our understanding. I know it’s a lot to ask, sir, but I wondered if you might go and explain things to her. There’s no one else who could do it. (423-424, Ishiguro’s emphasis)

We can see that Gustav sensed the death is approaching and thinking “time has come” to talk about the understanding. This italicized “understanding” is a tacit understanding between Gustav and Sophie of not to talk to each other directly. However, Gustav is longing to reconcile with Sophie and that he wants to talk to Sophie directly to ask for an apology. When Sophie arrives, she still shows denial of talking directly with Gustav; they converse each other only through Boris about the “coat” I mentioned earlier. Gustav apologizes to Sophie through Boris. Boris says to Sophie: “Grandfather says he’s sorry. He said to say he’s sorry.” (468), “He said he’s happy. He wasn’t comfortable before, but now the coat’s come, he says it means a lot to him. [...] He says he’s very happy with the coat.” (468), or “Grandfather says the coat’s just what he wanted and he likes it even more because Mother gave it to him.” (472) Sophie persistently denies talking to Gustav directly. However, at the end, Sophie goes into the room where Gustav lies and talks to him. She starts talking about a blue sports bag: “Do you remember that day you came to school? When you came with my swimming kit? […] you came with the blue sports bag, the one with the string strap, came right into the classroom. Do you remember, Papa?” (474) Gustav replies by changing the subject to the coat: “This is a very good coat. Look at this collar. And it’s real leather along here,” (474) Sophie does not listen to Gustav and continues talking about the blue sports bag. Gustav praises Sophie by saying, “I was always very proud of you.” (474) and dies. As you can see, in The Unconsoled father is written differently compared to Ishiguro’s earlier novels. First, the child shows hunger for love from the father; however, at the end, the child displays hatred and torments the father by not talking directly or holding a precious token until he is about to die. Considering the things the child went through, the largest regret the father has on mind is one thing, “missed the chance.” He missed the timing to attempt to mend the relationship. In other words, it was “too late” to gain back the trust.

4. Conclusion

In this paper, I tried to explore the meaning of the “Father” in The Unconsoled by
comparing the father-and-son relationship with the grandfather-and-grandson relationship. Many fathers and sons in Ishiguro’s novels hesitate to communicate or express their feelings to each other, but the grandfathers and grandsons are written in a very affectionate way without any conflicts. However, in *The Unconsoled*, it is clear from Boris’s imaginary stories that the most important thing he wants to do is to protect his father from the thugs. Boris teamed up with his grandfather and scared the thugs away so that his father could return home safely. By comparing the role of the grandfather and father in *The Unconsoled*, Boris’s feelings toward his father stand out. How affectionately and strongly Boris is attached with Gustav, Gustav could not fulfill Boris’s emptiness created by the absence of his father.

The relationship of a father and child that Ishiguro adopts is not always warmhearted to say the least. However, I would have to say that *The Unconsoled* does not fit into the “Oedipus Complex” that has been argued previously. In *The Unconsoled*, an idealistic world and heroes are created in the child’s fantasy, which indicates the hunger for love, but the father does not notice the child’s yearning for attention. He does not give any salvation to the child. Gradually the child’s desire to get close to his/her father turns into hatred as they grow up. When the father apologizes or mentions some gratitude to his child in dying bed, the child does not respond. The father of Stevens in *The Remains of the Day* says, “I’m proud of you.” to his son and the similar scene is repeatedly written in *The Unconsoled*. In spite of the similarities, Ishiguro did not just repeat the emotional scene. Ishiguro added a transitory factor of “passing time.” By the time the father tries to reconcile with his child, it is “too late.” The father’s repentance can be encapsulated in Sophie’s words to Ryder about Boris: “This is his childhood, now, slipping away. Soon he’ll be grown and he’ll never have known anything better.”(250)

However, it seems that Sophie’s words never actually reached Ryder. The role of father is symbolically written to emphasize his remorse for “missing the chance” to reconcile with his child.

It was 1995 when *The Unconsoled* was published. In the US, from the late 1980’s to 1990’s, the news of child abuse, domestic violence, child abuse in foster homes, and child neglect were regarded as social problems. Considering Ishiguro became a father in his real life at that time, he may have been sensitive to those kinds of issues. The childhood days, which are the most influential period in constructing personality, pass quickly. It is no exaggeration to say that how closely parents are related to their child during the childhood will have an effect on the child’s life. Through the gentle gaze that Ishiguro turns upon the innocent and intact world of childhood, we can feel the
ephemerality of “passing time.” Simultaneously, the grandfather consciously signifies the reader about “aging” and “death.” I think Ishiguro wanted to indicate that childhood days are limited, and it is the same with their parents as seen through the role of the father in *The Unconsoled*. Ishiguro teaches us through fathers that the parent and child should construct a strong bond during the childhood days. When you ignore and delay constructing this bond, it will be “too late” to reconstruct the relationship. The child will not respond to you even in dying bed.

**Works Cited**


For example, Shaffer(1998), Wang(2005), Wai(2006), et al.

Takayuki Shonaka states the relativity of Banks, the protagonist in When We Were Orphans, and Ishiguro using the definition of the Oedipus complex in “Kazuo Ishiguro No Sakuhin Ni Mirareru Bosei Heno Shokei (Yearning for Maternity in Kazuo Ishiguro’s Novels),” Kyoto Gaikokugo University Eibeigogaku Kenkyu Kai (Study of English and American Languages), 24, 2007, p.82-84.

In The Remains of the Day, when Stevens visits his father at his dying bed, his father confesses his feelings for the first time saying, “I hope I’ve been a good father to you.”(101) However, Stevens only replies, “I’m afraid we’re extremely busy now, but we can talk again in the morning.”(101) and leaves the room. His father dies shortly after this.

Ishiguro said in the interviews that “[T]his is a biography of a person, but instead of using memory and flashback, you have him wandering about in this dream world where he bumps into earlier, or later, versions of himself.”(Jaggy 114) or “I wanted to have someone just turn up in some landscape where he would meet people who are not literally parts of himself but are echoes of his past, harbingers of his future and projections of his fears about what he might become.”(Steinberg 105-06)