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THE INVENTED SELF: A HORNEYAN READING OF KAZUO ISHIGURO'S WHEN WE WERE ORPHANS

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ABSTRACT

This paper provides a psychoanalytic interpretation of When We Were Orphans by Kazuo Ishiguro by applying the theoretical model of the concept of the self-according to Karen Horney. It posits that Christopher Banks creates an ideal detective figure in defence against primal anxiety that is based on childhood desertion and colonial displacement. Based on the concept of neurotic tendencies, the idealized self, and self-alienation by Horney, the paper discusses how the back and forth between compliance, aggression and detachment exhibited by Christopher is an indication of unresolved psychological insecurity. The paper also examines the use of memory as an account and protective process and how selective memory and self-delusion maintain the illusion of order and control. Through examining the progressive failure of the investigative pursuit by Christopher, the paper has shown that the detective figure is an artificial self that is created to conceal the weakness and defeat. This Horneyan approach, in the end, rebrands the novel as a deep study of identity formation in the face of trauma, and how the quest to create narrative order is a survival strategy in psychology.

KEYWORDS: Karen Horney; Invented Self; Basic Anxiety; Neurotic Trends; Memory and Self-Deception; Kazuo Ishiguro.

1. INTRODUCTION

Kazuo Ishiguro holds a unique place in the modern English fiction due to his delicate approach to the theme of memory, loss, and the delicate structures of identity that form the subjectivity of the modern. Critics have since *A Pale View of Hills* (1982) identified his fiction as characterized by a reserved narration, repressed emotions and characters who find it difficult to come to terms with their personal history and troubling realities (Jakubowska, 2003; Shaffer, 1998). A complex exploration of the identity formation process is perhaps one of the most complex explorations of identity formation by *We When Were Orphans* (2000), which lies between the overt historical trauma of his early novels and the speculative dystopia of his later work. The novel traces the life of Christopher Banks, a renowned detective in London who goes back to Shanghai to find out the mystery behind the disappearance of his parents during his childhood only to face the unreliability of his own recollection and beliefs. The novel has often been criticized as a detached form of detective fiction, with a psychological interior, disrupting the generic conventions and prefiguring the untrustworthy mechanisms by which the self-recounts the past (Groes et al., 2011; Murakami et al., 2009).

Academic reactions to *When We Were Orphans* have discussed the novel in a variety of ways, such as postcolonial displacement, trauma theory, memory studies, and postmodern narrative experimentation. Lewis (2024) notes that the conflict between individual illusion and official history continues to trouble the fiction of Ishiguro, and it is speculated that the narrators in his work tend to live within narrowly crafted self-images of their lives, which mask their underlying fears. Equally, Deyan (2015) places the narratives of Ishiguro in the wider context of alterity and the Other and highlights the precariousness of identity in transnational and colonial settings. The colonial environment of pre-war Shanghai and the cosmopolitan environment of interwar London in the case of Christopher Banks produce a disjointed cultural landscape that reflects his split psychological condition. The postmodern strategies of the novel have also been subject to criticism, especially the ironic presentation of detective tropes and the lack of narrative resolution, which reflect more general discussions on representation and historiography (Hutcheon, 2003; Groes et al., 2011).

The motif of abandonment has become one of the main issues of the novel readings. Dean (2021) sees

Christopher as the representative of the so-called abandoned child, whose personal crisis is an expression of greater fears of the decline of the empire and the instability of the international situation. The detective fiction parody, as Dean explains it, reveals the insufficiency of heroic stories to heal historical trauma. Similarly, Düzgün (2024) highlights the intersection of autobiography, fiction and postmodern self-reflexivity in the novel, saying that the narration of Christopher is so unclear that it is impossible to distinguish between lived experience and imagination reconstruction. These important interventions help us see how memory and narrative define the sense of self that the protagonist has; though they usually do not go further to analyze the underlying psychological processes that drive his continued self-delusion and his grandiose sense of mission.

Despite the fact that the current literature has been able to convincingly argue that the quest of Christopher is characterized by repression, nostalgia, and unreliability of the narrative, relatively less effort has been put in the analysis of the structural dynamics of his personality on the basis of a comprehensive psychoanalytic approach based on the theory of self as proposed by Karen Horney. Although the narrators of Ishiguro have often been analyzed in the Freudian or Lacanian paradigm, a Horneyan approach is especially fruitful in explaining the conflict between the vulnerable childhood figure of Christopher and the authoritative detective figure he creates as an adult. The conceptual resources brought about by Horney on basic anxiety, neurotic patterns, and the development of an idealized self can be used to understand how a person challenged by early insecurity can create a compensatory identity aimed at gaining control, admiration, and coherence. Here, the unshaken faith of Christopher in his future as a world-renowned detective can be interpreted not only as narrative irony but as a psychological tool of controlling the sense of helplessness based on the loss of parents and cultural alienation.

The way Ishiguro plays with the tropes of the detective genre, turning the rational detective narrative into a more and more surreal and disjointed experience, is that the seemingly external crime is not being investigated but rather a way of perpetuating an internal fiction. The novel disrupts realism by irony and narrative oblique as critics have observed (Murakami et al., 2009; Hutcheon, 2003), thus presupposing the artificiality of history and identity. The belief of Christopher in his interpretive authority is slowly eroding away, and it shows the shaky

grounds that his sense of self has been resting on. By situating this unraveling within a Horneyan framework, the novel can be reconsidered as a study of the “invented self” a defensive structure formed in response to basic anxiety and sustained through self-idealization.

1.1. Objective of the Study

This study aims to examine Christopher Banks’s constructed detective identity in *When We Were Orphans* through Karen Horney’s theory of the self, demonstrating how his quest functions as a neurotic strategy to manage childhood anxiety and how the eventual collapse of his illusions exposes the fragility of the invented self.

2. KAREN HORNEY’S THEORY OF THE SELF

The revision of classical psychoanalysis by Karen Horney presents a socially based and culturally sensitive theory of personality which changes the focus of the instinctual drives to relational insecurity and self-realization struggle. Leaving behind the biologically inclined model of Freud, Horney redefines neurosis as a result of the disrupted human relationships and the individual trying to deal with the deep-seated feelings of insecurity (Horney, 2013a; Freud, 1917). Although Freud explains mourning and melancholy as precursors of intrapsychic conflict and loss (Freud, 1917), Horney puts psychic disturbance into a larger interpersonal context, asserting that early neglect, domination, inconsistency, or indifference creates what she infamously refers to as basic anxiety a general sense of being alone and powerless in a potentially hostile world (Horney, 2013a). This is the central idea of her theory of the self, as it is the basic anxiety that drives the child to work out defensive mechanisms that, once solidified, become neurotic forms of personality.

Horney (2013a) describes basic anxiety in *The Neurotic Personality of Our Time* as a condition that occurs in the child when he or she feels that there is no real warmth and trust in the important relationships. Due to the dependency of the child, aggression towards caregivers is not allowed to be openly shown and thus suppressed, which increases internal conflict. The person then comes up with defensive mechanisms to ensure security and acceptance. These plans, which are originally adaptive, turn neurotic when they take over the personality and pervert the natural development. Honey (2013b) categorizes these defensive orientations into three main movements: moving

towards people, moving against people and moving away people. Both of them are different ways of coping with anxiety and finding some form of stability in an uncertain world.

The first movement, *moving toward people*, corresponds to what Horney (2013b) describes as the compliant solution. Those who use this approach are in need of affection, approval and reassurance and they compromise their own needs to keep the relationship alive. The second movement, which is opposite to people, is the aggressive solution, which is marked by power, prestige and control. In this case, the person tries to overcome the vulnerability through controlling others and proving to be superior. The detached solution, which is represented by the third movement, where people are abandoned, is where emotional withdrawal and self-sufficiency are used as a defense against disappointment or dependency (Honey, 2013b). These orientations are not mutually exclusive but neurotic people switch between them, which results in inner fragmentation and instability. As Butery (1982) notes, the tripartite model by Horney offers a literary critic with a fine structure of character motivation since it prefigures the conflict between outward action and underlying anxiety.

The major theme in the mature thinking of Horney is the reality between the *real self* and *idealized self*. In *Neurosis and Human Growth*, Horney (2013c) contends that healthy development is based on the gradual development of the real self an organismic center of spontaneity, creativity, and constructive striving. Neurosis however develops when the individual who cannot bear the feelings of inadequacy or insecurity develops an exaggerated image of who he or she should be. This *idealized self* promises invulnerability and coherence but is fundamentally artificial. It generates what Horney (2013c) terms the “tyranny of the shoulds,” a compulsive internal demand to embody perfection, heroism, or moral superiority. The more strict this idealized image, the more estranged the person is to the real feelings and constraints. Paris (1996) points out that the originality of Horney is that she portrays self-idealization as not an act of vanity but an act of desperate self-protection against self-hatred and anxiety.

Self-idealization cannot be done without the latter, which Horney (2000) subsequently describes as self-alienation. The loss of touch with real feelings, uncertainties, and weaknesses occurs when people associate themselves solely with their idealized image. They start perceiving themselves as a performance and not as lived immediacy. This alienation promotes pomp, obsessive effort and

skewed reality. In the context of personal growth and development, Robitschek and Thoen (2015) observe that psychological health is contingent on the openness to self-exploration and flexible adaptation characteristics that are exactly compromised by neurotic inflexibility. The theory of Neurosis by Horney therefore does not consider neurosis as a predetermined pathology but rather as a defensive system that hinders the process of self-realization of the person.

The reconfiguration of psychoanalysis by Horney continues the conversation with Freud but leaves his focus on the instinctual determinism (Freud, 1917; Horney, 2013a). She predicts subsequent humanistic and existential explanations of identity formation by anticipating culture, relational insecurity, and self-construction. Her model is especially applicable to literary analysis since it sheds light on how narrative selves can be influenced by compensatory fantasies, moral absolutism or exaggerated missions aimed at overcoming vulnerability. The Horneyan psychology, as Butery (1982) puts it, allows the critics to view fictional characters as not only symbolic figures but as dynamic personalities, who are in conflict between genuine development and defensive illusion.

The basic anxiety, neurotic movements, idealized self, and self-alienation are the ideas proposed by Horney that provide a consistent theoretical framework to analyze the characters whose identities are organized around the notions of compensation and denial. The fact that she insists that the self can become alienated to its own experiential core can be a particularly fruitful way of understanding narratives where heroes are desperately clinging to the roles or grand narratives they have created to preserve a sense of psychological stability (Horney, 2013c; Paris, 1996). In this respect, the theory of Horney is not merely a diagnosis of neurosis but the unsteady construction of the created self an identity created as a reaction to insecurity and maintained by its obsessive efforts to overcome inner insecurity.

The next conceptual model is the synthesis of the main theoretical constructs of Karen Horney and demonstrates their applicability to the psychological trajectory under analysis in this paper (Figure 1). It describes how childhood trauma and simple anxiety lead to the development of idealized self and its subsequent destabilization. This framework is used to analyze the invented identity of Christopher Banks in *When We Were Orphans*.

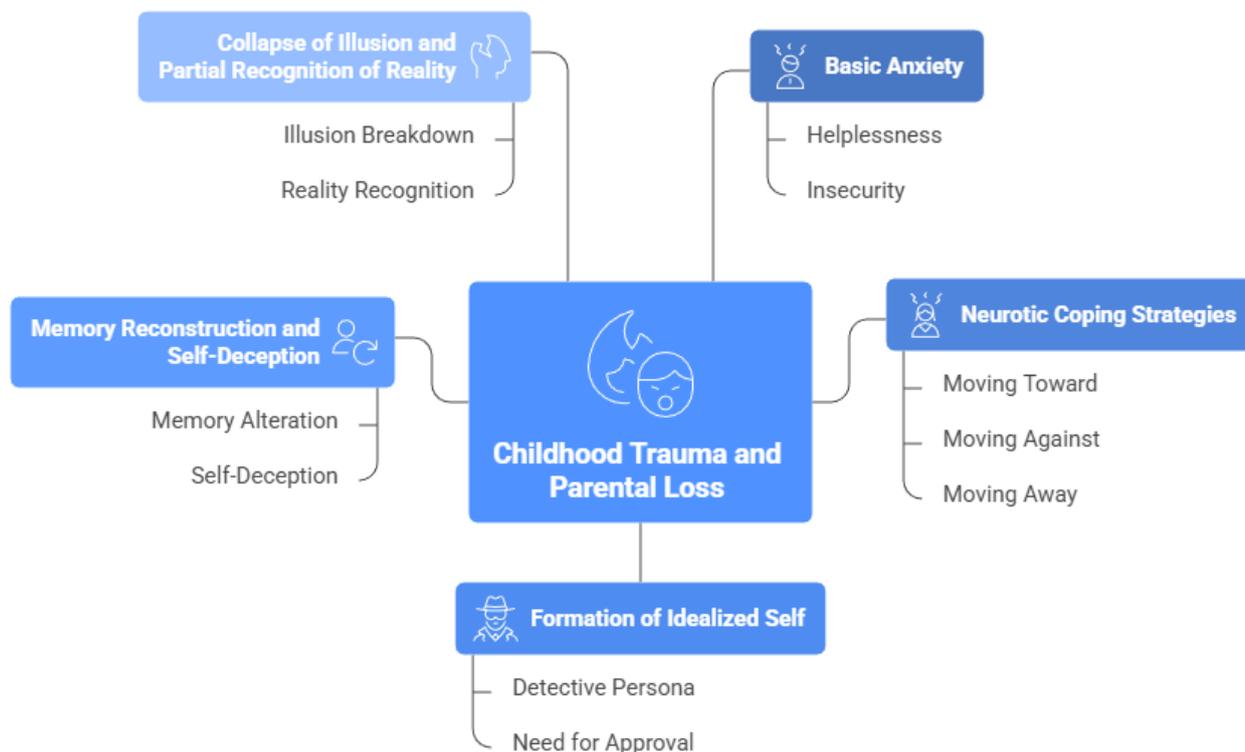


Figure 1: Conceptual Model of the Invented Self in *When We Were Orphans*.

Figure 1 shows the general conceptual flow of the invented self, the table below (see Table 1) provides a more detailed theoretical mapping of the major

constructs of Horney on the psychological patterns of Christopher Banks.

Table 1: Application of Horney's Theory to Christopher Banks in *When We Were Orphans*

Horneyan Concept	Theoretical Meaning (Horney)	Manifestation in Christopher Banks	Narrative Function in the Novel
Basic Anxiety	Feeling of isolation and helplessness arising from insecure childhood relationships	Parental disappearance; insecurity in colonial Shanghai; persistent fear of abandonment	Motivates lifelong need for control and coherence
Moving Toward People (Compliance)	Seeking approval, affection, and reassurance	Desire for social recognition in London; need to be respected as a great detective	Masks inner insecurity through external validation
Moving Against People (Aggression)	Pursuit of power, superiority, and dominance	Intellectual arrogance; belief in his unique investigative genius	Reinforces idealized heroic self-image
Moving Away from People (Detachment)	Emotional withdrawal to avoid vulnerability	Emotional distance from Sarah Hemmings; isolation behind professional identity	Protects self from intimacy and emotional exposure
Idealized Self	Construction of a glorified self-image to escape feelings of inadequacy	The heroic, world-saving detective persona	Central structure of the "invented self"
Tyranny of the "Shoulds"	Internal pressure to embody perfection and moral superiority	Conviction that he must solve his parents' case and restore order	Sustains illusion and delays acceptance of reality
Self-Alienation	Estrangement from authentic emotions and limitations	Denial of grief; inability to fully mourn parents	Leads to collapse of illusion in later narrative

3. CHILDHOOD TRAUMA AND PSYCHOLOGICAL INSECURITY

The adult identity of Christopher Banks in *When We Were Orphans* cannot be discussed without the traumatic events of his childhood in Shanghai, where the loss of his parents creates an experience of formation of abandonment, uncertainty, and emotional detachment. The novel does not place this trauma as a one-time experience but as a long-term state of instability that influences the psychic growth of Christopher. The sudden disappearance of his father, and then the displacement of his mother under dubious and politically charged conditions, creates a break which is never sufficiently grieved or understood. Ishiguro, as Dean (2021) contends, develops Christopher as a paradigmatic abandoned child, whose personal crisis is a reflection of more general concerns regarding the decline of the empire and geopolitical fragmentation. The deprivation of parental protection in a colonial enclave that is already characterized by political tension disrupts the feeling of safety in the child, creating a psychological climate in which the development of basic anxiety according to Horneyan terms is possible.

The structural nature of this early wound is also explained by trauma theory. In her conceptualization, Caruth (2016) views trauma as a powerful experience that cannot be fully integrated into conscious memory, and it returns late in the form of repetition and distortion of the narrative. It is precisely such belatedness that characterizes the recollections of Shanghai by Christopher: his

memories are characterized by nostalgic idealization and disjointed confusion. Instead of giving a coherent narration of the disappearance of his parents, he re-creates scenes with too much clarity in certain scenes and with too much vagueness in others, indicating the presence of defensive repression. The child who is the witness of the familial breakdown is unable to process the experience, and the adult narrator tries to give a retrospective sense of coherence to that which was initially perceived as an incomprehensible disruption. This movement is indicative of the traumatic formulation Caruth (2016) notes, where the past is not merely recalled but it is forcefully re-enacted as a narrative.

This insecurity is exacerbated by the emotional atmosphere of the childhood of Christopher. The ideological tension in the domestic sphere is brought in by his mother moral absolutism and her vehement opposition to opium trade. She seems to be upright and bold, but her inflexibility and obsession with moral crusade makes the child feel precarious. On the other hand, the father is depicted by lack of affection and physical presence that culminates in his unaccounted disappearance. This instability in two senses denies Christopher parental containment. As Drag (2014) notes, Ishiguro has dramatized in his fiction on numerous occasions characters who face unresolved loss and nostalgia, and he has created compensatory narratives to protect himself against psychic pain. The maternal intensity and paternal withdrawal in the case of Christopher creates an environment where affection is shadowed by anxiety and security is always jeopardized by external forces.

This weakness is compounded by the colonial situation in Shanghai. The International Settlement is described as a domain of cultural hybridization, economic exploitation and imminent violence. The theory of cultural memory developed by Assmann (2011) highlights the role of collective past in the formation of individual consciousness; in the world of Christopher in childhood, the imperial politics and international conflict permeate the domestic life. The child is raised in a community that is precariously situated in between cultures, loyalties and power structures. This volatile setting adds to what Jamali et al. (2025) refer to as the constant interaction of the novel with the memory, loss, and amnesia. Christopher cannot differentiate factual memory and imaginative reconstruction later not only as a symptom of personal trauma but also as the fracturing of historical memory as part of colonial modernity.

Stańczyk (2018) emphasizes the fact that the character of the orphan in modern cultural discourse is often vulnerable and rebellious, as a symbolic location of disputed identity. This orphaned condition is absorbed by Christopher well before he becomes aware of it; the sense of danger and secrecy fosters the feeling of precariousness even in the presence of his parents. The physical displacement is what solidifies his emotional alienation when he is finally taken to England. The breakup of memory by the severance of Shanghai puts him in a state of suspension between geographies and temporalities. This displacement promotes psychological fragmentation, when the child tries to maintain the image of family and home intact, and the loss is irreversible.

The outcome is a long-lasting sense of insecurity that continues into adulthood. The fact that Christopher continues to believe that his parents can be found and healed shows that he does not want to accept the finality of trauma. In trauma theory, this rejection usually takes the form of repetition and obsessive reversion (Caruth, 2016). His subsequent trip back to Shanghai, which is set in the context of a logical investigative quest, can therefore be seen as a subconscious effort to re-enter the place of original discontinuity and retroactively reestablish order. According to Jamali et al. (2025), memory in the work by Ishiguro is often a tool of concealment and survival; the selective memory of Christopher helps him to avoid facing the unacceptable helplessness. However, this protective role is also the one that sustains psychological immaturity, it does not allow the loss to be incorporated into a solid adult sense of self.

In this respect, childhood trauma in *When We Were Orphans* serves not only as a narrative back story but also as the paradigm of psychological insecurity of Christopher. The loss of his parents, which is exacerbated by the instability of the colonies and cultural displacement, creates a permanent feeling of vulnerability that organizes his further actions. The dismemberment of memory, the back and forth between nostalgia and denial, the constant attempt to find a resolution are all evidence of a self-constructed by unresolved abandonment. Similar to the examples provided by Dean (2021) and Drag (2014) in other settings, Ishiguro protagonists tend to live in the identities created in reaction to loss, as opposed to basing them on true self-understanding. The preliminary experiences of Christopher, therefore, precondition the subsequent formation of an invented self an identity that is destined to control the anxiety of childhood disruption, but in fact, unable to eliminate its sources.

4. CONSTRUCTION OF THE DETECTIVE IDENTITY

The rise of Christopher Banks as a detective star in London is much more than a career success; it is a well-created identity in which he tries to bring order to the unfinished disorder of his childhood. The detective character, with its associations of logical power, ethical dominance, and interpretative command, provides a desirable contrast to the powerless child who once saw his family break up in Shanghai. It has been noted by critics that *When We Were Orphans* not only embraces but also disrupts the conventions of the detective fiction genre, turning what seems to be a quest novel into a psychological compensation novel (Machial, 2004; Döring, 2006). In this generic subversion, there is the more profound meaning of the vocation that Christopher chooses: detection is the metaphor of the structural level of his effort to explore, rearrange, and finally rewrite the traumatic past.

The classical detective character is described as being intellectually superior, unemotional, and able to bring sanity to society by using reason. Ishiguro first introduces Christopher as being a conformist to this archetype. He is popular in London society, consulted in difficult cases and seen as someone of near mythical competence. But, as Machial (2004) points out, Ishiguro at the same time reveals the vulnerability of this character by placing Christopher in a situation where his confidence surpasses the reasonable nature of his means. Throughout the novel, his power is gradually shown to lie not so much in his proven brilliance as in a story that he has told himself. The detective character is therefore a

kind of an idealized figure that allows him to project himself as the agent that can not only unravel the mystery of the people but also the mystery of his parents disappearance.

Machial (2009) also implies that the novel redefines detection as a narration. The investigative voice of Christopher is like that of a narrator who is putting pieces together in a logical sequence. But the unity he is in search of is retrogressive and self-serving, which is influenced by a latent desire to hold on to the belief that order is possible to be restored. To this end, the detective identity serves as an epistemological protection. When he understands life as a case to be solved, Christopher turns the existential uncertainty into a puzzle that needs to be solved. Intellect makes the world readable, organized and finally conquerable. This worldview is in sharp contrast to the uncontrollable disruption of his childhood, when he disappeared without any reason and the authority figures did not help to reassure him.

According to Döring (2006), the English detective tradition was intentionally disenchanting by the novel, and the fact that Christopher goes back to Shanghai is a parody of the heroic rescue mission that is characteristic of imperial adventure novels. Instead of being the decisive, clear-cut character of Sherlock Holmes, Christopher wanders through the war-torn streets with a belief that is bordering on delusion. The discrepancy between the pomp of his cause and the messiness around him highlights the compensatory aspect of his identity. The fact that he persists in saying that he is the only one who can solve the enigma of the fate of his parents is a psychological investment in unique significance. The detective role gives him a feeling of indispensability that cancels the previous feelings of insignificance and abandonment.

Sim et al. (2008) understand the aesthetic strategy of the novel as a radical nostalgia, where the desire of the protagonist to have a stable past is the reason behind his subordination to outmoded forms of narrative assurance. This nostalgia can be seen in the way that Christopher believes in rational detection. He is clinging to the conventions of the genre as they promise solution despite the fact that the narrative structure is increasingly defying them. His career identity is therefore caught up in a time regression: to solve the case is to restore the lost integrity of childhood and to heal the break that created psychological insecurity. The detective character offers redemption, but it is constructed on the basis of selectivity and fantasy.

Weston (2012) claims that the devotion of Christopher to his mission is based on loss instead of objective evidence. His persistent faith in the possibility of his parents being alive and recoverable

shows his denial of the irreversibility. This denial is made possible through the detective identity that allows the search to be procedural and not emotive. What seems to be a rational perseverance is an emotional compulsion. His ethical confidence that the case will be solved and will turn the past into the justice restores personal sorrow into a social project. In this conversion, personal trauma is substituted with professional aspiration.

Lewis (2024) contextualizes Ishiguro narrators in a wider trend of self-fashioning and notes that they tend to build the roles that bring temporary stability and conceal more primary anxieties. Christopher is an example of such a pattern to a certain degree. His introduction of his self through a cool, commanding detective is opposed to the unsteadiness that he shows in narrative stuttering. The more violently he insists upon his ability, the more clearly the cracks in his self-conception are seen. The detective identity fails to eliminate insecurity, but instead, it superimposes it with a facade of certainty.

The building up of the detective character is a tactical reaction to initial powerlessness. Christopher is symbolically inverting the chaos of childhood by identifying himself with a character who brings order back. The inquiry after the disappearance of his parents is not an empirical project, but a self-confirmatory ritual. Detection is a way to prove the belief that the world is intelligible and that he has the right to decode it. However, as the story unfolds the gap between his perceived expertise and historical fact grows more and more evident. The detective identity, which at first seems to be a place of power, turns out to be a complex system of reimbursement a fictional self that is meant to maintain the illusion of power in the face of irreparable loss.

5. NEUROTIC PERSONALITY PATTERNS IN CHRISTOPHER BANKS

The analysis of the adult personality of Christopher Banks in terms of the theory of Karen Horney shows a complicated combination of the neurotic trends which organize his behavior, relations and self-image. Honey (2013b) explains that people who have basic anxiety that remains unresolved develop inflexible coping mechanisms that solidify into three predominant movements, namely, moving towards people (compliance), moving against people (aggression), and moving away people (detachment). Instead of combining these tendencies into a flexible personality, the neurotic person swings between them, creating inner conflict and alienation of self. Christopher is an illustration of this swings. His outward image as a great detective hides a sense of insecurity which he

expresses in turns as a need to be liked, an attitude of grandeur, and a withdrawal into emotional solitude.

The conformist *moving toward people* is seen in the fact that Christopher is continually seeking recognition and confirmation in London society. He may be portrayed as a confident person, but in his narration, he often stresses the respect he is respected and the respect his profession enjoys. According to Horney (2013a), the compliant type is the one that tries to find affection and reassurance in order to reduce the sense of helplessness. The fact that Christopher is proud of his social invitations, sensitive to his reputation and implicitly demands that others recognize his importance indicates that he is dependent on outside validation. His developed politeness and controlled tone conceal a certain nervousness of belonging. According to Butery (1982), literary characters formed through neurotic compliance tend to be overly polite and morally upright in order to hide a greater fear of rejection. The social performance of Christopher, therefore, serves as a stabilizing process, which allows him to gain symbolic approval instead of the unconditional security that he lost as a child.

The aggressive movement *moving against people* surfaces in Christopher's intellectual arrogance and implicit sense of moral superiority. Horney (2013b) characterizes the aggressive type as driven by a need for power, mastery, and dominance, compensating for vulnerability by asserting strength. Christopher frequently assumes interpretive authority over others, treating their doubts or confusion as evidence of their limited perception. His conviction that he alone can unravel complex mysteries, particularly the enigma of his parents' disappearance, reveals not only professional confidence but also grandiosity. This grandiosity aligns with what Horney (2013c) identifies as the "idealized self," an inflated self-image constructed to escape feelings of inadequacy. Christopher's belief in his exceptional destiny as a detective reflects the tyranny of the "shoulds" the internal demand to embody competence and heroism without weakness. Paris (1996) emphasizes that such self-idealization often conceals profound self-doubt; the more rigidly the idealized image is defended, the more fragile it becomes. Christopher's aggressive certainty, therefore, is less an expression of authentic strength than a defensive posture against the memory of helplessness.

At the same time, Christopher shows a strong tendency to *moving away from people*. According to Horney (2013b), the detached type is the one who wants emotional independence and self-sufficiency to prevent vulnerability. The relationships that

Christopher has and especially with Sarah Hemmings indicate that he is not good at maintaining intimacy. He keeps a polite distance, and he puts his mission first, rather than emotional reciprocity. He even withdraws into work when faced with love or friendship. It is not just a reserve; it is a strategic insulation against the possibility of disappointment. According to Robitschek and Thoen (2015), the key to healthy personal development is openness and adaptive engagement, which are also completely lacking in the relationship patterns of Christopher. His coldness strengthens the isolation, which propagates the same insecurity that it tries to cope with.

The combination of the three movements creates the internal conflict that Horney (2013b) describes as the core of neurosis. Instead of solving anxiety, the alternating strategies of Christopher aggravate it. His approval seeking is in conflict with his superiority seeking; his dominance seeking is in conflict with his withdrawal of real connection. A parallel is useful here, as Freud (1917) writes about unresolved mourning: when loss is not resolved psychic energy gets stuck, and it gives rise to melancholic self-absorption. The fact that Christopher could not grieve his parents openly is also a contributing factor to the inflexibility of his personality structure. The detective personality directs this unresolved sorrow into socially approved ambition but the conflict remains.

According to Deyan (2015), the protagonists invented by Ishiguro tend to live in the world of alterity and displacement, as they move between the perception of self and the reality. This disjunction is enhanced by the neurotic patterns of Christopher. He sees himself as a rational and composed person but his behavior is more and more showing impulsiveness and denial. The conflict between his self-image as described and the behavior that is observed highlights the argument by Horney (2013c) that the idealized self alienates people to their real self. Christopher represses vulnerability by associating with the heroic detective, although the repression is expressed in the form of rigidity and misjudgment.

The neurotic patterns of personality exhibited by Christopher illustrate how such defensive mechanisms, which were initially taken to cope with anxiety, may turn into self-reinforcing distortion mechanisms. His obedience gains him respect and makes him more reliant; his violence claims dominance and drives others away; his indifference preserves him against injury but increases his solitude. These movements fail to bring about

integration but disintegration. By the framework of Horney, Christopher turns out not only to be an unreliable narrator but a psychologically split subject whose constructed self is maintained by obsessive shifting between incompatible defensive orientations (Horney, 2013a; Horney, 2013c). His character is therefore a tragic paradox of neurosis: the very processes that are meant to provide security finally create a greater sense of insecurity showing the flimsy structure of the self that he has created.

6. MEMORY, ILLUSION, AND SELF-DECEPTION

In *When We Were Orphans*, memory is not a transparent archive of the past; it is instead a selective and self-defensive narrative process by which Christopher Banks maintains the identity that he has created. It has always been stressed by critics that Ishiguro has been a prophet of the instability of memory and the moral ambiguities of narration in his fiction (Groes et al., 2011; Murakami et al., 2009). In the case of Christopher, memory is no longer separable with illusion: his adult self is only maintained not by what he recalls but by the manner in which he recalls. The tone of the narration, calm and thoughtful, gives the impression of a certain confidence in the trustworthiness of memory; but as the story progresses we see how slowly the truth is being erased, and how much the desire is influencing the memory.

Zinck (2005) characterizes the novel as a "palimpsest of memory," suggesting that Christopher's recollections are layered, overwritten, and reinterpreted in ways that obscure as much as they reveal. His Shanghai childhood is initially described with vividness, full of emotional overtones and narrative clarity. But as the plot unfolds these memories start to reveal cracks. The scenes that were previously shown as coherent are ambiguous; the assumptions that appeared to be definite are shaken by conflicting information. This palimpsestic nature highlights the artificiality of self-conception of Christopher. Instead of facing the traumatic connotations of abandonment, he reinvents memory into a puzzle to be solved, maintaining the illusion that the past is still available and can be repaired.

Shang (2017) notes, Shanghai in the novel is not a geographical place, but rather a maze of memory, where the history of a person is interwoven with the history of the entire nation that is uncertain about everything. The conflation of memory and illusion is heightened by the fact that Christopher comes back to Shanghai in the middle of the war. The physical city is no longer the landscape of childhood that is

being recalled, but he continues to wander through it as though it were a fixed map that would take him back to the restoration of family. The unreasonable belief that his parents are alive in a war zone reveals how much memory has lost its attachment to empirical reality. His search is more of a reenactment than an investigation a symbolic effort to reenter the lost space of origin and re-write its conclusion.

According to Tellini (2016), the gradual shift in the novel between realist shelter and narrative fragmentation is emphasized by the fact that Ishiguro disrupts the traditional understanding of coherence. This dismantling of the structure is similar to the shattering of Christopher illusion. The detective story, which is based on the rational investigation, degenerates into the scenes that border the surreal. The unalterable conviction of the impending resolution of Christopher is made more and more unrealistic, and this shows how much he is self-deceived. The credibility of the narrator, which has been thought to be so, is revealed as conditional and defensive. Instead of making clear the past, his narration is a way of delaying the realization of its irreversibility.

This process is based on the dynamics of autobiographical narration. According to Eakin (2014), autobiographical identity is essentially narrative; people create coherent selves by selective narration. This principle is observed in the case of Christopher, but there is a distortion in the construction of his narrative. He constructs his memories in a path of predetermined success, placing himself as the heroic figure that will bring harmony back to the family. By so doing, he turns trauma into teleology. The loss of his parents is not received as such, but redefined as the triggering event of a great cause. This method of narration allows him to maintain the continuity of psychology, although it removes his closeness to the real understanding of loss.

Bizzini (2013) stresses that the narrators of Ishiguro frequently perform the role of storytellers who reconstruct the identity with the help of memory and disclose the permeable border between remembrance and creation. This porousness is at first hidden by the calm and confident voice of Christopher as he tells his story. However, as contradictions mount up, the reader realizes that his authority is based on weak grounds. Even the narration itself is an instrument of self-delusion: telling the story in a linear and controlled manner, he conceals the messiness of the emotions under the surface. Jamali et al. (2025) also add that memory in the fiction of Ishiguro often swings between remembering and forgetting, which

implies that forgetting is as constructive as remembering. The choice of omissions that Christopher makes in his unwillingness to consider other reasons as to why his parents had to die reveal how the process of amnesia works in a defensive manner to protect Christopher against intolerable knowledge.

Düzgün (2024) places the novel in the wider context of postmodernism of autobiography and fiction, suggesting that the story of Christopher disrupts the distinction between experience and fantasy. This destabilization is not only stylistic, but psychological. The more Christopher demands the factual certitude of his memories, the more obvious is the imaginative supplementation of the same. His self-conception relies on the fact that the past can be corrected. Once faced with the evidence of what his mother is going through and the likelihood of her survival, the structure of self-delusion starts to crack.

The breakdown of the illusion created by Christopher is the revelation of the fabricated self-sustained by manipulating memories. Both Groes et al. (2011) and Murakami et al. (2009) emphasize that Ishiguro is concerned with the moral aspects of self-narration; in *When We Were Orphans*, this concern leads to the acknowledgement that memory may serve as a survival mechanism and a growth hindrance at the same time. The encounter with reality by Christopher lacks dramatic catharsis but a low-key recognition of limitation. The detective story is disintegrated, and a more doubtful and less confident self-consciousness remains. Once set in motion as a weapon of mastery, memory demonstrates how it can be subject to illusion. When revealing the relationships between recollection and

denial, Ishiguro is not illustrating self-deception as being an intentional lie but rather, as something that is constructed over time and is not easily noticed but rather builds up until it can no longer hold the weight of the truth.

7. CONCLUSION

This paper has explored the psychological growth of Christopher Banks in *When We Were Orphans* based on the theory of self by Karen Horney, and it has been established that his renowned detective role is a defensive mechanism created by unresolved childhood trauma. The loss of his parents creates a state of primordial anxiety that continues into adulthood, which drives the establishment of an idealized self-based on the mastery, moral authority, and interpretive control. The internal struggles of neurotic development are demonstrated in the oscillation of compliance, aggression, and detachment in the personality of Christopher. The fact that he is using memory as a stabilizing narrative is another way of revealing how shaky the construction of this invented self is, supported by selective memory and perpetuated deception. The framework by Horney helps to see the psychological reasoning behind the self-deception of Christopher and realize that his search is not an outer exploration, but an inner conflict of making sense. Placing the novel in a Horneyan paradigm, this reading will add to the Ishiguro studies by preempting the relational and defensive aspects of identity formation. On a larger scale, it reminds us of the importance of psychoanalytic literary criticism as a method of revealing the emergence of story selves as a result of insecure and lossy strategies of survival.

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