

**Fragmented Memories and the Search for Healing in Kazuo Ishiguro's
*When We Were Orphans***

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Abstract

Kazuo Ishiguro's *When We Were Orphans* (2000) follows Christopher Banks, a London based detective who returns to Shanghai in 1937 to investigate the disappearance of his parents. This paper explores Banks's search as both a detective investigation and a psychological attempt to make sense of a past that remains emotionally unresolved and an experience that he has never adequately mourned. It argues that the novel presents memory as fragmented, unstable, and shaped by trauma rather than as a reliable record through which the past can be recovered. Drawing on Cathy Caruth's concept of trauma as belated and repetitive, it demonstrates how his retrospective narration is shaped by an unresolved childhood trauma that resists coherent understanding of his past. Dominick LaCapra's distinction between "acting out" and "working through" is used as a compensatory narrative offering repeated return to the trauma rather than genuine recovery for he continues to seek a solution to a loss that cannot be undone. Paul Ricoeur's ideas on memory and forgetting further illuminate his reconstructed recollections, while Pierre Nora's concept of lieux de mémoire helps examine Shanghai as a space where personal and historical memories converge. The paper eventually concludes that Ishiguro presents healing not as restoration of the past but as a gradual acceptance of loss, uncertainty, and memory's limitations.

Banks's partial movement toward consolation emerges instead through his relationship with Jennifer and through his tentative acceptance that the past cannot be restored. Healing therefore becomes an unfinished ethical practice rather than the recovery of a lost world.

Keywords: Kazuo Ishiguro; memory; trauma; healing; fragmented memory; acting out; lieux de mémoire; narrative identity; unreliable narration

Introduction

Kazuo Ishiguro's *When We Were Orphans* (2000) is built around a deceptively simple question: what happened to Christopher Banks's parents? The central paradox of Banks's character emerges from the contrast between his professional confidence and his personal uncertainty. As a detective, he depends upon the assumption that apparently disconnected details can be assembled into a coherent explanation and evidence can disclose concealed causes, and that investigation can ultimately restore order. His own history, however, refuses to conform to this model of knowledge. His childhood is preserved not as a stable sequence of recoverable facts but through gaps, impressions, substitutions, corrections, and retrospective uncertainties.

His fragmented recollections are particularly significant because the novel does not present them as accidental imperfections in an otherwise reliable narrative. Banks himself becomes increasingly conscious of the instability of what he remembers. Reflecting on his childhood and parents, he acknowledges that his memories have begun to "blur" and imagines that, with time, his Shanghai life may eventually consist only of "a few muddled images" (Ishiguro 41). The admission is crucial because it changes the meaning of his investigation. He is not merely attempting to discover what happened to his parents before his memories disappear; he is also attempting to preserve the childhood world on which his sense of identity depends. His earlier association of "going home" with all that he knew further demonstrates the extent to which Shanghai functions in his consciousness as a repository of family, belonging, and lost continuity. The investigation therefore acquires an urgency that exceeds the conventions of a detective case: to reconstruct the past is, for Banks, an attempt to hold together a self that has been organized around an absence.

The origins of his detective identity make this connection even more explicit. Banks does not simply become a detective by chance or apply an already established professional skill to his childhood mystery. The vocation grows out of the imaginative response he develops as a child to his father's disappearance. After the loss, he and Akira repeatedly play at being detectives who "search for father" and "rescue father" (Ishiguro 64). The game transforms an experience over which the child has no control into one in which action appear possible. What cannot be understood emotionally can therefore be represented as a problem to be solved. This pattern persists even after

Banks leaves Shanghai. In England, he continues to enact the detective scenarios he and Akira had created, sometimes privately and entirely through his imagination; by his school years, becoming a detective has become his “secret ambition.” When he later returns to Shanghai and tells Akira that, now that they are adults, they can finally “put things right,” the childhood game has effectively become an adult mission. Detection thus functions simultaneously as vocation, memory structure, and psychological defence: it converts helplessness into agency and absence into an apparently solvable problem.

This relationship between loss and vocation also gives particular significance to the novel's title. Banks is not simply someone who was deprived of his parents in childhood; orphanhood becomes a continuing condition through which he interprets his life. The title's collective “we” extends that condition beyond Banks alone and anticipates the novel's broader concern with different forms of separation, displacement, and attachment. Yet the title also carries an important temporal tension. “When” appears to locate orphanhood in the past, while the narrative demonstrates that its psychological consequences remain active in the present. Banks has grown older, acquired professional status, and established a life in London, but the emotional structure created by his childhood loss remains unfinished. The adult detective is therefore inseparable from the orphaned child who continues to search for what disappeared.

The instability of Banks's retrospective account makes narrative unreliability central to this process. Wayne C. Booth's concept of the unreliable narrator offers one useful way of understanding the gap between Banks's confidence in his own interpretations and the larger pattern of evidence available to the reader. He does not deliberately provide a deceptive account in any simple sense; rather, his narration is shaped by the limits of his knowledge, the persistence of childhood assumptions, and his need to impose coherence upon experiences he could not comprehend when they occurred. His unreliability is therefore not merely a formal device. It becomes a representation of the psychological difficulty of reconstructing a formative past from incomplete and emotionally invested memory.

The narrative and critical approaches establish an important critical foundation, but they also leave room for a more specific question: what happens if Banks's investigation is understood not merely as a failed detective narrative but as

an attempted method of psychological repair? The novel is certainly concerned with unreliable memory, nostalgia, imperial history, and the deconstruction of detective fiction. Yet its treatment of memory is also inseparable from the problem of what it means to live after loss. He repeatedly constructs explanations that make his childhood bearable.

This paper therefore argues that *When We Were Orphans* represents fragmented memory as both symptom and strategy. Banks's memories are fragmented because the past is traumatic, but he also organizes those fragments into a detective narrative because investigation protects him from confronting the irreversibility of loss. His return to Shanghai dismantles this protective narrative by exposing the distance between the remembered city and the historical city, between the parents he imagines and the parents who actually existed, and between the detective he believes himself to be and the child whose grief he has never fully acknowledged. The eventual discovery of the truth does not produce complete healing. Instead, it initiates a more modest process resembling what Dominick LaCapra calls "working through": an incomplete capacity to distinguish past from present without pretending that the past has ceased to matter. The search for truth consequently becomes inseparable from the search to preserve a self whose identity depends upon remembering.

Memory as Fragment and Defence

Banks's memories are unstable from the beginning, but Ishiguro does not present that instability through dramatic declarations of psychological breakdown. Instead, it appears in small linguistic qualifications: "I believe," "I suppose," "perhaps," "I am not sure," "I have a feeling," and "I do not recall." Such expressions matter because his professional persona depends upon the opposite qualities.

One of the earliest examples concerns his school years in England. He insists that he "blended perfectly into English school life," remembering how quickly he adopted the gestures, vocabulary, and manners of his classmates. Yet this recollection is immediately destabilized by James Osbourne's description of him as "such an odd bird at school" (Ishiguro 4). The contradiction is significant because it establishes a recurring pattern: his memories do not simply contain gaps; they actively produce a preferred version of the self.

His recollection portrays adaptation as mastery. He remembers himself as observant, controlled, and socially competent. His classmate, Osbourne's memory suggests something more alienated. Colonel Chamberlain similarly recalls the child Banks as a distressed "snivelling little squirt," whereas Banks insists that he "adapted very ably to the changed realities" of his circumstances (Ishiguro 17). The contradictions matter because Banks has made competence the organizing principle of his adult identity. If the child was helpless, the adult detective can become the opposite: controlled, rational, capable of restoring order. The detective profession therefore provides an identity capable of compensating for the helplessness of childhood. He does not have to remain the abandoned child if he can become the man who finds what has been lost.

Paul Ricoeur's account of memory provides a useful framework for this process. In *Memory, History, Forgetting*, Ricoeur distinguishes among forms of memory disturbance, including blocked memory and manipulated memory, and asks how individual recollection relates to historical knowledge and testimony. Banks's problem involves both dimensions. His memories are blocked or uncertain in some places, but they are also interpretively organized. He does not merely fail to remember; he remembers within a story about who he is.

The distinction matters because an exclusively psychological reading would reduce his unreliability to a symptom of trauma. Ishiguro makes the problem more complicated. Banks is not only remembering a traumatic childhood; he is narrating himself into adulthood through those memories. His professional identity is partly the product of his interpretation of his childhood. His detective apparatus becomes a mnemonic apparatus.

The same process occurs with his parents. He remembers his mother as morally courageous and his father as essentially loyal to her and to a larger ethical cause. He later discovers that this narrative is radically incomplete. His father did not disappear because of a heroic stand against the opium trade. Uncle Philip reveals that his father "ran off one day with his mistress," lived with her in Hong Kong, and eventually died of typhoid in Singapore (Ishiguro 176). The revelation is devastating not because it merely corrects a factual error but because it destroys the moral structure through which he has organized his childhood.

Uncle Philip explains that Banks's mother knew the truth but chose to protect him from it. She and Philip deliberately allowed Banks to believe a more heroic story because they believed that story would protect him. Banks's memory, then, is not simply his own construction. It has been shaped by the protective fictions supplied to him by adults.

This is where the novel's title becomes more complicated. Banks is not only an orphan because his parents disappear. He becomes an orphan epistemologically: he grows up without access to the truth of his own origins. The adult detective is consequently trying to recover both parents and the history that was withheld from him.

The Detective Plot as a Technology of Remembering

Banks's detective vocation is inseparable from the childhood games he played with Akira. When his father disappears, Akira proposes a new game: "we play detective. We search for father. We rescue father" (Ishiguro 64). This line is crucial because it reveals the psychological origin of his adult mission.

His later vocation appears noble: he wants to combat evil, expose criminals, and protect the innocent. But the novel steadily reveals that his public vocation is entangled with a private compulsion. His childhood trauma has been converted into professional purpose. He can investigate other people's mysteries because he has never resolved his own.

This helps explain why his memory remains so heavily invested in Shanghai. He explicitly acknowledges that he has begun thinking increasingly about the past just as his memories begin to deteriorate. After talking to his friend, Sarah Hemmings, about Akira, he is "surprised and slightly alarmed" that he has disclosed anything about his childhood because he has deliberately avoided discussing the past in England. He then recognizes that his memories of his parents have become increasingly blurred (Ishiguro 41).

The relationship between speech and memory is significant. He has kept his past private, and the result is not preservation but distortion. The memories he has refused to narrate to others have become increasingly dependent upon his own internal reconstruction. When he finally begins talking about them, the act of narration exposes their instability.

Cathy Caruth's theory of trauma helps clarify this temporal structure. In *Unclaimed Experience*, she conceptualizes trauma through the paradox of an experience that is not fully assimilated at the moment of its occurrence and therefore returns belatedly, producing an unstable relationship between knowledge and experience. Banks's childhood is marked by precisely such a temporal disturbance. He knows that his parents disappeared, but he does not know what their disappearance means. He has an event without an adequate explanation, and his adult life becomes an attempt to construct the missing explanation.

Yet Caruth alone cannot explain Banks's behaviour. His return to the past is not a simple involuntary return. It is organized by an active vocation. He deliberately creates a narrative in which his parents are victims, the perpetrators are identifiable, and the detective has the power to restore justice. This is why LaCapra becomes particularly useful.

LaCapra's distinction between "acting out" and "working through" avoids the simplistic assumption that trauma can be completely cured through the recovery of factual knowledge. For LaCapra, acting out involves a compulsive relation to the past in which temporal distinctions collapse, whereas working through involves the difficult process of distinguishing past from present while recognizing that the past remains consequential. Working through does not promise full cure or complete mastery.

Banks spends much of the novel acting out the structure of his childhood loss through detective work. He does not merely remember his parents; he continually reconstitutes their disappearance as an active case. The distinction between then and now becomes unstable. The adult Banks enters Shanghai believing that his parents can still somehow be recovered. The house in which he believes his parents are imprisoned becomes a kind of materialized childhood fantasy.

This is why the detective plot ultimately has to fail. If the investigation succeeded according to conventional detective logic, he would receive not only information but psychological closure. Ishiguro refuses that equation. Hélène Machinal observes that the novel progressively undermines the credibility of its narrator and eventually makes the comforts of detective fiction unsustainable. The

novel asks what happens when the investigative apparatus that has sustained a person's identity can no longer produce the answer that identity requires.

Shanghai and the Failure of Lieux de Mémoire

Banks's return to Shanghai constitutes the decisive confrontation between memory and reality. The Shanghai of his childhood is not simply remembered; it is aesthetically reconstructed. At one point he recalls the garden mound where he and Akira played and describes the house from that vantage point. Yet he immediately qualifies his own image: "I suspect this memory of the house is very much a child's vision" (Ishiguro 31).

That sentence encapsulates the novel's memory politics. He can visualize the past with extraordinary vividness while simultaneously recognizing that vividness does not guarantee accuracy. The house is both remembered place and psychological construction. Pierre Nora's concept of lieux de mémoire — sites where lived memory and historical consciousness become concentrated and illuminates both what Banks is looking for in Shanghai and why he cannot find it there. The historical city is fragmented by war, violence, political conflict, and colonial divisions. Sorensen's reading of the novel as an interrogation of imperial nostalgia is important here: Banks's remembered Shanghai belongs to a colonial social order whose apparent stability depended upon political and economic arrangements that the later Shanghai has rendered untenable.

His personal memory therefore intersects with historical memory. He has remembered a world of houses, gardens, servants, schools, social distinctions, and adult authority. The historical reality exposes the fragility of that world. The effect is not simply that he discovers that he was wrong. More fundamentally, the physical destruction of Shanghai deprives him of the spatial anchors through which memory could be stabilized. The city cannot return him intact to childhood because the physical environment itself has changed.

Banks's journey toward the house where he believes his parents are being held is consequently a movement through a landscape that cannot sustain his memory. The military officer guiding him explicitly warns him that the fighting is severe and

that civilians living inside the warren are caught between competing forces. He nevertheless continues to imagine the house as the destination of his personal mystery. The house cannot simply be recovered because the world that made the house meaningful has disappeared. This explains why his physical investigation becomes increasingly surreal. The closer he comes to his supposed destination, the less conventional the narrative logic becomes. His certainty grows precisely as external reality becomes less certain. The contradiction is deliberate. A rational detective should become more cautious as evidence becomes weaker; he becomes more committed.

The reason is emotional rather than deductive. If he admits that the house may not contain his parents, then he must confront the possibility that he has spent decades organizing his life around an impossible recovery.

The climax of the investigation therefore becomes a confrontation between two kinds of truth: factual truth and emotional truth. Factual truth eventually tells him that his father had abandoned the family and that his mother disappeared under entirely different circumstances. Emotional truth is harder: Banks must recognize that his adult mission has been built upon a child's refusal to accept irreversible absence.

The Traumatic Child beneath the Detective

The most revealing moments in Shanghai occur when Banks's adult identity breaks down and the childhood self re-emerges. During the ruined-house sequence, his narrative becomes markedly uncertain. He states that "my memory of these moments is no longer very clear" and can only reconstruct events through partial recollection (Ishiguro 166). He begins tearing through the ruins in search of his parents, even though the adult reader can recognize that the situation makes his expectations increasingly implausible.

This episode is important because he is no longer remembering the past from a safe distance. He is performing his childhood search in the present. The detective case becomes a literal reenactment of the child's search. His actions also become physically destructive. He tears apart the ruined building, overturns wreckage, and demands to know where his parents are. His professional apparatus—the magnifying glass, the revolver, his investigative identity—cannot protect him from the emotional logic of the scene. The detective disappears into the child.

This is a useful example of LaCapra's "acting out." He is not simply remembering his childhood trauma; he temporarily inhabits its unresolved structure. The past and present collapse into one another. The child who once believed that detectives would find his parents has become the detective who believes he can find them himself.

But the scene also demonstrates the limits of Caruth's model if used without qualification. The traumatic return here is not only an involuntary recurrence. Banks has engineered the circumstances through his own narrative project. He has deliberately travelled to Shanghai, deliberately followed clues, deliberately entered the war zone, and deliberately reconstructed the house as the endpoint of his investigation. His trauma has therefore become a vocation.

That is why the ending cannot simply be interpreted as the moment when the trauma is finally "resolved." The novel is more skeptical. Banks discovers the factual truth, but the psychological structure that made the investigation necessary cannot disappear overnight.

The Parents Who Never Existed as Banks Remembered Them

Uncle Philip's revelation is the novel's most important challenge to memory because it does not merely correct a minor factual detail. It dismantles the moral architecture of Banks's childhood. He has imagined his father as someone who resisted the opium trade and was consequently removed by powerful interests. His mother has been remembered as a morally uncompromising figure whose anti-opium commitments gave meaning to the family's disappearance. Uncle Philip explains that this interpretation was deliberately encouraged because his mother wanted to protect him. These revelations are painful because Banks's memory has idealized not only the parents but the family itself.

This is one reason the novel's treatment of memory is more complex than the familiar claim that trauma produces unreliable narration. Banks's memories are unreliable partly because they preserve emotional meanings that factual accuracy cannot preserve. His father's abandonment is almost impossible to integrate into the heroic structure through which he has understood his childhood.

Uncle Philip makes the psychological stakes explicit when he explains that Banks's father "idealised" his mother and could not live up to the standard he believed she represented (Ishiguro 177). The irony is considerable: Banks has done something

similar. He too has idealized his parents by converting them into symbolic figures—his mother into moral courage and his father into victimized integrity.

The truth, therefore, does not simply liberate Banks; it disillusion him. Uncle Philip's confession about his role in his mother's abduction removes one mystery but exposes a deeper wound, revealing that Banks's childhood memories were shaped by idealization and misunderstanding. Ishiguro thus shows that knowing the truth cannot restore what has been lost; healing lies not in recovering the past, but in accepting its irretrievability as he chose to move on rather than seeking the opportunity to kill him. The final stage of his search brings him to Hong Kong, where he finally encounters his mother who was kidnapped and taken as a concubine by Wang Ku, warlord. She is now unable to fully understand her surroundings, and when Banks calls out his childhood name, "Puffin," she responds, although it remains uncertain whether she truly recognises him (Ishiguro 188). Banks asks for her forgiveness and interprets her worries for the boy as a sign of her continuing love. The scene shows that his memories still shape how he understands the past. He further discovers that his adult identity has itself been materially connected to the sacrifice of his mother to fund his financial security. Yet he cannot restore the mother or childhood he remembers. Instead, the encounter makes him confront the limits of memory and accept that healing does not require complete recovery of the past. He must now grieve parents who were not the parents he had spent his life remembering. That is a more difficult form of mourning.

Memory, Nostalgia, and the Possibility of Ethical Recovery

Elizabeth Weston's reading is especially useful at this stage because she resists the assumption that nostalgia is merely destructive. She argues that nostalgia and melancholia in the novel can become active forces, generating ethical commitment and attachment to justice. This insight complicates any reading in which Banks's detective vocation is reduced to pathological obsession.

His mission has indeed damaged his capacity for intimacy. He rejects Sarah when she offers him an alternative life, and he repeatedly sacrifices present relationships to the pursuit of his past. Yet his commitment is not meaningless. The detective vocation gives him an ethical structure through which he attempts to respond to the violence and disorder surrounding him. The problem is therefore not that he remembers too much. The problem is that he has only one available form for remembering: investigation. This explains why healing in the novel cannot mean

forgetting. Forgetting would simply reproduce the condition from which he suffers. The challenge is to remember differently.

Sarah provides an important parallel. She tells him that she too has lost her parents and observes that although they seem to belong to the distant past, “in another way, they’re always with me” (Ishiguro 30). Her formulation anticipates the novel’s final position. The dead do not have to disappear from consciousness for life to continue. The alternative to compulsive pursuit is not forgetting but a different relationship to memory. He, however, reaches this insight only partially.

His relationship with Jennifer is therefore crucial. Jennifer is herself an orphan, but Banks’s relationship with her differs from his relationship with his own parents. Instead of attempting to recover her past, he has the opportunity to become a stable figure in her present. The irony is that he is better able to care for another orphan than to care for the orphaned child within himself.

Jennifer offers Banks a future-oriented form of relationship. She invites Banks to live with her in the countryside. He responds with humour and openness rather than with the language of duty or mission that he will give it a thought. More importantly, he later admits that she has become a source of consolation. He says, “I am grateful for Jennifer,” and describes their exchanges as “a source of consolation” (Ishiguro 191).

The significance of this relationship should not be understated. He does not recover his parents. He cannot reconstruct the childhood he lost. Instead, he develops the possibility of a different kind of attachment. He now has grown attached to London. That is the novel’s quietest movement toward healing. The past cannot be repaired, but the future can still contain relationships.

The Ending: Truth without Closure

The ending of the novel is often vulnerable to a misleading interpretation: he solves the mystery, learns the truth, and therefore completes his healing. However, the novel itself does not support such a neat conclusion.

After learning what happened to his father and confronting the truth about his mother, he continues to define himself through the language of mission. Sarah’s letter tells him that he has always had a mission and suggests that perhaps his tasks

are now behind him. His own reflection is more ambiguous. He says that people like him are condemned to “chase” the shadows of vanished parents and that there is “nothing for it but to try and see through our missions to the end” before calm becomes possible (Ishiguro 193).

The language of “shadows” is decisive. He has not recovered the parents themselves. He has pursued their shadows. The metaphor implicitly acknowledges the impossibility at the centre of his life. Yet he also reports a degree of contentment. He says that London has become his home and that he enjoys its parks and galleries. His life is no longer organized entirely around Shanghai. He can inhabit the present without pretending that the past has vanished.

But then Ishiguro refuses a final note of therapeutic triumph. Banks admits that “a sort of emptiness fills my hours” and that he will continue to consider Jennifer’s invitation (Ishiguro 193). The novel ends immediately afterward. This is not full healing. It is something more credible and, in theoretical terms, closer to LaCapra’s “working through.” Banks has acquired knowledge. He has survived the collapse of his childhood narrative. He has begun to establish relationships that are not entirely governed by his mission. He can call London home. He can imagine a future with Jennifer. Yet emptiness remains.

The ending therefore makes a crucial distinction between resolution and accommodation. Resolution would mean that the past has been satisfactorily explained and emotionally mastered. Accommodation means that he can continue living while carrying a past that cannot be repaired.

LaCapra’s formulation is especially appropriate because working through does not entail complete transcendence of trauma. It involves establishing distinctions between past and present while acknowledging that the past continues to exert force. Banks’s final position corresponds to this incomplete movement.

Conclusion

When We Were Orphans does not ultimately present memory as a storehouse from which the truth can be retrieved intact. It presents memory as an active and unstable process through which the past is repeatedly reconstructed according to present needs. Christopher Banks remembers his childhood as a coherent world because coherence is necessary to the identity he has constructed. The detective

vocation becomes the adult continuation of a childhood game in which disappearance can be converted into a solvable mystery. His parents' disappearance becomes a case because the alternative is to confront the intolerable possibility that some losses have no satisfying explanation. The novel gradually destroys this structure.

His discovery that his father was not the heroic victim he imagined and that his mother participated in a protective fiction about the family's past. His return to Shanghai only to find that the remembered city cannot be recovered and that the house containing his imagined resolution belongs to a world that has already been destroyed. His own memories become increasingly explicit in their uncertainty. At the very moment when the detective should become most certain, the narrator becomes most doubtful.

The significance of this structure extends beyond the familiar observation that he is an unreliable narrator. His unreliability is functional. It reveals how memory can protect an individual from forms of knowledge that are emotionally unbearable. His fragmented recollections allow him to preserve an idealized childhood, an idealized family, and eventually an idealized vocation. His investigation therefore operates as both an attempt at truth and a postponement of mourning.

Ricoeur helps illuminate the distinction between memory as recollection and memory as interpretation. Banks's past is not simply inaccessible; it has been organized through protective narratives. Caruth clarifies why the traumatic past continues to return in fragmented and belated forms, while LaCapra makes it possible to distinguish his repetitive pursuit of the past from the more limited possibility of working through it. The novel's historical and colonial dimensions prevent the trauma from being reduced to an exclusively private psychological event.

Most importantly, the ending refuses to convert truth into cure. He knows more than he did before. He has learned what happened to his parents. He has survived the destruction of the story through which he understood his childhood. He has begun to regard London as home. He has Jennifer as a possible source of continuing relationship and consolation. Yet he still experiences emptiness. That emptiness is not evidence that the investigation has been meaningless. It is evidence that knowledge and healing are not identical.

The novel's final achievement lies precisely in refusing to make them identical. He cannot restore his parents, recover childhood, or reconstruct the

Shanghai of memory. What he can do is gradually cease demanding that memory restore what history has taken away. His relationship with Jennifer offers the possibility of a future that is not founded upon recovering the past but upon remaining available to another person in the present.

In this sense, the novel redefines healing as a change in the function of memory. At first, memory demands recovery: Banks must find, explain, expose, and restore. By the end, memory can coexist with absence. The vanished parents remain “shadows,” the past remains incomplete, and the emptiness does not disappear. Yet he is no longer entirely imprisoned by the need to make that emptiness disappear.

The novel therefore closes not with recovery but with continuation. Its final silence refuses the consolation of complete closure while allowing the possibility of a life beyond compulsive return. His healing remains unfinished because the past remains unfinished. He cannot undo what happened to himself. His tentative movement toward the present constitutes not complete healing, but the difficult beginning of learning to live with what memory cannot restore.

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