

The Poetics of Unreliable Remembrance: Trauma and Narrative Reconstruction in

Kazuo Ishiguro's *When We Were Orphans*

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## ABSTRACT

Memory studies is an interdisciplinary field that investigates the processes through which individuals and societies remember, reconstruct, and transmit the past. It critically examines the relationship between memory, identity, trauma, and narrative, particularly highlighting the instability and subjectivity of recollection. Kazuo Ishiguro's *When We Were Orphans* (2000) explores memory as both

redemptive and deceptive in the aftermath of trauma. Through Detective Christopher Banks, who remains haunted by the disappearance of his parents in 1930's Shanghai, the novel interrogates the unreliability of autobiographical memory, and its formative role in shaping personal identity. The paper argues that the novel may be read as a Postmodern Fictional Autobiography in which Banks employs narrative reconstruction as a therapeutic strategy to reconcile fragmented childhood memories with adult consciousness. Yet his attempts ultimately reveal the epistemological limits of memory in accessing traumatic truth, as his self-fashioned narrative obscures rather than clarifies historical reality. By analyzing temporal dislocations, patterns of self-delusion, and the tension between nostalgia and factuality, the novel foregrounds the dependence of trauma survivors on storytelling as a means of meaning-making, even while exposing its inherent constraints. Thus, this study proposes that *When We Were Orphans* makes a significant contribution to memory studies by suggesting that authentic recovery remains unattainable when trauma fractures the self's capacity to narrate truth coherently.

Keywords: Identity, Memory, Psychological reconstruction, Unreliable narrator, Trauma.

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