Title: Introduction: Reading Kazuo Ishiguro in Times of Crisis

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Introduction

Reading Kazuo Ishiguro in Times of Crisis

At the start of the twenty-first century, our world is palpably precarious and fragile. We are faced with a clustering of serious, global crises that have built in major contingencies into our planet's future: climate change, globalisation in contest with resurgent nationalisms, and the emergence of neoliberal hyper-economies driven by digital technologies that challenge our definition of what "the human" is. We have to contend with major geopolitical shifts and tensions that reach back to the post-9/11 fracturing of American hegemony, and latterly with the nostalgic embracing of ethno-national identities and associated imperial pasts - from Brexit, to the attack on the US Capitol in January 2021, to Putin's dream of restoring Russia's pre-1917 Empire. These developments are tied into unresolved twentieth-century debates over our relationship to nature and about socio-economic and cultural injustices that many emancipatory movements – from Black Lives Matter to Extinction Rebellion to LGBTQIA+ activism – have put on national and international agendas. The tensions between progressive and retrenching conservative reactionary camps has led to many socio-economic and cultural divisions. To compound this situation, the proliferation of dis- and misinformation pulls the epistemological and ontological ground beneath our feet, plunging us into what might be described as a crisis of the Real.

These issues intensified when the COVID-19 pandemic arose in 2020: this health crisis – one of the largest of its kind – repeatedly exposed and accelerated broader current crises in individual and collective well-being and in social equality.[i] As the pandemic unfolded and societies were confronted daily with fundamental uncertainties,[ii] the recognition that the world might never be the same again

led to the emergence of perspectives that viewed our situation as an opportunity to accelerate older emancipatory movements and ideas, and to give serious consideration to alternative ways of living.[iii] The crisis offered a moment of reflection on pressing questions: How best to respond to a crisis? What is a healthy society? What level of uncertainty, of gaps in our knowledge, should we be able to bear, and how can we avoid false certainties arising where the unknowns become unbearable?

Crisis as a collective sensibility – as structure of feeling - is nothing new. As Frank Kermode notes in *The Sense of An Ending* (1966):

> When you read, as you must almost every passing day, that ours is a great time of crisis—technological, military, cultural—you may well simply nod and proceed calmly to your business; for this assertion, upon which a multitude of books is founded, is nowadays no more surprising than the opinion that the earth is round. There seems to be some danger in this situation, if only because such a myth, uncritically accepted, tends like prophesy to shape a future to confirm it. Nevertheless crisis, however facile the conception, is inescapably a central element in our endeavours towards making sense of our world.[iv]

Kermode reminds us that the apocalyptic tradition that characterises modernity gives us the endless sense that our world is always in crisis and always ending: we perpetually "live in the mood of end-dominated crisis"[v] and thus in perpetual transition. Over forty years later, Žižek continued to pinpoint similar sentiment in *Living in the End-Times* (2010), where he argued that "the capitalist system is approaching an apocalyptic zero-point" with our contemporary apocalypse comprised by "the ecological crisis, the consequences of the biogenetic revolution, imbalances within the system itself […] and the explosive growth of social divisions and exclusions."[vi] The point that Kermode made, though, is important (and linked to literary, rhetorical tradition): the sense that the world is ending is a double-edged sword because it puts experience in sharp focus, perhaps, but there's also the hopeless, defeatist that we might as well resign to our "fate" (whatever that is). This is not necessarily the case: if we take a Hegelian long-view of human history, what we see is that our modern world is characterised by continuity in change; but lacking a shared, accepted basis for a historical (and indeed,

geographic) long view, we are susceptible to the consolations of crisis, which act as a kind of *narrative* node, where meaning and significance appear to finally emerge from the newly exposed heart of an otherwise hopelessly uncertain world. Even a threatening revelation can, in this context, provide epistemological and psychological reassurance.

Such is the case for many of Kazuo Ishiguro's characters, for whom questions about the nature and significance of the crises they experience are often all-encompassing. The reader of Ishiguro will be tempted, at times, to affirm the apparent revelations of meaning offered by these crises, not least because Ishiguro's work - as we shall see here - continuously offers up new, insightful critical readings that contribute to our understanding of our own individual and collective crises. However, the ethical, political and psychological problems confronting Ishiguro's characters are repeatedly poised between the consoling attractions of narratives of crisis and subtle, repressed but ultimately inescapable signs of the factual and ethical dubiousness of that consolation.

Ishiguro's protagonists are often undergoing personal crises simultaneously with – or in delayed or displaced reaction to - international crises of global significance. One may recall, from the start of Ishiguro's writing career, Etsuko's retreat from society in *A Pale View of Hills* (1982)[vii] caused by relational trauma that is itself a delayed and extended result of her experiences before and after the Second World War and against the background of the atomic bombing of Nagasaki. Most recently, *Klara and the Sun* (2021)[viii] offers us a future in which the illness of the child Josie is mirrored by a sick, polluted earth ravaged by climate change. Ishiguro's own lifetime has included multiple crises: born in the shadow of the atomic bombing of Nagasaki and the atrocities of the Second World War (events echoing explicitly in his first three novels), Ishiguro has lived through the Cold War (discernable in the background to the Mitteleuropa of *The Unconsoled* (1995)),[ix] the triumph and gradual deterioration of American hegemony and neoliberal globalisation (on which *When We Were Orphans*[x] provides an uncanny reflection), international migration crises and racialised conflicts (visible in *Orphans* and again in *The Buried Giant* (2015)),[xi] and the emergence of techno-political and biogenetic challenges to the status of the human itself (evident in *Never Let Me*

Go[xii] and *Klara and the Sun*). He has also lived through the distinctively British crises of the Thatcher-era end of post-war social democratic consensus (on which his television play *The Gourmet* (1986) commented directly and overtly, whilst *The Remains of the Day*[xiii] and *Never Let Me Go* give distorted retrospectives), and Brexit, the context for which is increasingly read (including in this special issue) as informing Ishiguro's quasi-historical fantasy, *The Buried Giant*.

Aware of the striking, if always complex, resonances between Ishiguro's work and periods of national and international crisis, and further prompted by the long-term global crisis of climate change and the acute crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic, it seemed to us that a dedicated and interlinked set of studies devoted to Ishiguro and international crisis have been well overdue. This is why the editors of this volume organised an international seminar in July 2020 to ask how Ishiguro's fiction can make sense of a world in crisis. We hope that this this special issue will not only address this gap, but also seed new and renewed avenues of interest for scholarly and general readers of Ishiguro.

Still, it is important to recognise that Ishiguro's relationship with the idea of 'crisis', as a way of defining a historical period and/or an ethical or political imperative, is far from a straightforwardly affirmative one. Crises in Ishiguro rarely either reveal or resolve the wider meaning of events in the forms that they initially promise - whether in relation to the political and military crisis that Christopher Banks sets out to tackle in *Orphans*' Shanghai, the crisis of civic confidence and historical memory that Ryder is expected to address in the city of *The Unconsoled*, the confrontation with traumatic grief that Etsuko never fully realises in *A Pale View of Hills*, or even a marriage crisis in *Nocturnes*' short story "Crooner". If Ishiguro's characters tend to be marked by a feeling of having missed opportunities at crucial, formative points in their lives, this sensibility is persistently accompanied by the suspicion that the significance of any given moment of crisis, its representation of some broader personal and political process, is possibly being more *created* or "discovered" in retrospect than simply identified in the present.

In fact, the imperatives produced by the designation of a 'crisis' in some particular time and place more often have perverse effects than productive ones for Ishiguro's characters, frequently

overburdening his protagonists with a representative and redemptive function that is far beyond their capacity to actually deliver (Ryder and Banks are only the most obvious examples of this). In this sense, the perversities and problems produced by designating a ‘crisis’ form part of the broader problem of artistic and ethical representation with which Ishiguro is so powerfully concerned throughout his work, where the very demand for representative figures is always prone to slide into dangerous essentialism and fetishisation of authenticity (a risk to which Kermode already alerts us).

If Ishiguro’s crises and the imperatives they produce are, then, morally and factually ambivalent, they are nevertheless remarkably frequent in his work, and central to readings of its own significance, both across and within his individual texts. As essentially temporal claims, they also demand both historicist readings, and – in their uncanny, sideways reflections of real historical events like the Battle of Shanghai or the atomic bombing of Nagasaki – an attention to the gaps, problems and perversities in how history is represented, particularly in its perceived connections across the intimate and the global registers.

To frame and contextualise the contributions to this volume, we explore first some resonances between some specific contemporary and recent international crises and Ishiguro’s work.

A global pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic presented the world with a full-scale international health crisis that proved acute, complex, all-encompassing and extended. As a viral, biological, and potentially biopolitical threat, with origins that remain partly opaque and which have been subject to racist and orientalist framings[xiv], the COVID crisis echoes multiple themes and plot elements in Ishiguro’s fiction, perhaps most obviously the orientalist and incipient fascist paranoia depicted in *When We Were Orphans*.

In the United Kingdom, where Ishiguro lives and works, the pandemic has been an epistemological and political, as well as a public health, challenge. Initial attempts to establish a coherent national narrative framing the British pandemic experience invoked well-established military

rhetoric and Second World War tropes, especially the 'Blitz spirit' of collective sacrifice and the 'front-line',[xv] but the duration of the pandemic and the often poor fit between its characteristics and such historical examples, alongside a series of government scandals, undermined this framing and left the UK without a cohesive shared narrative of the pandemic - or of its relationship with that other ongoing British crisis, Brexit. Matthew Leggett (2020) comments, for instance, on the ways in which Eurosceptics and Brexiteers use(d) emotionally charged, bellicose war rhetoric including "the Dunkirk spirit", "treason" and "collaboration,"[xvi] thus evoking a past, mythical sense of crisis and trauma to colour the present. This situation resonates with the crises of national narrative that Richard Robinson explores here in his essay "'Many Strange Tongues in the Fenlands': *The Buried Giant* as Brexit Allegory?", as well as with Ishiguro's longstanding critical interest in British (and other) nationalisms and the long legacies of twentieth-century conflicts.

Simultaneously, the lockdowns and restrictions experienced in the UK and many other countries during the pandemic find powerful resonances in Ishiguro, as Sebastian Groes explores in his essay here. Temporal and social disorientation, a sense of contradiction and frustration of purpose in everyday life, and the transformation of urban spaces into uncanny and absurdist zones, all have been features of the pandemic experience that echo in Ishiguro's work, notably in *The Unconsoled* and *Orphans*, where Ryder and Christopher Banks both find themselves in frustratingly, sometimes seemingly senselessly transformed cities, where surface absurdities only partially conceal a crippling yet terrifyingly vague sense of threat, and where leaders, experts and ordinary people are often in conflict with each other. In this sense, we might obliquely understand the structure of feeling of the COVID-19 era by reading Ishiguro's work, which Groes' essay does in relationship to more direct depictions of pandemic, such as Albert Camus's *The Plague* (1947), a novel to which many turned to make sense of the global health crisis.

Conspiracist attitudes about the origin, nature and implications of the pandemic (which echo in Dean's essay here), and the theory of a bioengineered origin of COVID-19 in a laboratory, resonate with Ishiguro's elegiac and uncanny meditations on biopolitics and biofuturism as they emerge in

Never Let Me Go (2005) and, most recently, in *Klara and the Sun* (2021). Ishiguro's narrative modus operandi uses, as Groes explains, a doubling perspectival structure to suggest how conspiracy functions. When we are shackled closely to the narrating consciousness of Stevens, Christopher Banks or Kathy H., the reader is firstly trapped within the confines of the narrators' (often false) faith in ideological framings that resemble conspiratorial thinking. All these narrators are unconsciously scared of admitting that, as we find out when the narrative progresses, their worldview is artificially constructed by their minds to be whole and continuous. The intimacy of the narrator-reader contract is one that the latter needs to break when they come to understand that the reality beyond the smooth, comfortable surface story is fragmented and shaped by unacknowledged manipulations and unconscious motivations. Ishiguro's work trains us to see the smoke and mirrors for what they are – and accept that the real world is accessible only opaquely, via politically and psychosocially compromised narratives that we can neither accept at face value, nor dismiss entirely, nor yet interpret authoritatively.

Climate change

Perhaps the greatest and most urgent crisis currently facing the world today is that presented by climate change. The COVID-19 pandemic has proven a point of reflection on the nature of our individual and social relationship with pressing ecological realities. Although the effects of the pandemic on actual carbon emissions has been negligible,[xvii] the period provided a chance for some citizens to (re)discover nature in one's vicinity. Indeed, as the crisis laid bare major inequalities and discrepancies of well-being in our cultures, we wondered about a wider, related question: what really is a healthy society? For Bruno Latour, the pandemic was *the* opportunity to change our attitude to all socio-economic relationships, especially that to the *milieu*. In *After Lockdown: Metamorphosis* (2021),[xviii] Latour argues that we should regard the global health crisis as a means to transform our relationship to earth. As Groes notes, the realisation of such hopes remains to be seen.

Ishiguro's work is often skeptical of the ways in which people might assert themselves and give up their own comforts for the sake of others, and for the earth. This is not simply to do with

selfishness, but with a problem of the unthinkable that Amitav Ghosh reminds us of in *The Great Derangement* (2017):[xix] climate change is too vast for the limited human imagination. Crimes against nature are present throughout Ishiguro's work: one may think of the ways in which the impact of the atomic bombs on Japan are described in the first two novels, as well as the underlying problems of ethics in a world of bioengineering in *Never Let Me Go*; or of how *The Buried Giant*'s initial retreat into a seemingly pastoral idyll is undercut through political intricacy, bloodshed and betrayal. Set in a near-future North America, *Klara and the Sun* is Ishiguro's most explicit engagement with the climate change crisis. In Klara's world, the outside seems dangerous because of 'Pollution' - the nature of which, however, is not entirely clear. The diesel-powered roadworks machines as well as the Cootings diggers belch smoke into the air: "The amount of dark smoke appeared to vary from panel to panel, so that it was almost as if contrasting shades of gray were being displayed for selection".[xx] We are in a Blakean realm of contraries, according to Klara: a world of innocence and experience, where there are hints that Josie's sister, for instance, died of a disease related to pollution. Josie's mother points out a chemical plant where Josie father used to work - once used for refrigeration, but presumably now for solar batteries: "It's a good place. Clean energy in, clean energy out."[xxi] The Artificial Friend, Klara, is solar-powered, but is left on the brink of understanding that her binary construction of the battle between the sun and pollution is flawed. Yet, of course, Ishiguro never spells out directly the precise technological and ecological realities of the world in which Klara exists.

The vagueness of *Klara* indeed suggests the limitedness of the human mind to understand – let alone act upon – such a complex, world-spanning problem as climate change. The so-called "*planetary cognitive ecology* that includes both human and technical actors and that can appropriately become the focus for ethical inquiry" as N. Katherine Hayles describes it in *Unthought* (2017)[xxii] seems itself a utopian notion. Yet, through images, symbols and metaphors and other poetic structures, literature and other forms of culture might 'translate' these vast issues for us and provide a glimpse of not only the scale of the problem, but perhaps also provide a sense of agency that has its power in a form of negation. Just as during the pandemic, when to not-act, to stay at home helped beat the spread of the virus, perhaps climate change can be thwarted through a stoic, ascetic anti-strategy:

to not give in to one's desires, to not act on our impulses that awakened so many different external triggers. This philosophy of negation - which runs deeply in Ishiguro via his engagement with, for instance, Samuel Beckett, but also via Japanese philosophies such as Shintoism - seems to provide some sort of putative answer to the problem of climate change.

Migration and border crisis

Migration and border conflicts have been significant recent international crises in their own right, and intersect with many of the other forms of crisis described here. They are also persistent themes in Ishiguro's work, as explored in Dominic Dean's essay, which considers migration crises from Ishiguro's first novel, *A Pale View of Hills*, via *Remains*, to *Orphans* as a particularly extended treatment of this theme. Migration crises expose the conflicts between nationalist, internationalist and humanitarian discourses as major ideological frameworks for the late twentieth and early twenty-first century world. Their very disruption to any notion of a secure home prompts, Dean argues, a fetishisation of the idea(l) of 'home' - a repeated source of trauma, stilted progress, and outbreaks of violence in Ishiguro.

Migration crises also invoke and challenge cosmopolitan values and the territorial and affective borders of societies that make claims to cosmopolitanism. This is the primary context for Ivan Stacy's essay, which argues both that the individual and intimate consolations desperately sought by Ishiguro's protagonists are typically dependent on cosmopolitanism as a political and social practice, and that Ishiguro is decreasingly willing to extend that consolation as his work develops throughout his career. Stacy reads *The Buried Giant* as a decisive point in Ishiguro's turn away from the forms of consolation apparently (if always ambiguously) achieved at the conclusions of his earlier works, and argues that this novel's depiction of a broad and deep crisis in cosmopolitanism is critical to this turn, whilst also being closely related to the crisis over historical memory simultaneously underway in the novel.

Crises of cosmopolitanism, migration and memory in *The Buried Giant* are given a specific historical framing in Richard Robinson's essay, which argues that this novel must be read as anticipatory of the British political crisis that followed little more than a year after its publication: Brexit. Taking a nuanced approach to Ishiguro's prescience, Robinson argues that *The Buried Giant* finally helps readers to understand Brexit less as a singular, irreducible crisis and more as part of a broader recent history (and as reflecting a longstanding set of concerns and interests that Ishiguro has pursued throughout his career). *The Buried Giant* emerges from this as both central and provocative for Ishiguro's status (particularly following his receipt of the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2017) as a contemporary cultural mediator and representative figure for anxieties over renewed and resurgent nationalisms, cosmopolitan internationalisms, and complex transnationalisms.

Territorial and border conflicts, as well as crises of historical memory, are also at stake in Melinda Dabis' essay, which returns to one of Ishiguro's most explicit yet also most complex and ambivalent engagements with these themes, *The Unconsoled*, and to the ambiguous nature of the Central Europe depicted there.

Political extremism and violence

The 2010s and early 2020s have been marked by increased political extremism and polarisation, sometimes even leading to 'post-truth' conflicts over the basic nature of reality – conflicts that involve, in turn, crises over ethical and political responsibility. Ishiguro has long been concerned with complacency towards political extremism and the distortions of truth involved in relativising and revising its role after the fact, as seen in his early 'Japanese' novels and in *Remains*. He developed this into a disturbing, uncanny portrait of extreme inhumanity in a depoliticised, complicit environment engaging in self-justifying narratives, no longer at even a slightly safe temporal distance from the violence they produce, in *Never Let Me Go*, while *The Buried Giant* depicts a period of post-imperial complacency perhaps about to come to an end, but at the terrible expected cost of renewed ethnic hatred and genocidal violence. In *Klara and the Sun*, this threat of violent eruption is transferred from the ancient past to the near future, as communities arise that are

delineated not only by ethnic or class status, but by differential versions and levels of human status, and which explicitly prepare to engage in violence (allegedly for self-protection), a violence that reflects a collapse of confidence both in the polity and in any shared and definitive framework for human nature, human purpose, or human rights. Ultimately political extremism always reflects a crisis both in the national polity and in any kind of international "settlement" in Ishiguro, as is reflected here, especially in Dabis's, Dean's, Robinson's, and Stacy's essays.

This rise of political extremism is connected to the rise of mis- and disinformation in our era: from Trump to the Russian government, our times are dogged by a resolute dispute about what is happening factually. Fake news is often intertwined with conspiracy theory and especially anti-Semitism, as Dean describes here. It was of course Orwell who anticipated this crisis, which, as Peter Boxall notes, stems from the dematerilisation of history that leads to a mutable past, a compulsory forgetfulness, and cultural relativism "in a society that has lost its collective sense of reason" because of "the development of information technology that allows for the manipulation of recorded reality".[xxiii] Our crisis seems to be on about the crisis of reality, an ontological questioning about what is real – whose narratives do we accept? During a launch event for *Klara*, Ishiguro noted that he had become distrustful of fiction, because it too seemed to manipulate people's emotions; but it is Frank Kermode who usefully reminds us of the distinction between myths and fiction:

> Fictions can degenerate into myths whenever they are not consciously held to be fictive. In this sense Anti-Semitism is a degenerate fiction; and *Lear* is a fiction. Myth operates within the diagrams of the ritual, which presupposes total and adequate explanations of things as they are and were; it is a sequence of radically unchangeable gestures. Fictions are for finding things out, and they change as the needs of sense-making change. Myths are agents of stability, fictions agents of change. Myths call for absolute, fictions for conditional assent.[xxiv]

This explains why – even though we may not make a clear-cut distinction between fiction and non-fiction anymore – it is important to embrace fiction as a tool for dismantling the power of fake news and disinformation. Ishiguro's work has consistently shown the importance of the ways in which we

need the narrative imagination to keep reminding ourselves of the need to question and challenge the modern myths that clutter the public unconscious.

This crisis of truth also intersects with the recent rise of and/or return to nationalisms after the (ostensible) failures of international politics of globalisation, the renewal of "great power" conflicts at a time when American hegemony is in decline and various kinds of "cold war" in the early twenty-first century return (as discussed in Dabis's essay here)

The return of such great power disputes after a period of internationalism or globalisation is a repeated backdrop in Ishiguro's work, most notably in *Remains* and *Orphans*. These conflicts are often also (in real history as in Ishiguro's fiction) disputes over historical memory, an issue that recurs throughout the essays in this special issue. As grand, indeed global, as the scope of such issues apparently is, however, they often transform into intimate and indeed narcissistic problems for Ishiguro's protagonists; Dean's essay turns on the idea that conspiracy theories about international affairs centre, for these protagonists, on the idea of retrieving the interior and psychological, as well as national and ethnic, "home" from some projected globalised adversary.

Problems of scale and crises of representation

This concern with the intimate and individual reflects how approaching crises involves problems of *scale*, and how Ishiguro returns to such problems – including as they emerge in relation to his own presumed or projected representational status – throughout his work. To act effectively in a crisis, a protagonist must correctly perceive their place within the conditions that have created it.

These issues of scale of responsibility and ethical reach – as in Stevens' claim that his standards of silverware maintenance made an appreciable impact on facilitating complex political negotiations – recur frequently in Ishiguro's novels, though they are never definitively resolved. They are a significant focus of Catherine Charlwood's article here, "Quiet and Personal, or Resoundingly Universal? An Ishiguro Crisis", which explores the relationship between individual and collective crisis in Ishiguro. The difficulty of this relationship is also at stake in Stacy's essay, where

cosmopolitanism functions as, amongst other things, a mediation between individual consolation and collective resolution.

If Ishiguro's work has tended to subtly warn about seeking to resolve a large-scale, even international, crisis through the representational function of one individual and their interior consolation, this is surely at least partly because such a function has frequently been projected on to the author himself. In early responses to Ishiguro as an allegedly uniquely 'Japanese' writer, and later to him as a transnational author of universalist insights into the globalised human condition, assumptions about the ethical, as well as artistic, value of Ishiguro's position and biography have rarely been far from the surface. Even receiving the Nobel Prize, and other high honours, has risked reinforcing this tendency, despite Ishiguro's repeated satirising of the dangers of expecting too much from transnational, cosmopolitan figures of presumed special representational status like Ryder and Banks.

In this special issue of *English Studies*, therefore, we have tried to do justice to the ethical difficulties in Ishiguro's crisis narratives, their refusals of easy or satisfying resolutions, and indeed their implicit critique of crisis frameworks for understanding political and historical problems, and even problems in the status of the human itself. Critical humility is a necessary response to authorial humility in matters of crisis. Humility and modesty, though, are not the same as passivity or disinterest, and even while insisting on the importance of gaps, problems, and ironies in Ishiguro's international crises, we also argue that these crises remain central to his work, its contexts, and its significance.

> "About this world being made a safer, more civilised place. I do believe it, you know. At least […] I'd like to believe it. Oh yes, I'd dearly love to believe it. But I don't know, my young friend. I don't know if in the end we'll be able to hold the line. We'll do what we can. Organise, confer. Get the greatest men from the greatest nations to put their heads together and talk. But there'll always be evil lurking around the corner for us. Oh yes! They're busy, even now, even as we speak, busy conspiring to put civilisation to the torch. And they're clever, oh, devilishly

clever. Good men and women can do what they can, devote their lives to keeping them at bay, but I fear it won't be enough, my friend. I fear it won't be enough. The evil ones are much too cunning for your ordinary decent citizen. They'll run rings around him, corrupt him, turn him against his fellows. I see it, I see it all the time now and it will grow worse. That's why we'll need to rely more than ever on the likes of you, my young friend. The few on our side every bit as clever as they are. Who'll spot their game quickly, destroy the fungus before it takes hold and spreads."[xxv]

Notes

[i] A report by the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities showed how the pandemic had a detrimental impact on well-being in England: anxiety, depression, loneliness and life satisfaction were all affected. See 'COVID-19 mental health and wellbeing surveillance: report', 8 September, 2020. See: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-mental-health-and-wellbeing-surveillance-report [Accessed 19 September 2022]. Research has also shown that the pandemic has had an unequal impact as some people who shared certain characteristics (belonging to certain ethnicities or age categories, having a disability or being women or from the LGBTQ+ community). See the report "The unequal impact of COVID-19" by the NHS Confederation, 15 June, 2002. See: https://www.nhsconfed.org/publications/unequal-impact-covid-19-protected-characteristics [Accessed 19 September 2022.

[ii] See for instance Simon X. B. Zhao at al.'s *COVID-19 Pandemic, Crisis Response and the Changing World*. Singapore: Springer, 2021. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-16-2430-8

[iii] The idea that we could learn lessons from the pandemic has led to an overwhelming volume of publications exploring how the world could change almost every aspect our lives, from social interaction and learning to the economy to our approach to nature. For the latter, one example is Bruno Latour's *After Lockdown: Metamorphosis* (2021), which invites its reader to take the pandemic period as a moment for reflection that would lead to a re-imagination of just about everything, including the law, politics, the arts, architecture, cities. See Groes's essay for more details on Latour's optimistic narrative.

[iv] Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending*. 94.

[v] Ibid, 98.

[vi] Žižek, Slavoj. *Living in the End Times*. X.

[vii] Ishiguro, Kazuo. *A Pale View of Hills*. London: Faber and Faber, 1982.

[viii] Ishiguro, Kazuo. *Klara and the Sun*. London: Faber and Faber, 2021.

[ix] Ishiguro, Kazuo. *The Unconsoled*. London. Faber and Faber, 1995.

[x] Ishiguro, Kazuo. *When We Were Orphans*. London: Faber and Faber, 2000.

[xi] Ishiguro, Kazuo. *The Buried Giant*. London: Faber and Faber, 2015.

[xii] Ishiguro, Kazuo. *Never Let Me Go*. London: Faber and Faber, 2005.

[xiii] Ishiguro, Kazuo. *The Remains of the Day*. London: Faber and Faber, 1989.

[xiv] See, for instance, Angela R. Grover's "Anti-Asian Hate Crime Rise During the COVID-19 Pandemic," *American Journal of Criminal Justice*, Volume 45, 2020 (647-667). DOI: https://doi.org/10.1007/s12103-020-09545-1

[xv] See for instance Lisa McCormick's 'Marking time in lockdown: heroization and ritualization in the UK during the coronavirus pandemic', in *American Journal of Cultural Sociology*, 2020, 8(3): 324-351. DOI: 10.1057/s41290-020-00117-8

[xvi] Leggett, Matthew. 'Brexit and war rhetoric: an election strategy. *Observatoire de la Societe Britannique*. No 25, pp. 49-64. https://doi.org/10.4000/osb.4709 49.

[xvii] See Tollefson, 'COVID curbed carbon emissions in 2020 – but not by much'. *Nature* 589, 343 (2021) doi: https://doi.org/10.1038/d41586-021-00090-3

[xviii] Latour, Bruno. *After Lockdown: A Metamorphosis*. Cambridge: Polity, 2021.

[xix] Ghosh, Amitav. *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016.
[xx] Ishiguro, *Klara and the Sun*, 28.
[xxi] Ibid, 99.
[xxii] Hayles, Katherine N. Unthought: *The Power of the Cognitive Unconscious*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017
[xxiii] Peter Boxall, *Twenty-First Century Fiction: A Critical Introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013. 47.
[xxiv] Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending.* 39.
[xxv] Ishiguro, *Orphans*, 43-44.

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