

Montclair State University

Montclair State University Digital Commons

Theses, Dissertations and Culminating Projects

1-2020

Making Meaning : Death, Dignity, and Dasein in Kazuo Ishiguro's Never Let Me Go

Angel Katrina Tuohy

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.montclair.edu/etd>

 Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores Kazuo Ishiguro's 2005 novel *Never Let Me Go*, with a focus on the way the novel considers large questions concerning the "meaning" of human life and the nature of "human condition" as Ishiguro calls it in interviews discussing his novel, using language and terminology provided by phenomenologist and philosopher Martin Heidegger in his seminal work *Being and Time*. This thesis builds on these questions to consider the complex ways that the concept of "dignity" as shown through the experiences of clones who have socially predetermined lifespans complicates issues surrounding the inevitability of death, the uncanniness of clones and organ donation, and the reluctance to resist circumstances that cannot be changed. Ultimately, the novel provides a way of approaching a kind of bittersweet hopefulness in moving towards death, despite the crushing weight of its, and our, unalterable circumstances.

MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY

Making Meaning: Death, Dignity, and *Dasein* in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*

by

Angel Katrina Tuohy

A Master's Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of

Montclair State University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

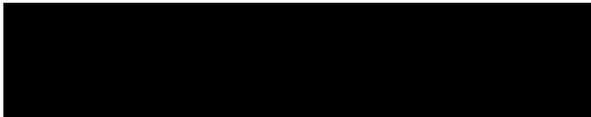
For the Degree of

Master of Arts

January 2020

College: College of Humanities and Social Sciences

Department: English


Dr. Jonathan Greenberg
Thesis Sponsor


Dr. Jeffrey Gonzalez
Committee Member


Dr. Jeffrey Miller
Committee Member

MAKING MEANING: DEATH, DIGNITY, AND *DASEIN* IN KAZUO ISHIGURO'S *NEVER*

LET ME GO

A THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the degree of Master of Arts

by

ANGEL KATRINA TUOHY

Montclair State University

Montclair, NJ

2020

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would first like to thank my thesis advisor Dr. Jonathan Greenberg of the English Department at Montclair State University for supporting this project, especially after my extended absence from the University, as well as for being a wonderful and thought-provoking professor through my time in both in the undergraduate and graduate English programs. I would also like to thank Committee members Dr. Jeffrey Gonzalez for his invaluable support and his insights and Dr. Jeffrey Miller for his enthusiasm, which I will never forget from working with him on my Honor's thesis for my Bachelor's degree.

I want to extend my gratitude as well to Dr. Naomi Conn Liebler for the opportunity to participate in the Graduate Assistantship program. There are unique people in the world, and Dr. Liebler is certainly one of them—her formidability is matched by her kindness.

Lastly, I want to share my deepest thanks to Morgan Reed whose manifold support made completing this thesis and the graduate program at Montclair State possible. Our time together and our conversations bring up all kinds of interesting questions and attempts at answers, and many of them have found their way to this thesis.

The “meaning” in my own life is made from my studies, experiences, relationships, and the memories I've made. I hope that they can fortify me going forward and last me until the end.

Angel Katrina Tuohy
December 2019

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Making Meaning: Death, Dignity, and <i>Dasein</i> in Kazuo Ishiguro's <i>Never Let Me Go</i>	1
Introduction	1
Critical Responses	2
Heidegger's Concept of <i>Dasein</i> , or "Being-in-the-world"	8
"Told and not told"	12
"Being the spiders"—Fear and Loathing	18
Testing, or What We are Supposed to Do	28
Death and The Law of Un-equivalent Exchange	34
"Being-towards-death" with Dignity	42
Meaning, Dying and Time	47
WORKS CITED	51

Making Meaning: Death, Dignity, and *Dasein* in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*

Introduction

Kazuo Ishiguro's 2005 novel *Never Let Me Go* presents a dystopian vision of a reality very near our own in which clones are generated, brought to adulthood, and then subjected to giving their organs through donation before their deaths at around the age of thirty. In *Never Let Me Go*, Ishiguro makes use of the dystopian genre and the idea of a clone underclass as a backdrop for a muted, beautiful, and quite sad exploration of what makes our human lives have meaning at all or to what extent those meanings can have a wider or external importance. This thesis will explore the way the novel brings the reader into a position of identifying with the narrator Kathy H. and the "clone class" instead of seeing the clones as "other" and how this feeling of relation allows for a parallel of our own natural human lives with those of the clones. This framing offers a new angle for examining the qualities of human life which populate lived experiences with "meaning," which this thesis will define in relation to Martin Heidegger's concept of *Dasein*, or a "being in the world."

In a 2006 interview with Cynthia F. Wong and Grace Crummett, Ishiguro shares aspects of his process of writing *Never Let Me Go*, saying: "I was always trying to find a metaphor for something very simple—it sounds rather grand—but, a metaphor for the human condition, and for coming to terms with the fact that we're not immortal, that we're here for a limited time" ("A Conversation with Kazuo Ishiguro" 215). The specific metaphor of cloning could have been more in line with what is typical for the science fiction genre, but Ishiguro makes this "metaphor for the human condition" by focusing on the intimate and personal instead of on politics at a global scale. Hailsham and the England that surrounds it is a familiar place, although set apart by

the slim shadow of a medical revolution, in constant but subtle contact with the banality of human life; overall *Never Let Me Go* is more melancholic than fantastical.

In Ishiguro's parallel England, set sometime in the late 1990s or early 2000s, clones are engineered, raised (typically in cruel conditions) to adulthood, and then inevitably the clones begin the process of donating organs to "normal" human beings in need of medical intervention and care. There is no narrative focus on the technological aspects of this process and no explanation of how it is meant to work. There is no radicalism either—even the "radicals" in *Never Let Me Go*, the founders of the Hailsham project, have long given up the ghost by the time the narrating character, Hailsham student and "carer" Kathy H., are told the truth about the reality of the unbalanced relationship between clones and normal people as an adult near the conclusion of the novel. The clones follow through with their social duty given the paucity of possibilities, and though this may distress the reader the choice to move along the course is what makes the clones the most human of all.

Critical Responses

Following the debut of *Never Let Me Go*, the novel generated a discussion surrounding contemporary bioethics, ultimately leading to conversations around the importance and sacredness of personal autonomy and individual freedom. It is undeniably appealing to focus on the biopolitical implications of *Never Let Me Go*—critical scholarship from Bruce Jennings¹, Mark Jerng, and others convincingly and adeptly explore the topic as presented by Ishiguro within the greater contemporary biopolitical conversation around these issues. However, as Lev Grossman writes in his review of the novel for *Time*: "[The novel] could easily be mistaken for a

¹ "Biopower and the Liberationist Romance." *Hastings Center Report* vol. 40, no. 4, 2010, pp. 16-19, *Project Muse*, doi: 10.1353/hcr.0.0284.

work of bioethics, or a genre thriller, but it's more than either of these: *Never Let Me Go* is an existential waltz, set to the music of hopelessness, about ordinary people trying to wring some joy out of life before it ends, and trying not to flinch when the axe falls" ("Never Let Me Go").

Both Grossman's and Ishiguro's own statements on the novel emphasize the constraints on life that are a consequence of the finite and brutal quality of time, with the conceit of cloning amplifying the "end" of life as the moment of losing vital organs is always looming on the Hailsham students' horizons, coloring their otherwise average and pointedly non-special experience of "growing up," making and breaking friendships, and falling in and out of romantic love. Ishiguro's unique approach to the theme of death leads some critics to draw comparisons to the absurdists; for *The Nation*, Claire Messud writes: "As in Beckett, Ishiguro's characters, in their detailed world, show us a version of our own minute preoccupations and piddling distractions, and raise life's largest questions for us all. Is this all there is? Must it end so soon? Why strive? Why persist? What is it all for?" ("Love's Body"). In his review of the novel for the *Guardian*, John Harrison expands on Messud's question of "why" by bringing a laser focus to the text's hopeless quality: "So what is *Never Let Me Go* really about? It's about the steady erosion of hope. It's about repressing what you know, which is that in this life people fail one another, grow old and fall to pieces" ("Clone Alone").

There is something deeply depressing about *Never Let Me Go* and the "erosion of hope" as Kathy H. and her fellow "students" approach the premature ends of their lives, and there's something poignantly ironic about writing a thesis that can at times seem to closely mirror the big essays assigned² as terminal projects for Hailsham students preparing to take off for the next

² "We [Hailsham students] still had our essays to finish, but it was well known we didn't really have to finish them if we chose to start our training [as carers]" (Ishiguro 197-98).

stage of their lives—as carers to donors, and then donors themselves. Among the many provocations in *Never Let Me Go*, chief among them is, perhaps simply, “Why?”—but also to an equal, but nihilistic, degree: “Why not?”

One issue that emerges for some readers is the absence of rebellion or resistance; it can become a bother or disappointment that the novel offers no proper revolutionaries from among the clones and the resistance among the general population amounts to not much more than a palliative attempt to increase the quality of clones’ lives. This resistance takes its form through the Hailsham project, which provides comfortable study in the liberal arts while the clones are young and their lives are still their own, even if that ownership is limited. Perhaps with other genre fiction³ in mind, a reader might wonder: Why doesn’t Kathy try to run away? Why doesn’t anyone offer up a proper fight; where are our heroes? Pushing it further, why doesn’t Kathy, or any other clone which Kathy knows from Hailsham, attempt or commit suicide?

There is a special quality to the novel that while not quite hope-inspiring does encourage a certain kind of holding on, sticking through and suffering the inevitable with a sturdy disposition. There’s a nobility in adhering to what one *must* do, and generating one’s own sense of value from doing it. Also, at any time, any single person might autonomously decide to end their own life, and the reasons this could happen are both endless⁴ and ultimately irrelevant. Death *will* happen, and the overwhelming majority of human lives culminate in a great deal of

³ Consider director Michael Bay’s 2005 film *The Island*, where clones of human beings discover the truth of their existence—that they were created to house backup organs—and spiritedly break out of their confines with the help of their converted oppressors.

⁴ Seneca famously provides an expansively open-ended argument for the voluntary termination of one’s own life in Letter 70, from the *Ad Lucilium Epistulae Morales*: “The wise man will live as long as he ought, not as long as he can.” For Seneca the quality of life, in his equation, is vastly more important than the quantity—obviously the “quality of life” being a matter of opinion.

nothing as far as the scope of history is concerned (for those who measure the value of a life lived by its potential to have a far-reaching effect on the greater world and remembered for as long as possible—this is not the only yardstick). Yet, every day, people choose to go on living despite their opinion on the quality of their lives, and the choice seems relevant—it seems to have greater meaning because lives are finite.

There is nothing more oppressive or uncompromising than the strictures of biology. Naturally born human beings, of course, all die—it is both completely obvious and virtually ignored in day-to-day existence. The weaving relationship between selfhood, death, and “hope” has been clearly emphasized by Ishiguro himself. “My subject matter wasn’t going to be the triumph of the human spirit. I was interested in the human capacity to accept what must seem like a limited and cruel fate,” Ishiguro stated in an interview with Michael Scott Moore and Michael Sontheimer for *Spiegel*. Ishiguro elaborates in an interview with John Freeman on *Never Let Me Go*: “What are the things you hold on to, what are the things you want to set right before you go? What do you regret? What are the consolations?” And perhaps most painfully for real-world students: “And also the question is, what is all the education and culture for if you are going to check out?” (“Never Let Me Go: A Profile of Kazuo Ishiguro” 195).

Never Let Me Go complicates this issue of “human capacity” with the idea of a select group of privileged “students,” really generated clones, growing more and more aware of the inevitability of death. Critic and essayist Louis Menand sums it up in his 2005 *New Yorker* piece “There’s Something about Kathy: Ishiguro’s Quasi-Science-Fiction Novel” by saying the clones’ “lives are short; they know that they are doomed” (78). The fates of these clone-students are “limited and cruel,” with lifespans that end in their early thirties, occasionally extending into a

third or even fourth conscious “donation” of their body’s organs⁵, with “completion” always coming after a fourth call to donate (Ishiguro 279).

Ishiguro is aiming to have the story of these clones and their “doomed” position function allegorically for the “human condition” as Ishiguro names it, and because of this allegorical structuring they can be seen to show in bold type the twin awareness and ignorance of the facts of nature, specifically death, in our own real-world human lives. As Bruce Robbins explains in “Cruelty is Bad: Banality and Proximity in Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go*,” this duality is what makes human existence bearable. “Like [Kathy] I depend for my daily dose of contentment on a blinkering of awareness that I myself in my better moments would find outrageous and repulsive” (293). Using something strange, a “clone” in this case, to examine the complex aspects of the “human condition”—the willingness to live despite this conscious awareness of “blinkering” death—complicates the question of what the “human condition” fundamentally is. This allegorical figure of a clone—an “other”—being representative of the “human condition” creates something of a paradox and evades, or even defies, comprehension. To the reader, the clone can begin to feel like the figure most imbued with humanity and most dignified in their acceptance of their own forced impermanence, while the normal humans at large demonstrate their failure to accept that they are “doomed” as well. By using an unethical medical process to try to cheat the tenets of biology and skirt the most painful aspect of the human condition—dying—the humans become arguably more inhuman than the clones.

⁵ Again, *Never Let Me Go* does not indulge a more typical “science-fiction” curiosity about the technology that allows for cloning, how these harvested organs are distributed, or whether the organs being removed are vital or non-vital. For some related scientific context please see the report “Cloning Human Beings” by the National Bioethics Advisory Commission for the U.S. President in 1997, which was commissioned following public anxieties surrounding “Dolly” the sheep, the first cloned mammal using a process called “nuclear transfer.” The report finds: “The notion of human cloning to produce individuals solely as organ donors is repugnant, almost unimaginable, and morally unacceptable.”

The clones may be allegorically figured, but the concept of a “clone” at first suggests a type of essential unity, being an ostensibly perfect and complete copy of a naturally occurring human being—think identical, monozygotic twins—but Ishiguro’s clones are separated from their human counterparts almost exclusively because of social difference from the world around them, and as a result are not considered by the world at large to be entirely “human.” This level of difference from “normal” humans is made explicit throughout the text via the presentation of the wider social perception of cloned individuals as something discomfiting, shadowy and unacknowledged. As Kathy explains, even from a young age the clone students at Hailsham “certainly knew—though not in any deep sense—that we were different from our guardians, and also from the normal people outside; we perhaps even know that a long way down the line there were donations waiting for us” (Ishiguro 69).

Yet the closeness of Kathy H.’s first-person, introspective narration leaves very little if any room for the reader to question whether Ishiguro’s clones are meaningfully distinguishable from humans as Ishiguro grants them a fully human intelligence and emotional depth. Additionally, Ishiguro does not describe any significant biological difference from a “real human” in the novel aside from the inability to sexually reproduce.⁶ Thus, *Never Let Me Go* is not a novel that is overly concerned with maintaining the line between the allegorical clone and what makes a real human experiencing a real human condition; any line of difference between the two is constantly smeared, creating a “cosy site of suspension” for the reader as well as for the clone characters in the novel (Ishiguro 143). In that closeness the reader identifying with the

⁶ Of course, a number of conditions preclude “real humans” from sexually reproducing (including prepubescence) and there is no credible scientific concern that not being able to reproduce means those people are not really human. It also highlights the closed circle of a cloned person’s possibilities—they may not, or cannot, conceive of genetic or personal continuity.

clones can be forced to stand face-to-face with the implications of their own deaths, or a possibility of not being anymore.

Ishiguro shared during an interview with Emily Mead for *Publisher's Weekly* that he chose to give the clones in the novel a truncated but mature lifespan as a way to magnify the confrontation of death and make the loss of life more potent, saying: "We all face the inevitability of our lives coming to an end, or of organs failing if not being removed. People search for something that will carry on beyond death, through art or religion or love, but everyone has that same fate to accept. My interest, in this book, was compressing that into 30-odd years of three individuals' lives" ("Future Present" 47). This "compressing" of time and the magnification of the universal inevitability of death for clones provide a way of looking at a rational awareness of one's own temporality that is specific to *Dasein*.

Heidegger's Concept of *Dasein*, or "Being-in-the-world"

What would it mean for a clone to experience a particular philosophical acceptance and rational awareness of death that is often reserved for "real" human beings? The question of the "human-ness" of clones is complicated for the social world of the novel, but not so for the reader. As detailed earlier, throughout *Never Let Me Go* Ishiguro makes it clear that clones who donate their organs are not *treated* the same as "real" humans because they were created to fill a social, biomedical need; that is the only distinction in the text that separates clones from "normal people" and the reason clones have a unique relationship with their fixed and impending deaths. This manner of being aware of one's own death was examined by the seminal German philosopher Martin Heidegger, who named this mortal awareness *Faktizität*, or "facticity;" according to *Being and Time*: "Whenever *Dasein* is, it is as a Fact; and the factuality of such a

Fact is what we shall call Dasein's *facticity* [...] The concept of 'facticity' implies that an entity 'within-the-world' has Being-in-the-world in such a way that it can understand itself as bound up in its own 'destiny' within the Being of those entities which it encounters within its own world" (56).

Before continuing to discuss the relationship between Heidegger's concept of "facticity" and Ishiguro's novel, it will be necessary to provide a foundation for bringing the concept of *Dasein* into play when thinking about the "meaning" of *Never Let Me Go*. What might be commonly considered as the idea of the "self" is reproducible by Heidegger's concept of *Dasein*, defined as the state of "being:" "*Dasein* is an entity which does not just occur among other entities. Rather it is ontologically distinguished by the fact that, in its very Being, that Being is an issue for it" (32).

Frankly, Heidegger's philosophical writing has a reputation for being almost mystical in its density; to compound the difficulty English-speaking readers are relegated to reading through translation. Simply stated, *Dasein* refers to a "being there," to existence—we as humans do not possess *Dasein* but are in *Dasein*, and we each are *Dasein* because each of us has a way to exist in time with a relation to that time in a way that is not impoverished. Heidegger's term is helpful here because it allows for a way to render an understanding of the "human condition" as it is illustrated in *Never Let Me Go* that is more specific than something like "subject" or "rational animal," and possesses ample room to include both "normal" humans and the human clones in the novel in a shared designation. For Heidegger, the "human condition" is distinct among life forms in that humans find themselves placed in environments filled with particular objects and

tools, wrapped up in the course of particular goals and schemes, both of which culminate in and emerge from the situational total of those tools, goals, and schemes.

As discussed earlier, the clones in *Never Let Me Go* are relegated to an “other-than-human” classification by their larger society because they perform an instrumental function in the larger socio-political structure of Ishiguro’s biotechnologically distinct, parallel version of contemporary England. However, their ability to illustrate for the reader a deep and magnified sense of the human condition because of that limitation on their realities as clones assigns them too a *Dasein*; they might not be human “socially” but the clones definitely are not in an Object category as Objects (in Heidegger’s formulation in *Being and Time*) cannot relate themselves to Being—Kathy and the other clones are *not* like plates, for example, as a plate can never “comport itself towards its Being as its own most possibility” (68).

According to Heidegger, while human beings have the ability to experience their own finite nature, other entities have an impairment; animals may have a sense of their mortality and their dying but the understanding is presumed to be lesser. In Heidegger’s ontology, animals exist in an impoverished state because animals cannot transcend their immediate needs. In Heidegger’s lecture course *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, he argues anthropocentrically and hierarchically that *Dasein* is *weltbildend*, or “world forming” while objects are “worldless” or *weltlos* and animals are *weltarm*, or “poor in the world” (184).

Even though socially clones exist to perform a function and are denied the same status as “normal” human beings, the clones are still not reasonably viewed as “object” or “animal.” Daniel Vorhaus notes in his review of the novel for *The American Journal of Bioethics* that by the time the novel becomes direct with the reader on the status of the characters as clones, it’s

“too late” to formulate reasons why they cannot be considered human beings: “[Ishiguro’s] clones have already established themselves as ordinary people. They laugh, cry, squabble, reconcile, grow older and, ultimately, they fall in love. While Ishiguro’s tale has an unmistakable air of science fiction to it, it is difficult for the reader to view its protagonists as anything other than remarkably normal” (99). For the reader, this “remarkable” normality in combination with the fact that the clones know that they will not live past their thirties further orients the clones away from the category of “animal” which would experience the world in a state of “poverty,” or “poor in the world.”

The clones *know* their deaths, and knowing death is a possibility is a “second-order” level of conscious presence, following Charles Peirce’s categories of firstness, secondness, and thirdness where secondness is the first level where humans register, because reason first appears in that second category level (*Peirce on Signs* 180-203). This second-order tier of consciousness as human-exclusive would mean that “being-there,” or *Dasein*, is human-exclusive as well. In *Never Let Me Go*, clones are marked as “other-than-human” socially but are specifically seen breaking the membrane of this particular exclusivity, and one way that Ishiguro accomplishes this is through the relationship between the narrator Kathy H. and the reader.

Never Let Me Go could be described as a first-person memory novel, with Kathy H. remembering and narrating her lived experiences as a clone who is preparing to begin donating her organs as she recalls them, which creates by the fact of its difference from the “normal” human experience the allegorical device—the allegory of a group of human beings, albeit created with an ethically uncomfortable mortal fate, who do *not* resist their inevitable and abjectly cruel destinies. This abhorrence or irritation for the reader comes as a reaction to the

characters' seeming resignation to their prescribed purpose, that they do what they are meant to do and "complete" as the novel delicately calls it when clones die from the process of donating, without fighting in an instantly or typically recognizable way. James Butcher writes in *Lancet*: "Perhaps the most disturbing aspect of the book is the stoicism with which the clones face their fate" ("A Wonderful Donation" 1299). He elaborates by saying that the clones are "brainwashed into believing that donation is the only option for them. None of them seeks to escape or avoid their fate [...] But that is not to say that they are mindless automatons. On the contrary, these are people who are every bit as human as the members of the society who created them." Ultimately, Butcher is indicating that there is something about the "human condition" as Ishiguro presents it that makes such a rebellion less than possible, and that being a fully human being does not preclude accepting a cruel fate. In fact, being fully human makes that acceptance possible.

"Told and not told"

In order to reach an understanding of how rebellion can become impossible, it is important to consider the environments, structures, and experiences of the characters in the novel. *Never Let Me Go*'s Hailsham is a special liberal arts-focused boarding school for clones who are privileged enough to take place in its exclusive program—Kathy H. explains in the course of the novel that other young clones did not experience the same luxury environment, and according to Miss Emily and Marie-Claude at the novel's crestfallen "climax" the poor treatment⁷ of cloned children in part generated their interest in the Hailsham initiative (Ishiguro 260-63).

⁷ At times it seems the issue of how clones in the novel are treated as children in the world outside of the Hailsham program is more horrifying and unspeakable than the fact that they grow to adulthood and begin donating. The subject is handled with the attitude that it's simply too grisly to detail, which in turn highlights the insulated and overprotective Hailsham environment.

Ishiguro shows this exclusivity of experience through one-sided comparison. As a “carer,” a clone who spends a part of their early adulthood as a type of nurse and companion for clones who are in the process of donating, Kathy is sometimes asked by clones who grew up in other places to recount her experiences for them:

There have been times over the years when I’ve tried to leave Hailsham behind, when I’ve told myself I shouldn’t look back so much. But then there came a point when I just stopped resisting. It had to do with this particular donor I had once, in my third year as a carer; it was his reaction when I mentioned I was from Hailsham. He’d just come through his third donation, it hadn’t gone well, and he must have known he wasn’t going to make it. He could hardly breathe, but he looked towards me and said: “Hailsham. I bet that was a beautiful place.” Then the next morning, when I was making conversation to keep his mind off it all, and I asked where *he’d* grown up, he mentioned some place in Dorset and his face beneath the blotches went into a completely new kind of grimace. And I realized then how desperately he didn’t want reminded. Instead, he wanted to hear about Hailsham. (Ishiguro 5)

This is the way that Ishiguro, through Kathy H., introduces Hailsham to the reader complete with its guardians, student collection boxes, and the Art Room—a picture is painted of an overall appealing, idyllic, and progressive place to grow with guidance into a fully developed individual. Yet one recurrent aspect of the students’ experience at Hailsham is a conflict among the guardians over how direct to be with the students about their role in society as clones, that they will, without any deviation, grow to become donors and “complete” around the age of thirty. The issue is that Hailsham’s students are “told and not told” (Ishiguro 81-8) that they are clones;

part of the Hailsham project's mission it to create a childhood and adolescence for clones that prioritizes the project leaders' humanistic values, and their humanistic values do not provide a clear guide when it comes to how to present the realities of the students' future.

In Chapter Seven of the novel, Kathy recounts a day that occurred when she and her fellow Hailsham students are about fifteen and preparing to leave the school as young adults. The guardian Miss Lucy overhears two boys discussing what it would "feel like if [they] became actors. What sort of life it would be." Miss Lucy becomes visibly distressed by their fantasizing and chooses in the moment to directly and plainly address all the students present: "I know you don't mean any harm. But there's just too much talk like this. I hear it all the time, it's been allowed to go on, and it's not right." She continues her address:

"If no one else will talk to you," she continued, "then I will. The problem, as I see it, is that you've been told and not told. You've been told, but none of you really understand, and I dare say, some people are quite happy to leave it that way. But I'm not. If you're going to have decent lives, then you've got to know and know properly. None of you will go to America, none of you will be film stars. And none of you will be working in supermarkets as I heard some of you planning the other day. Your lives are set out for you. You'll become adults, then before you're old, before you're even middle-aged, you'll start to donate your vital organs. That's what each of you was created to do. You're not like the actors you watch on your videos, you're not even like me. You were brought into this world for a purpose, and your futures, all of them, have been decided. So you're not going to talk that way any more. You'll be leaving Hailsham before long, preparing

for your first donations. You need to remember that. If you're to have decent lives, you have to know who you are and what lies ahead of you, every one of you." (Ishiguro 81)

Returning to Heidegger, Miss Lucy's agitation over the issue of students being "told and not told" illustrates this underlying theme of the immediate experience of facticity in the novel; the students have this experience concretely when Miss Lucy performs this small revolt against a lived experience that she feels instills a false and improper sense of hopefulness and, at a more basic level, of normality in the students. Miss Lucy leaves nothing unclear: "Before you're old, before you're even middle-aged, you'll start to donate your vital organs." This claim starkly contrasts to the vagueness of the "unsaid," that the students are aware of fact of donating but are not pressed to confront it; it is a reality that in its apparent inevitability curtails other possibilities.

Earlier in their youth, Miss Lucy struggles with restricting herself from speaking plainly to a young Tommy about his ultimate fate as a donor, which he recounts to Kathy:

"There's something else," he went on. "Something else she said that I can't quite figure out. I was going to ask you about it. She said we weren't being taught enough, something like that.

"Taught enough? You mean she thinks we should be studying even harder than we are?"

No, I don't think she meant that. What she was talking about was, you know, about *us*. What's going to happen to us one day. Donations and all that."

"But we *have* been taught all about that," I said. "I wonder what she meant. Does she think there are things we haven't been told yet?" (Ishiguro 29)

Since the students are being “told and not told,” the students are not learning something radically new from Miss Lucy’s protesting outburst—they know about “donations and all that” in a way that makes the subject banal. In fact, the subject, the “all that,” is *so* banal and hazy that it becomes dispassionate and can be framed as remote. In his profile on Ishiguro for *The Guardian Saturday Pages*, Nicholas Wroe quotes Ishiguro’s explanation of the secretive quality of their not-secret reality: “If information does trickle gradually it’s because the children themselves do not realise who they are. The reader is on a sort of parallel journey” (“Living Memories” 20). Leona Toker and Daniel Chertoff make the argument in their essay “Reader Response and the Recycling of Topoi in Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go*” that the novel “subtly explores the educational techniques that have conditioned [the clones] to accept their predicament. These techniques are, to some extent, re-enacted by the narrative structure which affects the reader in parallel to the intellectual development of the characters” (166). Toker and Chertoff then conclude that this parallelism is “as if they have known this crucial fact all along but without knowing that they knew” (167), as the reader is brought along on the voyage from knowing to knowing about knowing as Kathy recounts her experiences and her relationship to her own situation—from the opening of the novel we know plainly that Kathy is a carer for donors who give their organs before dying, and that she will do this too, but it takes the entire course of *Never Let Me Go* for the reader to confront the inevitable and feel the full gravity of Kathy H.’s ultimate situation.

The consequences of being “told and not told” are an example of the softly cruel components of an education at Hailsham—as quoted earlier, Ishiguro is asking: “What is all the education and culture for if you are going to check out?” This question is obviously magnified

when it concerns a “Being” made exclusively for a terminal service. The novel does not give more than small, grimaced glimpses at the young lives of clones who did not get to go to Hailsham, but Hailsham can be said to provide a more humane and more humanistic intellectual environment with an attitude towards individual flourishing, a specific tool that at least aims to support the cultivation of *Dasein*⁸, but in its special care and consideration it creates what amounts to a disingenuous separation of the children and the reality of their inalterable position—a porous barrier to the facticity of death that Miss Lucy seems to believe is unethical.

In being “told and not told,” in being given only enough information about the fact of their reality as socially mandated organ donors to make it commonplace and unexamined, there is no “hole” in the Hailsham system’s construction to escape from and launch some kind of rebellion—returning to Toker and Chertoff, there are “educational techniques that have conditioned [the clones] to accept their predicament” (166). The intentional haziness of it can only annoy. When Kathy’s friend and fellow Hailsham student Ruth implies that favorite guardian Miss Geraldine gave Ruth a special pencil case as a secret present, Kathy says: “Still, I hated it when Ruth hinted in this way. I was never sure, of course, if she was telling the truth, but since she wasn’t actually ‘telling it’, only hinting, it was never possible to challenge her” (Ishiguro 57). This passage replicates in small specificity the larger issue of the guardians at Hailsham blurring with niceties the reality of the clones’ duty to let go of their vital organs and die, restricting the students’ ability to challenge it.

⁸ This can only be speculated so far. Through Kathy’s narration the reader encounters clones who are not Hailsham students, in particular Rodney and Chrissie. Both appear to be as capable of “Being-in-the-world” as Kathy, even if they (and Hailsham student Ruth as well) occasionally appear “inauthentic” in a Heideggerian sense. In my view, attending liberal arts school isn’t a necessary factor of *Dasein*.

These unique experiences around the awareness of death and its facticity “hint” in their way at the students’ reality without offering a concrete sense what it will really be to have to walk towards their own deaths. This moment of being explicitly “told” by Miss Lucy is something of a point of no return—pretending for a moment that *Never Let Me Go* is a novel about average, “normal” people growing up and reaching adulthood, this is where to pin the place where a loss of innocence occurs, where children are forced to transition into something else, into something likely disillusioned, rebellious, or ambivalent. The novel, however, is about people with a specific socially imposed designation, and the society Ishiguro shows in *Never Let Me Go* establishes limits on that transition.

“Being the spiders”—Fear and Loathing

There are earlier situations in the novel during Kathy’s childhood that illustrate the awareness of the facticity of their reality as clones with a designated purpose, far before Miss Lucy breaches the line between the children’s state of being “told and not told” which forces the students to confront directly their status as socially distinct from “normal” humans. There is a painful moment of awareness that arises from a childhood experiment to surprise “Madame,” later identified as Marie-Claude, a Hailsham founder and mysterious, remote and avoidant figure of authority who doesn’t seem to like to come to make the rounds. At Hailsham, the students are tasked with making artworks and some are chosen by Madame for her “Gallery,” as the children come to call it. The clone children wonder if Madame’s emotional and physical distance from them could be due to a fear or revulsion that she has of them, and Kathy, Ruth, and others make a childish game-like test of their hypothesis. When the children know Madame is due to visit

Hailsham, they arrange to emerge from behind a corner en masse and observe her reaction, and Kathy recounts:

I'll never forget the strange change that came over us the next instant. Until that point, this whole thing about Madame had been, if not a joke exactly, very much a private thing we'd wanted to settle among ourselves. We hadn't thought much about how Madame herself, or anyone else, would come to it. What I mean is, until then, it had been a pretty light-hearted matter, with a bit of a dare element to it. And it wasn't even as though Madame did anything other than what we predicted she'd do: she just froze and waited for us to pass by. She didn't shriek, or even let out a gasp. But we were all so keenly tuned in to picking up her response, and that's probably why it had such an effect on us. As she came to a halt, I glanced quickly at her face—as did the others, I'm sure. And I can still see it now, the shudder she seemed to be suppressing, the real dread that one of us would accidentally brush against her. And though we just kept on walking, we all felt it; it was like we'd walked from the sun right into the chilly shade. Ruth had been right: Madame *was* afraid of us. But she was afraid of us in the same way someone might be afraid of spiders. We hadn't been ready for that. It had never occurred to us to wonder how we would feel, being seen like that, being the spiders. (Ishiguro 35)

In one sense, this scene is the first where Kathy and her fellow students are forced to see themselves as inarguably different from the larger group of human beings: the children were forced to experience how it feels “being seen like that” which leads Kathy to double and internalize this assessment of her “being,” of “being the spiders.” *Because* Madame has seen

them, they *are* as spiders. Still, the event is not a true revelation for Kathy—it began as a test of a theory of something that Kathy both knows and doesn't know:

All the same, some of it must go somewhere. It must go in, because by the time a moment like that comes along, there's a part of you that's been waiting. Maybe from as early as when you're five or six, there's been a whisper going on at the back of your head, saying: "One day, maybe not so long from now, you'll get to know how it feels." So you're waiting, even if you don't quite know it, waiting for the moment when you realize that you are really different to them; that there are people out there, like Madame, who shudder at the very thought of you—of how you were brought into this world and why—and who dread the idea of your hand brushing against theirs. The first time you glimpse yourself through the eyes of a person like that, it's a cold moment. It's like walking past a mirror you've walked past every day of your life, and suddenly it shows you something else, something troubling and strange. (Ishiguro 36)

The confrontation with Madame in the corridor is the first time Kathy sees herself through the specific gaze of someone who is affected by her being there, who seems afraid of her for what she is, which transforms her own sense of self-perception into "something troubling and strange." That ungraspable whisper of truth becomes a cold and shocking touch. Bringing even painful truths to light by proving them can generate a masochistic pleasure and be liberating or exhilarating, but for the students the revelation of this proof of their position in the larger world results in an awareness of their difference that they do not welcome and can not easily evade. The students' unwillingness to truly accept or discover the reality of their creation and purpose, the way this makes them "different" to those who know what they are, and the way that

difference makes normal humans feel “afraid” necessitates a novel’s worth of narrative to travel to the final weighty truth of death and Kathy’s ultimate acceptance of that fact.

Following Heidegger in *Being and Time*, in order to feel fear, or *das Furchtbare*, it is necessary to have difference and for the “something” feared to have the dual qualities of *geheuer*⁹ and proximity. If something is too distant, there is no reasonable cause to fear it or to feel any potent emotion about it. When something becomes too close, it is reasonable to feel it may make undesirable contact: “it can reach us, and yet it may not” (180.) Simon Critchley writes in a series on Heidegger for *The Guardian* with the conveniently shared example of spiders: “[Heidegger’s] claim is that fear is always fear of something threatening, some particular thing in the world. Let’s say that I am fearful of spiders. Fear has an object and when that object is removed, I am no longer fearful. I see a spider in the bath and I am suddenly frightened. My non-spider fearing friend removes the offending arachnid, I am no longer fearful” (“*Being and Time*, Part 5: Anxiety”).

Of course, the children are not directly analogous to spiders; they are in every physical way indistinguishable from normal human beings. A “normal” person, as the novel shows, has to know that a clone is a clone beforehand to be able to feel anxious about being in proximity with one. Later in Chapter Fourteen when Kathy and the other clones are young adults they take a trip to Norfolk, and while there they find themselves at an art gallery. The woman there, seeing a group of normal-looking young people around college-age, logically assumes that they are “art students”—which, really, they *are*, since that is what they’ve been up to at Hailsham. Tommy answers, “Not exactly [...] We’re just, well, keen,” which causes the woman to “beam” at them

⁹ In searching for a suitable word for *geheuer* in English, Google Translate offered “the creeps,” which does a surprisingly serviceable job of conveying the specific emotion.

(Ishiguro 163). This moment is the inverse of the episode with Madame in the corridor after the children test her affectedness—this silver-haired woman sees them as art students, and the group collectively takes comfort in that “cosy state of suspension” of being seen absent of their biosocial difference. However, it is an instant of temporary reprieve from an otherwise stressful experience; after leaving the gallery Rodney at the front of their pack is “theatrically stretching out his arms, like he was exhilarated” (164) and trying to disguise the tension that resulted from the reason of going to the gallery in the first place—to administer another test, this time of Ruth’s “possible.”

In the world of *Never Let Me Go*, a “possible” is a potential genetic source for organ donating clones first introduced in Chapter Twelve, or as Kathy explains, “the people who might have been the models” (Ishiguro 139). There may not be possibles at all, or they may be cloned from “the gutter,” from prostitutes and drug addicts (166). The motivation for discovering “possibles” is complicated and individual to each clone, but the idea is that “all [the young clones], to varying degrees, believed that when you saw the person you were copied from, you’d get *some* insight into who you were deep down, and maybe too, you’d see something of what your life held in store” (140). This description makes it clear that the “possible” is also a symbol of a possible divergence from the course of student-carer-donor that each clone is relegated to, even if the possible alternative is singular and banal, like Ruth’s fantasy of possibly working in an office. Ruth is egged on by the other clones at the Cottages to head into Norfolk and take a look at her office-working “possible” in person, and after watching her through the windows of her office building the group follows the woman “like a gang of muggers” (161) around Norfolk

and enters the art gallery behind her. While the woman from the office talks the the silver-haired lady from the gallery, Kathy and the others observe Ruth's "possible":

And as we kept listening to them, stealing the odd glance in their direction, bit by bit, but something started to change [...] If we'd left it at seeing the woman through the glass of her office, even if we'd followed her through the town and lost her, we could still have gone back to the Cottages excited and triumphant. But now, in that gallery, the woman was too close, much closer than we'd ever really wanted. And the more we heard her and looked at her, the less she seemed like Ruth. (Ishiguro 163)

A variation on the theme, the same feeling of unease at the extreme proximity of this "possible" affects Kathy and her group as it did for Madame when she got "the creeps" from being around the clones when they tested her as children. Here, even though Ruth's "possible" never pays attention to or addresses the group from the Cottages the group discovers that she is *not* Ruth, and they've gotten far "too close" to this symbol of alternatives and of normality to play pretend any further. Because Ruth's "possible" is *not* an original of Ruth and is instead different in *both* physical presence and social designation, the experience itself generates an internal sensation of unease and uncomfortableness for the students about themselves and their lack of possibilities. For the clones, there is something "other" about "normal" humans that inspires dread, for the same reason of socially designated difference.

The contemporary term for this specific feeling of fear at the most minute of unsettling differences is the one used for the concept of an "uncanny valley," coined by Masahiro Mori¹⁰ in his 1970 essay "The Uncanny Valley," first published in *Energy* (33-5). The term is used to

¹⁰ Mori's "The Uncanny Valley" was printed in *Energy* in translation by Karl MacDorman and Takashi Minato.

describe the feeling of unease and disquieting wrongness that comes from observing the minimal differences of high-quality, nearly indistinguishable artificiality that many people experience when looking at realistic CGI representations of humans, hyper-realistic sex dolls, technically advanced animatronic human-mimicking robots, and so on. People do not feel this aversion to robots that *look* like machines¹¹ or to toasters, even when the toaster has the ability to speak and demonstrate manners. In *Never Let Me Go*, a variation of the experience of the “uncanny valley” is created not from visual distinction but from when the social difference is known to the either the clone or to the “normal” human and that knowledge leads to fear and loathing, as Madame experiences in the corridor. These children will *touch* Madame; they are far too close in every way.

Madame’s exhibition of fear is a result of her getting “the creeps” from the children because they propel her perception of them into the “uncanny valley,” but unlike a spider they can not be easily removed by a brave friend—these “aberrations” are irremovable from the biomedical situation in Madame’s world. To further outline this thesis’s particular sense of the formulation of the uncanny, consider Sigmund Freud’s 1919 essay “The Uncanny.” Freud begins by explaining that the “uncanny,” or *das unheimlich*, “is undoubtedly related to what is frightening—to what arouses dread and horror” (339). There, Freud looks at E. T. A. Hoffmann’s short story “The Sandman,” which in brief is about a student who falls in love with Olympia, his professor’s daughter—Olympia ultimately is revealed to be an automaton. Freud cites the position of German psychologist Ernst Jentsch’s essay “On the Psychology of the Uncanny,” in

¹¹ After writing this section, I encountered a floor-cleaning Roomba-type robot in a grocery store that was about a foot taller than me at 5’5”, in the form of a floating black obelisk with accent LEDs. I’m unable to say that this completely non-human robot didn’t give me pause and make me feel like leaving its area as fast as possible.

which Jentsch argues that what makes Hoffmann's story "uncanny" is that the reader is left in a state of suspense, not knowing for sure whether Olympia is a "human" or not. On "The Sandman," Freud writes: "The main theme of the story is, on the contrary, something different [than Olympia's humanity], something which gives it its name, and which is always re-introduced at critical moments: it is the 'Sand Man' who tears out children's eyes" (348) and these harvested eyes are used to feed his charges, who have inhuman features.

There is a similarity that is uncanny in Hoffmann's story—the parts of one set of children are being taken away to feed another set of children—and this uncanny reversal is also a part of the premise of *Never Let Me Go*, that organs from one group of human beings designated for the role are taken and given to another group of human beings in a perversion of the natural cycle of life. In "The Sandman," the Sandman's children are uncanny, and in Ishiguro's novel the "normal" humans, the category "we" would fall into, are uncanny as well—the society of "normal" humans have to relocate their own uncanniness onto clones, which they socially relegate to a distant "other-than-human" position in order to justify the practice of organ harvesting from living bodies with complete consciousnesses. Freud, in a similar way to Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*, departs from Jentsch and lands on an understanding of the "uncanny" as coming from the themes of the larger story itself rather than the direct question of the personhood or human-ness of the clone characters. For Ishiguro's novel, the fact and theme of the removal of organs is the site of the "uncanny" that is closer to Mori's term for measuring minute but not dismissible difference and an important factor in Madame's reactive, affective feeling of fear and anxiety towards the children at Hailsham. The organs will be taken, without a need for coercion, from these clones and given to normal humans in an unnatural but beneficial

perversion of that normal human's biological lifespan—this practice is the more potent source of the novel's particular type of uncanniness and the real issue of discomfort among normal humans towards the clone class. For Kathy, all of these direct confrontations with what is “known but not known,” “told and not told” at Hailsham—that the students are different, that they will die, that they will die for others in an ethically distasteful medical system, is a whisper that grows, then wanes, to a swallowed scream.

Hailsham students and all clones in Ishiguro's novel must “complete,” the novel's term for referring to the mandatory period of organ donation that connotes a satisfying success. This “completing” means that each clone will be called on to begin donating their body parts, with some well-performing donors surviving through second and third rounds. No clone survives past their fourth donation, at which time they “complete” by dying and having the remainder of their bodies harvested. The novel is markedly not interested in sensationalizing the physical method of organ harvesting and avoids completely reveling in gore or shock value to convey the horror of the practice. Instead, the novel's most disturbing description comes from Hailsham alumnus Tommy speculating on what his own fourth donation might be like with Kathy in the final chapter, who at this point in the narrative is his assigned “carer” and his romantic partner: “You know why it is, Kath, why everyone worries so much about the fourth? It's because they're not sure they'll really complete. If you knew for certain you'd complete, it would be easier. But they never tell us for sure.” Defaulting to the Hailsham-conditioned muscle memory of turning away from the facticity of dying and the uncanny, unfathomable anguish of “completing” in this way and into the comfort of being “told and not told,” Kathy, “who had been wondering for a while if

this would come up” answers with “It’s just a lot of rubbish, Tommy. Just talk, wild talk. It’s not even worth thinking about” (Ishiguro 279).

The thought of a Being being denied their death, suspended on the operating table, having the remaining pieces pulled from it with no ability to will it to stop—and all after having already made piecemeal of the living body—is truly horrifying to imagine and a highly magnified analogue for the facticity of each death each Being must confront. It is unlikely that the average person will see their lives end in literally this gruesome a way, but Ishiguro is magnifying the normal deterioration of the body in hyper-speed first by giving the clones a lifespan that ends around thirty, and then by having their last phase be the rapid sequential breakdown of physical function that all human beings experience regardless of their efforts to stay fit and physiologically sound. Normal humans may not be dissected while alive the way the clones in the novel are, but time makes piecemeal of every body in its own manner.

Again, these organ donations are done to clones without any need for or use of force. Kathy, Ruth, and Tommy are each unique individuals, illustrative of different human qualities and able to make unique choices and yet none choose or are compelled to mount a resistance—this is what they are supposed to do, and that is accepted. Corporally being torn apart is the ultimate reward for a life of *supposed to*, of caring for others and donating to others; as Kathy explains: “A donor ‘on a fourth,’ even one who’s been pretty unpopular up till then, is created with special respect. Even the doctors and nurses play up to this; a donor on a fourth will go in for a check and be greeted by whitecoats smiling and shaking their hand” (Ishiguro 278). It may be a bit itchy for the reader to think that the clones come to believe as a result of their lived experiences that they *should* all “stoically” approach *this* fate, which Bruce Robbins

characterizes as a “moral obscenity” (291), without attempting to escape through revolt or through, perhaps less satisfyingly, suicide.

Testing, or What We are Supposed to Do

Throughout Kathy’s narrative a love triangle develops between her, Tommy, and Ruth—all Hailsham students who grow up together at the school, transfer to the Cottages together before advancing to caring for donors and then donating as adults. Throughout this time, all three are close, and as is true for all love triangles burdened with petty insults and the mishandling of feelings; again, Ishiguro’s approach to a story about cloning and organ donation focuses largely on the banalities of common life experiences—Robbins sees this banality as a consequence of the novel’s “welfare state” and class system, but the immediate effect of these passages for the reader is the removal of what Robbins calls the “blinkering of awareness” that human beings use to stave off an arresting sense of existential dread. They are at first all childhood classmates, then Ruth and Tommy become a sexual, romantic couple for a time, and then Kathy and Tommy become a sexual, romantic couple only after Kathy becomes Tommy’s official carer. The relationship is a result of their following Ruth’s encouragement after Ruth nears her own completion and shares her imaginative fantasy that Kathy and Tommy were supposed to have been together all along.

Ruth’s plea for Kathy and Tommy to love each other in that way that comes from a belief in a rumor that true love between Hailsham students can award them a chance at deferment, a rumor they discover during their time at the Cottages with students who grew up in other environments who believe that Hailsham students are special and have more possibilities available to them. This is why Rodney and Chrissie take Ruth to test her “possible,” as

discussed earlier. The outing to Norfolk is more than a test of Ruth's "possible;" it is really a test of Hailsham students and their access to the possibility of special rules. The myth of special rules for Hailsham students extends to whispers that there are ways to prove that two students from Hailsham are really, truly in love and that this proof will grant them a temporary reprieve from being called to donate their organs and complete in their thirties. Chrissie, another clone Kathy meets at the Cottages, describes this belief:

"We heard [...] something about Hailsham students. What they were saying was that some Hailsham students in the past, in special circumstances, had managed to get a deferral. That this was something you could do if you were a Hailsham student. You could ask for your donations to be put back by three, even four years. It wasn't easy, but just sometimes they'd let you do it. So long as you could convince them. So long as you *qualified*."

"What they said," Chrissie continued, "was that if you were a boy and a girl, and you were in love with each other, really, properly in love, and if you could show it, then the people who run Hailsham, they sorted it out for you. They sorted it out so you could have a few years together before you began your donations." (Ishiguro 153-54)

This fairy tale that the clones generate is reinforced by Madame's practice of selecting choice art from Hailsham students for her Gallery, which the children come to believe is done as a way for

Madame and the guardians to measure the qualities, or the presence, of the students' inner beings, their souls¹².

The ultimate direct confrontation Kathy has with the reality of her Being as something viewed as “other-than-human” by the “normal” humans who will have to adhere to her predetermined purpose comes when she and Tommy both try their hand at being exceptional; they follow Ruth’s wish for them to try for a deferral. This mission in many ways resembles the game/test the children made of coming around the corner to surprise Madame and force her unfiltered reaction—here, Tommy and Kathy surprise Madame at her home without an invitation to try and submit their interior worth and love for each other and to ask for more time to live. Kathy and Tommy trail Madame like long shadows while she is out in her neighborhood, then (courteously) ambush her in her doorway. Kathy’s “Excuse me” causes Madame to, according to Kathy, “spin around like I’d thrown something at her.” Madame’s affected in the same way she was in Kathy’s Hailsham days:

And as her gaze fell on us, a chill passed through me, much like the one I’d felt years ago that time we’d waylaid her outside the main house. Her eyes were as cold, and her face maybe even more severe than I remembered. I don’t know if she recognized us at that point; but without doubt, she saw and decided in a second what we were, because you

¹² The issue of having a “soul” has undeniable religious implications that, while unendingly interesting, do exceed the scope of this thesis. There is no overt mention of the religious or a religious institution in the text, but critics including Tiffany Tsao argue cogently that *Never Let Me Go* has a “deeply theological” nature with a lot “to say about religious life and biotechnological creation,” specifically concerning “religion’s ability to provide its adherents with a sense of purpose” (from the abstract for Tsao’s essay “The Tyranny of Purpose: Religion and Biotechnology in Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go*.” *Literature & Theology* vol. 26, no. 2, June 2012, pp. 214-32, doi:10.1093/litthe/frs001. A testing or weighing of one’s soul at the end of their life is a theme present in the larger part of known religions as well.

could see her stiffen—as if a pair of large spiders was set to crawl in the setting sun.

(Ishiguro 248)

Tommy and Kathy explain that they've come to prove that they are truly in love, and Tommy brings his mechanical animal drawings, a late proof of his "soul" that he feels will earn him entry into the Gallery at last and qualify him as a Being in *Dasein*. Of course, there is no test of true love and no way to defer—Robbins rightly observes that the true "proof" of the children's creativity is not their art projects but the fact that they create myths and rumors about the system they inhabit and the world around them: "The irony, exquisitely compressed into this theology of provisional salvation, is that the school fails to recognize the children's genuine creativity, which expresses itself not in the artwork but rather in this myth-making *about* the artwork and its ability to transform their lives" ("Cruelty is Bad" 294). The time of not knowing is decidedly ended, and the blinders have to come off. These revelations of the students' belief in the test of their souls and their clinging to impossible rumors manifest for Madame Marie-Claude, a founder of Hailsham, as remorse: "Poor creatures. What did we do to you? With all our schemes and plans?" (Ishiguro 248).

When former Hailsham guardian Miss Emily joins in their discussion, the reception is more amiable and she is more enthusiastic to see Hailsham students in adulthood. "I think what we achieved merits some respect. Look at the two of you. You've turned out well. I'm sure you have much to tell me to make me proud" (Ishiguro 256). Miss Emily knows about the rumor among clones that deferment is possible, and so does Marie-Claude, who finds it "foolish" and virtually impossible to "stamp it out." The rumor regrettably was "never true," but after being pressed Miss Emily explains that the students were partially right about the purpose of their art

and the Gallery, and she and Marie-Claude try to explain why the Hailsham project did what it did for, or *to*, the students. The student artwork was the way to reveal “what they were like” inside, that they had souls “at all,” or in another way of putting it, that each student was in *Dasein* too.

This open admission that the students *did* have to prove that they had “souls” is startling to Kathy and Tommy, with Kathy asking: “Why did you have to prove a thing like that, Miss Emily? Did someone think we didn’t have souls?” For Miss Emily, Kathy’s feeling that it is a given that she and the other students have souls and share the status of Beings is proof positive of a job well done for the Hailsham project—Hailsham intended to hold back the torrential wash of facticity and of reality from the students there, yet ultimately they could not stop the inevitable. On preventing children from becoming inundated with the cruelties of being alive, Ishiguro shares in an interview with Tim Adams for *The Observer*: “When you become a parent, or a teacher, you turn into a manager of this whole system. You become the person controlling the bubble of innocence around a child, regulating it. All children have to be deceived if they are to grow up without trauma” (“For Me, England is a Mythical Place” 17). Death and the facticity of dying is a trauma that no one can be sheltered from forever.

In director Mamoru Oshii’s 1995 film adaptation of Masamune Shirow’s manga series *Ghost in the Shell*, Major Motoko Kusanagi, a human being with a completely cybernetic body, tells her relatively more human partner Batou in angst: “But that’s just it, that’s the only thing that makes me feel human. The way I’m treated.” This same idea applies to the clone students at Hailsham as well—they feel they *are* human, that they have souls, because that is how they are treated at Hailsham. They are treated normally when the silver-haired woman takes them for art

students, and in that moment they remember being treated like humans at Hailsham by the majority of the guardians and accept the comfort of wearing blinkers after the anxious awareness of difference they experience when Ruth's "possible" is proven to be false. It takes the clones testing their environment and the authority figures that inhabit it to see behind the treatment they receive as children to the truth of their position in society, that they are considered things "less than human" by "normal" humans to justify the perverse but indispensable practice of organ harvesting.

The students, as Miss Emily sees it, should be content with their curated experiences and the way they've been treated: "You've had good lives, you're educated and cultured," she tells the empty-handed Kathy and Tommy. Importantly, Hailsham has not blessed them with an indisputable humanity, it only made it possible for clones to "grow to be as sensitive and intelligent as any ordinary human being"—to feel like a human being for a time—where before they were perceived socially as "shadowy objects in test tubes" (Ishiguro 261), an equation that ultimately reinforces their perceived difference. By the time society began to ask whether cloning and organ harvesting were ethically or morally permissible, the benefits of that scientific advancement were too hard to let go of, and the uncanny quality of the process of taking organs from clones forced a perception of clones as distinctly "less than human" (263) that is ideologically necessary if the biomedical practice is to continue.

The Gallery of student artwork is the core of the test Hailsham's founders are playing at, a reversal of the students' childhood game-like provocation of Madame that seeks to prove whether clones possess a soul—a way of distinguishing a fundamental quality of humanity that assigns the students *Dasein*. However, the Hailsham experiment is irrevocably flawed from its

inception. Combining the students' art and experiences to prove they are each in *Dasein* ultimately, if successful, delegitimizes the entire practice of cloning and organ harvesting altogether—the beneficial biological advancement becomes much more clearly undeniably “repugnant, almost unimaginable, and morally unacceptable” (National Bioethics Advisory Commission, “Cloning Human Beings” 30). But who among those assigned souls by accident of being naturally born would want to give up such a monumental biomedical achievement, particularly after the fact? Miss Emily asks Kathy: “How can you ask a world that has come to regard cancer as curable, how can you ask such a world to put away that cure, to go back to the dark days¹³?” (Ishiguro 263). This test is by its well-meaning but flawed design impossible to pass.

Death and The Law of Un-equivalent Exchange

As Marie-Claude explains, the biotechnological advancements in the novel's version of England make it possible for the practice of cloning to solve sundry medical issues and extend the human lifespan beyond its current limitations, but clones do not die *instead* of their counterparts in a one-to-one exchange—mortality is a reality for everyone. Death remains an incontrovertible force. As Jaques Derrida explains in *The Gift of Death*:

If something radically impossible is to be conceived of—and everything derives its sense from this impossibility—it is indeed dying for the other in the sense of dying in the place of the other. I can give the other everything except immortality, except this dying for her to the extent of dying in the place of her and so freeing her from her own death. I can die

¹³ This recalls Kathy's experience with testing Madame's fear of her in her youth, as Kathy remarks that “it was like we'd walked from the sun right into the chilly shade.” Additionally, Kathy describes her “last years” at Hailsham, after Miss Lucy tells them frankly about the raw truth of their purpose, as feeling “darker,” “like day moving into night” (Ishiguro 77).

for the other in a situation where my death gives him a little longer to live, I can save someone by throwing myself in the water or fire in order to temporarily snatch him from the jaws of death, I can give her my heart in the literal or figurative sense in order to assure her of a certain longevity. But I cannot die in her place, I cannot give her my life in exchange for her death. (43)

In saying that “everything derives its sense from this impossibility,” of the inability to exchange mortality for immortality, this passage of Derrida’s facilitates an understanding of the complicated paradox of separating life’s inherent value and life’s conditional value that *Never Let Me Go* examines. The conditional value of the lives of clones, whom Miss Emily describes as “kept in the shadows” and after the collapse of the Hailsham experiment “wanted [...] back in the shadows,” throws a wash of light onto the facticity of death, and in turn on the conditional value of our own human lives, which, following Seneca’s equation in Letter 70, are always mortal and under threat of being personally or socially devalued. Whenever light is cast on its object, the bright clarity exaggerates the object’s shadow behind it.

Having stared at the truth, of her situation as a clone and the special facticity of her death and purpose, what is left for Kathy or for any clone to do? In *Never Let Me Go*, the default course is duty, what she and the other Hailsham students and all clones are supposed to do. Ishiguro told Jeff Giles in an interview for *Newsweek*: “Not only do [the clones] not want to escape, but they feel a sense of duty [...] They want to be good donors, just like we all want to be good postmen or writers or whatever. I think that’s what I found touching and admirable and sad about people in general” (“Like Lambs to Slaughter”). Further, in an interview for *The Atlantic* Jennie Rothenberg Gritz asks Ishiguro about the lack of resistance in the novel, posting out that

after leaving for the Cottages the clones have seemingly no unbreakable restrictions on their activities or movements—they can drive cars as they please and can even have sexual relationships with other people, clones or “normal” humans with the only condition being that clones have to be careful *who* [they] have sex with” (Ishiguro 84) because normal humans are believed to be more emotional about the act (Kathy thinks this is mostly to do with the issue of reproduction but it’s also likely that it’s got a lot to do with “normal” people not being able to tell clones are clones unless they’re told and potentially feeling misled). Ishiguro shares:

In most clone stories I’ve come across, the clones are used as a metaphor for slavery or an underclass that has been exploited. Usually that exploited class rebels [...] I didn’t want this story to be about slavery or exploitation. So I created a world in which, peculiarly, nobody expects them to rebel. They actually feel a sense of dignity in carrying out their duties well. It’s important to Kathy that she’s a good caretaker. It’s important to Tommy that he’s a good donor. I find that more interesting and more sad. And I think that’s more like what we are. (“Myths and Metaphors”)

Mark Jerng also takes up the complex question of dignity in his essay “Giving Form To Life: Cloning and Narrative Expectations of the Human”—with an absence of alternative choices, clones do not try to conceive new possibilities by breaking the rules in an effort to steal a claim to *Dasein* or an unwritten future though what he calls “the narrative trajectory of individuation” that might inspire rebellion or refusal:

It is not that Ishiguro fails to portray these clones as human; rather, he writes a story that reverses the narrative trajectory of individuation. Ishiguro does not reveal the human as unfolding and developing from a given inert potentiality. This

is a much more disturbing story because it withholds the reader's desire for emancipation: the clones do not rebel and thus "become human." Rather, they learn to make sense of their lives as clones. In this way, *Never Let Me Go* disrupts the narrative of individuation and the values placed on the mysteriousness of birth, the "giftedness" of life, and wholeness. The novel takes up the question that challenges our privileged narratives of humanness: how is a life that is not "born" in the usual sense given form and dignity? By disrupting the narrative trajectory of individuation, Ishiguro gives us the imaginative potential of shining our expectations of the form of humanity. (382-83)

Jerng's assessment of Ishiguro's disruption of the "narrative trajectory" forces the annoyed reader waiting for the act of resistance to reconsider: Why would the reader even expect one? The novel holds the single narrative of one intentionally ordinary young woman— as Valerie Sayers notes in *Commonweal*: "In order to reflect Kathy H.'s ordinariness, Ishiguro here employs a style more matter-of-fact than in his other novels; the language flatter and more workaday" ("Spare Parts" 27)—to be capacious enough to have room for grand actions that can force a disruptive shift, by herself, in a social order that is structured to prohibit reformation? What could reasonably come of it? Discussing Ishiguro's narrative choice to give Kathy the "syntax of 'muddling-through'" that reveals the fortitude of the institutional "welfare state" of the novel and its examination of class and upward mobility, Bruce Robbins writes: "Kathy's brisk efficiency leaves no space for surprise at the fact that there *are* recovery rooms [for donors, which Kathy finds "comfortable"]; that recovery rooms exist in the first place only because of 'donations'; that the existence of donations and recovery rooms signals a suffering that is beyond

any possible compensation” (296). For Robbins, the systemic oppressiveness of cloning, caring, donating, and redistributing organs is so well-founded in the novel’s world that Kathy is imprisoned by its rules, even down to the level of her own language. At the larger sociopolitical scale, even the rebellious corporate efforts of the Hailsham Initiative, an institution with a rival philosophy, have greater but still severely limited potential to force some fundamental change, and that initiative failed to do so within the diegetic text. In fact the social hierarchy of normal humans and socially designated “other-than-human” clones is reinforced after the Hailsham initiative fails; special schools for clones are closed and the issue of humane treatment for clones is dropped—the system continues in its most apathetic form.

Suicide remains a completely logical option, but the tools given by and the environment engineered at Hailsham create a situation that omits the self-terminating impulse. Hailsham’s guardians by careful omission “lied to [and] fooled” the students to create an environment that conceals the inevitable so the students will participate in the art and writing, the lessons—“Why should you have done [your projects],” Miss Emily asks, “knowing what lay in store for each of you? You would have told us it was all pointless, and how could we have argued with you? So [Miss Lucy] had to go” (Ishiguro 268). Hailsham is hinged on a complicated equation where the innate, “sacred” value of the students’ lives and the conditional value they have as healthy clones are frequently incompatible, and in both cases a suicide that results from either apathy or extreme agency causes both poles of the value system to come apart.

It remains only hypothetical what could have been different had Miss Lucy not broken the system of telling and not telling, but Kathy recounts that after that instance the general mood does change: “In my memory my life at Hailsham falls into two distinct chunks: this last era, and

everything that came before. The earlier years [...] tend to blur into each other as a kind of golden time [...] but those last years feel different” (Ishiguro 77). Still, there is no out-loud resistance in the place Miss Lucy cleared where it could have grown. The “different,” darker feeling at Hailsham after they are plainly told leads Kathy to look “in a new light” at things about Miss Lucy and about Hailsham at large. The first peculiarity that Kathy notices is the novel’s sole reference to suicide—an act that while just as final as “completion” avoids the suffering, pain, and the potential of an uncanny non-separation during a third or fourth donation. Kathy remembers:

We’d been looking at some poetry, but had somehow drifted onto talking about soldiers in World War Two being kept in prison camps. One of the boys asked if the fences around the camps had been electrified, and then someone else had said how strange it must have been, living in a place like that, where you could commit suicide any time you liked just by touching a fence. This might have been a serious point, but the rest of us thought it pretty funny.” The students then play at mock electrocutions, which cause Miss Lucy to turn “ghostly” and say in a whisper, “It’s just as well the fences at Hailsham aren’t electrified. You get terrible accidents sometimes” (Ishiguro 78).

It is worth noting that the students don’t sense any direct comparison *or* identify a striking difference to their own experience and environment at Hailsham and the internment of World War Two prisoners; also, the *geheuer* of dying via such a horrifying suicide doesn’t affect them the way the idea of clones carrying out this means of suicide affects Miss Lucy. It is not the case that Miss Lucy is so pragmatically oriented that she balks at the possibility of lost biomedical value should Hailsham students begin offing themselves—she dissents, but as a

member of Hailsham's guardians, she surely holds a deep ethical belief in their "right" to a humane upbringing, and the world for clones outside Hailsham who are always "told" and never cared for perhaps sees clones choose suicide often, and perhaps see these suicides cause chain reactions that spread to "normal" humans as well.

Robbins posits that Kathy's narrative style and choices are a consequence of deeply rooted institutional limitations, but there are instances where the children find ways to talk about their specific realities nihilistically instead of hopefully through myths and fairy tales. The students also bypass *geheuer* after Miss Lucy's speech and find a way to talk about the impending cycle of caring and donations when Tommy rips open the skin on his elbow in Chapter Seven and asks Kathy to care for him. The students tease that he will "unzip" (Ishiguro 85), lose his parts, and get in trouble—a way to talk about "unzipping" their bodies in hospitals to have their organs removed and their obligation to do it, in a way that doesn't break the rules at Hailsham—open talk of donating is not allowed. For the students, this violation of the rules is, as Kathy puts it, something said to "get a laugh, to put someone off their dinner—and, I suppose—as some way of acknowledging what was in front of us" (88). The students can talk in their own way to each other about their purpose of donating in a manner that is safe because it mixes humor in with the uncanny and grotesque, but it also shows how seriously the students take the preservation of their bodies and how deep their sense of duty runs—Tommy knows that failing in his duty to carry his organs in a healthy state so he may give them to someone else would be shameful, and creates a disinterest in suicide because its antithetical to their socially enforced sense of honor and success in donating.

This lean towards the established ideas of proper behavior, self-preservation, rule-following, and a disinterest (but not disgust) in self-termination are all indications that the clones are committed to fulfilling their assigned purpose of dying *for* unknown others, but there are moments where the Hailsham students do consider their “legal” options. The difference is that they weigh the options that they come to believe are possible through the system of rules that they inhabit—not through escape, violence, or protest. These tests—namely the test of true love that can grant deferrals—are within the rules so far as Kathy, Tommy, and Ruth understand them. Far away from suicide, the clones are testing whether they might live a bit longer, or testing whether there is a test at all.

Options that are not really feasible are toyed with but ultimately, and bitterly, dropped, like the chance Ruth gets to examine her office-worker “possible.” These small ventures outside the boundaries—to break the rules and visit a clone who has “graduated” to the carer role, to get within reach to test the possibility of Ruth’s possible—are at the end insignificant as they lead to nothing nor bear any disciplinary consequences. What is shown in the episodes of Ruth’s imaginative dreaming is the wall, the one that Miss Lucy reinforced at the pavilion in her speech about the danger of hoping for the ordinary.

When Ruth begins donating, Kathy and Tommy go to visit her and they return to the topic of Ruth’s possibilities from their time at the Cottages, and the two team up on the weakened Ruth to prod her about it. “‘Don’t you sometimes think,’ [Kathy] said to Ruth, ‘you should have looked into it more? All right, you’d have been the first. The first one any of us would have heard of getting to do something like that. But you might have done it. Don’t you wonder sometimes, what might have happened if you’d tried?’” (Ishiguro 230).

Of course such a thing is impossible, and Kathy and Tommy both know. It exceeds the scope of their testing of what might be legally possible for them as clones; really, it is an impassable test of Ruth and an exploratory tug, or jerk, at their bonds to each other. At this point in her donations, Ruth is nearly done internally and externally and there is no reasonable expectation that she, at the edge of invalidism and completion, could give something so wild a shot. “How could I have tried? [...] It’s just something I once dreamt about. That’s all” (Ishiguro 230). The last test Ruth “knows” of is the test of true love, and in “triumph [...] like when one person’s pointing a gun at another person [and making the] other one do all kinds of things” Ruth charges Kathy and Tommy to be together and to make a go at living a little longer, to prove that they are exceptional, to find Madame and receive special rules that open up some meagre possibilities—and risk failure. *Never Let Me Go* is a novel that looks directly at impossibility and the cruelty of suggesting possibilities, and Ruth’s hopeful mandate is a cruelty as well.

“Being-towards-death” with Dignity

An aspect of death that can be considered through Heidegger is one’s own experience of the death of someone else. In the “present” of the novel, Kathy is a carer¹⁴, and it is her duty to care for donors while they progress towards dying. At the end of her narrative she cares for Tommy as well, up until he prepares for his fourth and final donation when he asks for distance from her. Heidegger describes a “being-towards-death” as being connected to the possibility of “authenticity” [*Eigentlichkeit*], the “ownness” [*Eigen*] of *Dasein*. Heidegger states that it is not

¹⁴ Another Heideggerian equation is that of “care,” or [*Sorge*]—*Dasein*’s Being reveals itself as *care*: “Care, as a primordial structural totality, lies ‘before’ [*vor*] every tactical ‘attitude’ and ‘situation’ of *Dasein*, and it does so existentially *a priori*; this means that it always lies *in* them [...] ‘Theory’ and ‘practice are possibilities of Being for an entity whose Being must be defined as ‘care’ (*Being and Time*, 227-38). “Care,” simply, is Heidegger’s ontological state of *Dasein*. What “care” is not is “will, wish, addiction, and urge,” and care is not “concern” or “welfare.”

possible to experience one's own death, as one only experiences their world through life, and life and death are forever separate. To help explain, consider Françoise Dastur in *Death: An Essay on Finitude*: "The certitude of death [for Heidegger] has of itself, such that it is not the *cogito sum*, the 'I think, I am,' that constitutes the true definition of *Dasein*'s being but, rather, *sum moribundus*, 'I am dying,' where only '*moribundus*,' 'destined for death,' is what gives *sum*, 'I am,' its meaning" (49). This equation of impossibility leads to the terminal point of phenomenology and of *Dasein* as *Dasein* can never contain its *own* death (*Being and Time*, 301-2). However, acting as carer to the dying creates an experience that forces the continuous awareness of death, death of others and of the self.

For Heidegger, our understanding of philosophy is rooted by necessity in our own personal engagement with the world we inhabit, and he believes that the normal response to the contingent nature of human existence is to "flee" [*Flucht*] from the needling thought that one's chosen way of Being is not right, or somehow untrue. Heidegger does not offer a way to eliminate this anxiety, because there isn't any correct way to lead one's life. There is however a possibility in authenticity, or in choosing one's own way to be. In *Being and Time*, he writes that it takes a tremendous effort of "clearing-away concealments and obscurities [if one is to] discover the world in [one's] own way" (167). This is something only a human (or an "other-than-human") can do—again, the dishes do not discover the world in their own way. The root of *Dasein*'s anxiety—the unassailable fact that our worlds are organized contingently and not planted firmly in anything essential or timeless—is also the root of *Dasein*'s dignity, in that *Dasein* can choose. *Dasein* can choose the inevitable; it can choose its *supposed to*, and this is what the clones *choose* to do.

Being a being who is aware of the facticity of dying and understands it as an end of Being puts a weight on individual choices, or what makes up one's existence. Heidegger writes that feeling anxious in the face of death "liberates *Dasein* from possibilities which 'count for nothing,' and lets [*Dasein*] become free for those which are authentic" (*Being and Time* 395). There is a problem of "if"—the "human condition" is marked by the wealth of strategies humans develop to avoid thinking about death, despite the fact that death is a guaranteed possibility: "Death is *Dasein's* ownmost possibility" (258-59), and death is "the possibility of the impossibility of every way of comporting oneself towards anything" (307). The human condition is irrevocably intertwined with the experience of mortality and the knowledge of dying. A fuller "existential-ontological" explanation delineates what ways death forms *Dasein's* experience of its world: it is non-relational, certain, indefinite, and not to be surpassed (303) with special permissions or privileges because death is, for living beings, non-negotiable—this is especially true for the novel's clones, but serves as an allegory of the inevitability of death that affects us all.

Heidegger argues that this is an opportunity for "anticipation of death" [*Vorlaufen in den Tod*], or an authentic response towards death which "unlike inauthentic being-towards-death¹⁵, does not evade the fact that death is not to be outstripped; instead, anticipation frees itself for accepting this" (308). Heidegger is describing a running ahead into death—running ahead into death is, for the clones with socially predetermined lifespans in Ishiguro's novel, a completely unavoidable prospect; while all human deaths are guaranteed to occur with a rising probability as

¹⁵This is different than expectation of death or waiting for death [*Erwarten*] which still is too possessed of the actual, and death actualizes its possibility. The state of anticipating death is not inherently a morbid state.

time progresses, for clones the means of dying and the relative window of death are knowable. In accepting this extreme temporality and running ahead into death, the authentic, anticipatory Being-towards-death may separate from the rule of the everyday, from the normativity of the “one” [*das Man*¹⁶]. A *Dasein* pointed towards death is “wrenched [...] away from the ‘they,’” of the everyday that propels one’s chosen course through the world and “makes manifest that all being-alongside the things with which we concern ourselves and all being-with-others, will fail us when our ownmost ability to be is the issue” (308). For Heidegger in *Being and Time*, “Death lays claim to [*Dasein*] as an individual and “individualizes *Dasein* down to itself”—death’s non-relational quality means that the bonds that tie one’s self to others are severed, and anxiety in the face of death in this equation brings “an unshakable joy” (358) because this fact of dying bears the weight and the meaning of the total sum of an individual’s choices with a value that is uniquely determined.

Death and Being-towards-death in Heidegger’s equation is an individual endeavor, but Kathy’s role as a carer complicates *Dasein*’s total singularity in moving towards death by exploring the duality of “care,” how each *Dasein* is confronted with the shade of the knowledge of death from the death of others. Kathy is aware that the challenge of caring is the constant witness of the suffering and death of her fellow clones, a suffering and death she *will* soon endure herself. For Jerng, care becomes important in that it “locates the grounds for a full realization of the human as properties within the individual.” He explains: “Whereas the moment of separation—from parents, from school, from immaturity—is often used to mark the individuality [...] this novel’s resistance to an arc of separation marks the clone’s personhood as

¹⁶ In German, “*das Man*” is an indefinite pronoun; in English: “They say,” “One must,” “That’s what one does.”

real and realized only through the relationships in which it is held—if this is realized at all (386). Jerng’s assessment is that “care,” *Dasein*’s ontological state, is also observable through the necessity of caring for and being in confrontation with others. Robbins compounds this by stating that “cruelty is not indistinguishable from caring,” indicating the necessity of Jerng’s “confrontation.” “It’s only by being cruel to Tommy that Kathy can lovingly hold open the possibility of an aspiration (however theoretical) that he would be allowed to enjoy. From this perspective, caring, even love itself, would necessarily have cruelty in it” (Cruelty is Bad 300). For Kathy, caring and attachment are extremely important all the way to her choice to begin her transition into donating, even when that care requires “cruelty”—the same sort of well-meaning “cruelty” that Hailsham also cannot avoid in caring for their students as children.

To be “Being-in-the-world,” *Dasein* must be in a state where “it can understand itself as bound up in its own ‘destiny’ within the Being of those entities which it encounters within its own world” (*Being and Time* 56)—Kathy as carer is the most “bound up” in the “destiny”—the dying the from loss of vital organs—of others like her, and her activities are largely activities for others, done very closely with those others. By being with them as they move towards death, Kathy becomes acquainted with her own dying. “Being-with,” Heidegger writes in *Being and Time*, “is an existential constituent of being-in-the-world [...] So far as *Dasein* is at all, it has being-with-one-another as its kind of being” (163). In the everyday sense of Being-with, of being part of the “they,” and *Dasein* is relegated to living how one *should*, how one is supposed to. “The world of *Dasein* is a with-world” (155). Hailsham creates a “with-world” of art and introspection, of walls and of tests that can’t be passed; of cruelty in caring that in its

discomfiting proximity allows a Being-with that breaks a rule and never fully lets go of its relational attachments as it runs ahead of death.

Meaning, Dying and Time

More than anything, and despite the inevitable cruelties that come from the extreme closeness of Being-with for clones through caring, clones manifest for themselves a personal sense of dignity not out of what they do for society biomedically as an assigned obligation, but in how they wear their responsibilities lightly for each other, how they all care for each other and permit room for possibilities in their world of hard impossibilities. An authentic being-towards-death generates a freedom that is not freedom from what *must* happen; being-towards-death grants a freedom to affirm the meaning of one's own life in advance of the mortal necessity of dying, to weigh a life lived according to the confines of its limited choices, no matter how few.

For Heidegger, the only authentic death is one's own death— the deaths of others are secondary to one's own death. But in closeness, in the state of Being-with, death can touch *Dasein* first in the deaths of others, and Kathy as a carer experiences the fact of death through donors (which include her closest friends Tommy and Ruth) first. There is the risk at coming apart in the face of the deaths of others, in the screamed anguish that it can generate, and that first relation to death is separate from an anxiety over the fact of one's own death.

After Kathy and Tommy discover that the test of their love and of their souls is impossible to pass, and worse, never existed, Tommy breaks down in a show of temperament and screams out in the "blackness", "raging, shouting, flinging his fists and kicking out" against the

inevitable truths that Kathy had first perceived as a whisper¹⁷, there in the mud. Kathy holds him; he and she make a late show of pretending that they will not have to let each other go, even though they know they do. “It seemed we were holding onto each other because that was the only way to stop us being swept away into the night,” (Ishiguro 274). Being-with hurts; there is so much at stake. Kathy as his carer does her best to “be there,” to steady Tommy in his moment of shattering. Tommy must donate his organs and complete.

This is part of what they both are *supposed*¹⁸ to do, and what they can do well. Yet Tommy never lets go of his mechanical animals, and he moves himself away from Kathy before his fourth donation, to wear it lightly before her, and to spare her the risk of breaking apart at the experience of his death relationally. To spare Kathy from the painful proximity of his death and to move towards the end of his life with dignity, Tommy has to move away from her and towards a Being-with with other donors; they are on their own stalwart advance towards no longer being, and he belongs with them. Tommy’s death comes, and Kathy feels through the final loss of Tommy that she too will have to move on from the carer role, from her *supposed to* of clinging to caring and into her *supposed to* of letting go.

Before his fourth, Tommy asks Kathy if she ever “gets tired of being a carer,” as all the other students in their age group have already gone on to donating and completing. “Don’t you

¹⁷ This thesis concentrates on Kathy because she is the novel’s narrator and it’s only perspective, but Kathy does tell the reader that Tommy seems to have always known “something the rest of [the students] didn’t” (Ishiguro 275) and was never the “idiot” at all—there is so much that must be left unsaid here about Tommy, his mechanical animals, his raging, and his “soul” that could not fit into this thesis.

¹⁸ Kwame Anthony Appiah examines Stevens, the butler from Ishiguro’s novel *Remains of the Day* and finds that Stevens also finds a kind of freedom in doing what he is supposed to: “Mr. Stevens serves as a good example of the moral power of individuality because he exemplifies it even though he doesn’t himself believe in liberty, equality, and fraternity. Even someone as illiberal as Mr. Stevens, that is, demonstrates the power of individuality as an ideal” (315-16). From “Liberalism, Individuality, and Identity,” *Critical Inquiry* vol. 27, no. 2, Winter 2001, pp. 305-32, *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/1344252.

sometimes wish, Kath, they'd hurry up and send you your notice?" In other words, isn't it time to walk positively towards dying? Kathy responds by saying that "it's important there are good carers. And I'm a good carer" (Ishiguro 282). But what is it all for? What can it mean? Kathy will have to let go, and move towards death, but letting go proves difficult even after the fact of loss. But letting go is a choice, and letting go of possibilities can be an "unshakable" relief, if not a "joy," in the freedom *from* choosing.

Being *is* time, and time is cruelly limited. For the individual, for *Dasein*, time ends one's life and brings its end, and to understand what it means to be an authentic Being one must look always towards its death. In confronting death directly and making it a light, a meaning can be made from the fact of death. For these "other-than-humans," for Kathy, that limitedness is magnified—their deaths as "other-than-human" organ donors are hyper-guaranteed, which in turn magnifies their state of *Dasein* and their approach to their situation by Being-towards-death, by experiencing death first by Being-with and caring, and by finding a sense of freedom and dignity in acting within the confines of *supposed to*.

What does it all mean? The "human condition" is a condition that accumulates memories and turns them over, placing them here and there, creating connected narratives from the pieces or piling them up until they become largely indistinguishable—at the site of death, at the end of time, those memories and the color they take on define the life exclusively for the person who lived it, where they are examined, valued, and then they are let go.

For Kathy at the end of the novel, the only choice is compliance, but compliance is a dignified choice. Why not? Kathy's life, ultimately, is as terminable as anyone's, and despite this inevitable end of Being we continue to be. Kathy *was* a good carer and she made the journey

towards dying possible for those who had no choice but to make the trip; she had Hailsham and the guardians, she had Tommy and Ruth and the others, she had the pain of discovery and the experience of being-in-the-world—all this is rendered meaningful *because* Kathy lets go and moves towards her own inalienable dying, something that resisting or rebelling would only delay. The ultimate dignity of the human condition, for all of us humans, is its acceptance of death and its ability to turn towards it, walking straight. After Kathy piles up her memories in an unknown place “along the fence [where] all sorts of rubbish had caught and tangled,” she says: “I just waited a bit, then turned back to the car, to drive off to wherever it was I was supposed to be” (Ishiguro 288).

WORKS CITED

- Adams, Tim. "For Me, England is a Mythical Place." *The Observer*, 20 Feb. 2005, pp. 17.
- Butcher, James. "A Wonderful Donation." *Lancet* 365, 9 April 2005, pp. 1299-1300.
- Critchley, Simon. "Being and Time, Part 5: Anxiety." *The Guardian*, 6 July 2009, www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/belief/2009/jul/06/heidegger-philosophy-being.
- Dastur, Françoise. *Death: An Essay on Finitude*. Translated by John Llewelyn, The Athlone Press, 1996.
- Freeman, John. "Never Let Me Go: A Profile of Kazuo Ishiguro." *Conversations with Kazuo Ishiguro*. Edited by Brian Shaffer and Cynthia Wong, UP of Mississippi, 2008.
- Freud, Sigmund. "The Uncanny." *Art and Literature*. Edited by Albert Dickinson, Penguin, 1990.
- Giles, Jeff. "Like Lambs to Slaughter." *Newsweek* vol. 145, no. 14, 4 April 2005, pp. 52.
- Grossman, Lev. "Never Let Me Go." *Top 10 Novels of the 2000s*. *Time Entertainment*, 18 Dec. 2009, entertainment.time.com/2009/12/29/the-10-best-books-of-the-decade/.
- Gritz, Jennie Rothenberg. "Myths and Metaphors." *The Atlantic*, 15 May 2005. www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2005/05/myths-and-metaphors/303942/.
- Harrison, M. John. "Clone Alone." *The Guardian*, 25 Feb. 2005, www.theguardian.com/books/2005/feb/26/bookerprize2005.bookerprize.
- Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*. Translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, Harper Perennial Modern Thought, 2008.
- . *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*. Translated by William McNeill and Nicholas Walker, Indiana UP, 1995.

Ishiguro, Kazuo. *Never Let Me Go*. Vintage International, 2005.

Jerng, Mark. "Giving Form to Life: Cloning and Narrative Expectations of the Human." *Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas* vol. 6, no. 2, 2008, pp. 369-93. *Project Muse*, doi: 10.1353/pan.0.0014.

Mead, Emily. "Future Present." *Publisher's Weekly*, 21 Jan. 2005, pp. 47.

Menand, Louis. "There's Something about Kathy: Ishiguro's Quasi-Science-Fiction Novel." *New Yorker* vol. 81, no. 6, 2005, pp. 78.

Messud, Claire. "Love's Body." *The Nation*, 28 April 2005, www.thenation.com/article/loves-body/.

Moore, Michael Scott and Michael Sontheimer. "Spiegel Interview with Kazuo Ishiguro." *Spiegel Online*, 5 Oct. 2005, www.spiegel.de/international/spiegel-interview-with-kazuo-ishiguro-i-remain-fascinated-by-memory-a-378173.html.

Mori, Masahiro. "The Uncanny Valley." Translated by Karl MacDorman and Takashi Minato. *Energy* vol. 7, no. 4, 1970, pp. 33-5.

Oshii, Mamoru and Masamune Shirow. *Ghost in the Shell*, Manga Entertainment, 2004.

Peirce, Charles. *Peirce on Signs: Writings on Semiotic by Charles Peirce*. U of North Carolina P, 1995.

Robbins, Bruce. "Cruelty is Bad: Banality and Proximity in *Never Let Me Go*." *Novel: A Forum on Fiction: Ishiguro's Unknown Communities* vol. 40, no. 3, Summer 2007, pp. 289-302, *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/40267704.

Sayers, Valerie. "Spare Parts." *Commonweal* vol. 132, no. 13, 15 July 2005, pp. 27-28.

- Seneca. *Ad Lucilium Epistulae Morales*. Letter 70. Translated by Richard M. Gummere. Vol. 2, G. Putnam Sons, 1920.
- Token, Leona and Daniel Chertoff. "Reader Response and the Recycling of Topoi in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*." *Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas* vol.6, no. 1, 2008, pp. 163-180, *Project Muse*, doi: 10.1353/pan.2008.0009.
- United States, Congress. "Cloning Human Beings: Report and Recommendations of the National Bioethics Advisory Commission." National Bioethics Advisory Commission, 1997, <https://bioethicsarchive.georgetown.edu/nbac/pubs/cloning1/cloning.pdf>.
- Vorhaus, Daniel. "Review of Kazuo Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go*." *The American Journal of Bioethics* vol. 7, no. 2, 2007, pp. 99. *PhilPapers*, doi: 10.1080/15265160601112451.
- Wong, Cynthia and Grace Crummett. "A Conversation about Life and Art with Kazuo Ishiguro." *Conversations with Kazuo Ishiguro*. Edited by Brian Shaffer and Cynthia Wong, UP of Mississippi, 2008.
- Wroe, Nicholas. "Profile: Living Memories: Kazuo Ishiguro." *The Guardian Saturday Pages*, 19 Feb. 2005, pp. 20.