The Political Science Reviewer • Volume 43, Number 1 • 2019
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Decency, Hope, and the Substitution of Memory in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*

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Introduction

Set in a parallel dystopian universe in the 1990s, Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* chronicles the lives of three students who are reared, come of age, and find their way in (and ultimately out of) England.[1] The novel's title is taken from a scene in which one student, Kathy H., is caught by the patron of her boarding school clutching a pillow to her breast while dancing to a song whose only memorable line is its refrain: never let me go. Kathy, like the rest of the children at the Hailsham boarding school, is a clone, destined for a life first as a carer and then as a donor. The caring to be done, though, is for the donor, and the donating is that of vital organs; the clones' purpose is to be harvested, to aid and abet the scientific advances that followed the Second World War and that made possible the indefinite extension of human life.[2] *Never Let Me Go* thus offers, at least on the surface, a contemporary rendition of *A Brave New World*, one that explores the dark possibilities of the future, especially in the context of increasingly advanced biotechnologies.[3]

No doubt because of the anxieties generated by those very technologies in contemporary society, critics have largely focused on these dark themes, staying relatively close to the surface of the novel's plot.[4] Unsurprisingly, most see there a harbinger of the future, the downside or unintended consequences of the unmitigated advancement in science and technology. As commonsensical and obvious as this may seem, however, reading the novel as an exposition on the bioethics of cloning misses the mark, at least with

regard to the way Ishiguro himself understood the work. Ishiguro maintained that of all his novels, *Never Let Me Go* was the most hopeful, as it demonstrated the possibility that despite otherwise hopeless circumstances, people could nonetheless lead decent lives.[5] Ishiguro's expressed intention was to explore the phenomena of love and friendship set against the backdrop of mortality, and what he found, despite all dark pretenses to the contrary, was that humans retain their ability to be decent because of their inherent ability to love one another.[6] The bonds forged through this affection persist regardless of the meaninglessness within which the individuals find themselves. Put another way, man retains some measure of hope despite his postmodern condition.[7]

Our reading of Ishiguro's novel seeks a third way between author and critic. On the one hand, we explore Ishiguro's understanding of decency, taking as seriously as possible this sense of hope he finds in modern society. Yet on the other hand, we partly join the critical commentary by casting doubt on the viability of this decency and therefore on the feasibility of hope in our own future. Owing to the way Ishiguro weaves together the novel's characters, themes, and setting, we question the extent to which Ishiguro himself actually saw through the depths of his dark metaphors. Instead, we indicate what is fundamentally at issue in the novel: the only thing the students truly possess is their memories, however fallible and ultimately fleeting. Despite what Ishiguro may have sought, the student's decency is not a basis for hope or optimism; indeed, we cast doubt on that decency and question whether it is evidence of their humanity at all, a question posed by the novel itself. In other words, we want to suggest Ishiguro's hopefulness rests on a memory, one increasingly likely to be forgotten.

What follows thus makes the case for reading *Never Let Me Go* as a much darker literary exposition than critics have done hitherto and as having a much darker message than the one intended by the author himself. Critically assessing the novel in this way also offers a rather unique opportunity: *Never Let Me Go* provides a literary looking glass into the condition of modern society, at least as seen through the eyes of one of our more prominent modern poets.[8] To

that end, we begin by exploring the novel's dramatic structure, indicating how argument and action weave together the dark themes so characteristic of its reputation. In particular, we note the significance of the novel's tripartite structure: the three phases in the characters' development represent a deepening of their self-understanding and culminate in the very perspective through which Kathy narrates the story.[9] We then examine Ishiguro's understanding of the novel's teaching, or the extent to which the novel could be thought optimistic despite its dark dystopian themes. Finally, we provide our critical analysis of the novel. We indicate the ways in which the students are problematic examples of humanity (or the ways in which humanity itself has become problematic) and question whether their decency is a cause for hope. We conclude with a series of questions seemingly implicit or inchoate within the text, questions that focus on the importance of memory and that therefore offer other avenues for future scholarship.

Told and Not Told: Love and Friendship Through Mortality

As we noted above, Ishiguro weaves a literary argument into the dramatic action of *Never Let Me Go*. That is, the novel has something of a double movement; the plot unfolds conventionally according to the internal development of its characters, culminating in a dramatic climax that resolves the tensions and obstacles presented in and through that development. This otherwise normal storyline is told one step removed, however; much like the Platonic dialogues with which Ishiguro identifies elsewhere, the novel's action is narrated or recounted after the fact, creating a literary distance between action and narration.[10] This point, otherwise seemingly trivial, in fact indicates an important interpretive nuance: the narrator's memory is itself brought into focus, making it an integral part of the novel's action and development. But before going further, let us say a bit more about the intersection of argument and action as a distinct literary methodology.[11]

Reconsidering her memories are not primarily a historical exercise for Kathy; notwithstanding a few exceptions, the events of

her past remain quite vivid and are not as such the subject of her focus.[12] Kathy has her own reasons for recalling and narrating the past as she does; the story is more than her memories of past events, and she tells it to cherish those memories as well as to make sense of them, to see them now as an intelligible whole, which was not possible when experiencing them firsthand.[13] The way she makes sense of this whole, which is here equivalent to the way Ishiguro explores his own themes, is to organize her memories according to the way her love and affection developed. Her self-understanding deepens as she realizes how love and affection drive individuals apart as much as they unite them; Kathy's self-knowledge comes only once she comes to know others, including her younger self. And knowledge of those others presupposes knowing their relations; seeing how she, Tommy, and Ruth were brought together and driven apart is hence necessary for her to understand what her memories mean to her. The action of the novel thereby produces its own unique argument, one Ishiguro asks his readers to reflect on as they consider what Kathy recalls, in what ways she makes sense of those recollections, and how both fit within the novel's overarching backdrop.[14]

Nowhere is the interaction of argument and action clearer than the title. *Never Let Me Go* announces the novel's identity while also tying that identity to something said to be outside the novel and to the meaning of a scene within the novel. *Never Let Me Go* is the name of a song by Judy Bridgewater, a fictive artist whose song was written and performed long before the novel's action takes place and whose lyrics have nothing to do with the lives of the characters. As Kathy admits, the song is relevant not because of its actual lyrics, that is, because of what it literally says, but because of what she wishes it to say, or what it means to her. That meaning, for her, indicates a fantasy, an impossible possibility:

> And what I'd imagine was a woman who'd been told she couldn't have babies, who'd really, really wanted them all her life. Then there's a sort of miracle and she has a baby, and she holds this baby very close to her and walks around

> singing: "Baby, never let me go …" partly because she's so happy, but also because she's so afraid something will happen, that the baby will get ill or be taken away from her.[15]

Kathy understands the song to be about birth, about life, ultimately about hope, however untenable that interpretation. But her hopes have a dark underside; Kathy cannot have children because she is a clone, sterile either by design or consequence. Her very aspirations are haunting, as the one desire that would otherwise shape or inform her growth and development as a young woman is denied to her. This is true also of Kathy's friends, children who grow up from early on in a school of privilege in the English countryside. All alike, their collective hopes and aspirations prove futile in light of their destinies, their true purpose. Ishiguro uses this dialectic of hope and darkness to unfold the novel's action, which recounts the seemingly tragic nature of their existence.

Never Let Me Go is divided into three unequal parts: the first section on the clones' lives at Hailsham is 111 pages, the second section on the period at the Cottages is 88 pages, and the third section in which Kathy serves as carer both to Tommy and Ruth is 81 pages. Because the novel consists of Kathy giving an account of the key memories of her life, the longer length of the section on Hailsham indicates she thought either more or more important events happened there than anywhere else. In fact, most of the second and third parts of the novel are Kathy, Tommy, and Ruth trying to understand the meaning of their time at Hailsham. In terms of "historical time" within the novel, the time at Hailsham covers the longest period; Kathy speaks with Tommy about leaving Hailsham after the summer most of the students are sixteen.[16] There is no mention of a time in Kathy's life before Hailsham. At the start of the novel, Kathy says that she is thirty-one years old and has been a carer for over eleven years.[17] This makes the time at the Cottages, at most, a period of four years. The key memories of her time as a carer are the periods of donations for both Ruth and Tommy, and the reader is told about a year takes places between Tommy's donations.[18]

Hailsham

As Kathy later admits, going to Hailsham is the dominant event in her life, which is why her memories are organized around life at and after having gone there. For a Hailsham student, the three sections of Kathy's story—Hailsham, the Cottages, and as a carer—are a fairly typical sequence. Not all of Kathy's classmates go to the Cottages; there are other places students go, such as White Mansion or Poplar Farms.[19] Very few are carers as long as Kathy,[20] though all are seemingly well prepared given the emphasis their education placed on taking care of one another. Despite attempting to, Kathy cannot escape the memory of Hailsham, and after a rather peculiar experience with a donor in her third year, she no longer tries to leave it in the past: "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."[21] Even after the physical school closes, Kathy insists Hailsham continues to have a real existence in her memory, telling of an encounter with a fellow alumnus where "we hugged, quite spontaneously, not so much to comfort one another, but as a way of affirming Hailsham, the fact that it was still there in both of our memories."[22]

Not coincidentally, what Hailsham means to the students is connected to the school's purpose. Readers of the novel have noted that the name of the school indicates a type of fraud is being perpetrated.[23] Hailsham means to hail a sham, or that what is being praised is a deception. The purpose of the Hailsham education is to create a world of innocence that allows the clones to lead a productive life. At some level, this is in keeping with the author's own views; Ishiguro has often said that deceptions are a key aspect of education:

> Hailsham is like a physical manifestation of what we have to do to all children. … It is a protected world. To some extent at least you have to shield children from what you know and drip-feed information to them. Sometimes that is kindly meant, and sometimes not. 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.[24]

The deception that is Hailsham is then something of a noble lie; for the sake of a future good, a beautiful falsehood is told about an ugly truth. In order for the students to overcome their plight in whatever way is possible for them, they must both "be told and not told."[25]

The role deception plays in *Never Let Me Go* is heightened by the intersection of recollection with foreshadowing. While the first part of the novel is Kathy's memory of her life and friends at Hailsham, she nonetheless divides that time at Hailsham in two:

> I'm talking about the period from when we were thirteen to when we left at sixteen. In my memory my life at Hailsham falls into two distinct chunks: this last era, and everything that came before. The earlier years—the ones I've just been telling you about—they tend to blur into each other as a kind of golden time. … That talk with Tommy beside the pond: I think of it now as a kind of marker between the two eras.[26]

This divide marks the end of the designed education Kathy receives from Miss Emily, Hailsham's headmistress; what follows is corrupted at least in part by the influence of Miss Lucy, an influential though short-tenured guardian. Miss Emily wanted the bubble of innocence around the children preserved at a time when Miss Lucy thought it better burst. Kathy's later years at Hailsham are described as "more serious, and in some ways darker" and are brought on when Tommy relates Miss Lucy's teaching to Kathy.

The pond scene is recounted at the start of Chapter Three, but that conversation is really a further explanation by Tommy as to why he is now able to control his anger. The educational structure at Hailsham praised students who were successful and productive

artists. For darker reasons disclosed only at the novel's end, the founders of Hailsham fostered this artistic atmosphere to get the best possible work out of the student body.[27] In Tommy's case, this atmosphere had the negative side effect of hurting him socially because he was not good at art.[28] Tommy was prone to fits of rage at being teased, and the students enjoyed teasing him at every opportunity, even picking him last at sports when he was among the best athletes on the field.[29] Miss Lucy, seeing a solution that would assuage his anger and hence remove the thrill associated with teasing him, tells Tommy he need not concern himself with being creative.[30] This revelation, according to Tommy, is the source of his new peaceful state; the doubt associated with their artwork's value, however, also begins the dark period for Kathy. In a sense, this doubt is their first step toward self-knowledge; for the first time, they gain some awareness or seriousness about the precariousness of their lives. Because they were born to be harvested for parts, their purpose can be said to be wholly bodily, a fact strongly hidden or obscured by their rather ideal upbringing. Yet the slow release of this truth, according to Miss Lucy, will keep them from leading full lives: "You'll be leaving Hailsham before long," she stresses, "and it's not so far off, the day you'll be 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."[31]

Years later when Kathy and Tommy go to see Madame and Miss Emily about the possibility of deferrals, Miss Emily makes explicit their rejection of Miss Lucy's ideas:

> Yes, in many ways we *fooled* you. I suppose you could even call it that. But we sheltered you during those years and we gave you your childhoods. Lucy was well meaning enough. But if she'd had her way, your happiness at Hailsham would have been shattered. Look at you both now! I'm so proud of you both. You built your lives on what we gave you. You wouldn't have become absorbed in your lessons, you wouldn't have lost yourselves in your art and writing.

> Why should you have done, 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? She had to go.[32]

Even Miss Lucy realizes the life-flattening effects of the truth toward the end of her time at Hailsham; she tells Tommy that in hindsight she should not have told him he could neglect his art. Rather, she should have told him it should matter to him for his own sake: "Listen, Tommy, your art, it *is* important. And not just because it's evidence. But for your own sake. You'll get a lot from it, just for yourself."[33]

The Cottages

The second section of the novel—the time spent at the Cottages—is a transition point for the students and the story's plot. For the latter, the very thing meant to keep the students together—the affection they have for one another—is tested for the first time. That test reveals something of an irony; the friendship(s) that brought and kept them together is now the very thing working to separate them. Put another way, the Cottages serve as the novel's transition by showing how love and friendship mature in ways that are not simply harmonious. Regarding the former, life at the Cottages proves to be different in important respects from life at Hailsham; most immediately, life at the Cottages is a time of leisure. Much like ordinary students away at college, it is the first time the Hailsham students are not watched by their guardians. Unlike college students, however, the Cottages are proportionally much later in life for a would-be donor. Toward the end of the first section Kathy warns Tommy that he is risking his future happiness by not getting back together with Ruth, saying, "Look you fool, you're not going to get many more chances. Don't you realize, we won't be here together like this much longer?"[34] Tommy counters, perhaps thinking he would be happier with Kathy, by saying, "Like you say, Kath. We're going to be leaving here soon. It's not like a game, anymore. We've got to think carefully."

The time at the Cottages is divided into their arrival, their trip to Norfolk with Rodney and Chrissie, and the point at which they decide to leave. Upon arriving, the Hailsham students think of themselves as a group; they are sent out from Hailsham to the various facilities in groups or cohorts, presumably on the basis of a pattern of affection long-established and observed. Reflecting on the first day, Kathy remembers the way all eight of the students from Hailsham "huddled together in front of the farmhouse" and remarks how the fear they had of the world they were entering never really left them. She comments, "because somewhere underneath a part of us stayed like that: fearful of the world around us, and—no matter how much we despised ourselves for it—unable to let each other go."[35] Later as a carer, Kathy hears that Hailsham will close and asks, "But what'll happen to all the students?" Kathy does not mean by this question the students currently attending the school; instead, she means *us*, "all the students who'd grown up with me and were now spread across the country, carers and donors, all separated now but still somehow linked by the place we'd come from."[36]

No doubt the design of their education encouraged these groups, which serve as a surrogate family of sorts as they enter the world: "But this was one thing we'd been told over and over: that after Hailsham there'd be no more guardians, so we'd have to look after each other. And by and large, I'd say Hailsham prepared us well on that score."[37] At times, Ruth sarcastically refers to Kathy as "baby sister." Yet it is also clear that they are not a normal family; their sibling-like bonds are quickly replaced by ill-defined, erotic relations. The ambiguity surrounding this transition is apparent in the awkwardness with which they handle it. Barely at an age when most teenagers would begin driving, the students are understandably immature emotionally; they learn their gestures and habits from television rather than from their mothers and fathers, or even from their former guardians. Kathy thinks Ruth adapts to life at the Cottages too quickly, pointing out the way she touches Tommy on the arm, an insincere gesture she learns from television.[38] Not surprisingly, love turns out to be a greater challenge than friendship at the Cottages.

Though meant to provide support after leaving their childhood confines, the grouping of Hailsham students frays rather quickly. Reminiscing again on Hailsham's closure, Kathy calls to mind a scene in North Wales in which a clown is holding a bunch of balloons. The balloons have faces on them; Kathy says they look "like a little tribe."[39] Perhaps indicating the tension or precarious connections, her major concern is that someone might come along and cut the balloon strings. She comments, "once that happened, there'd be no real sense in which the balloons belonged with each other anymore."[40] To be sure, the closing of Hailsham will separate them all as a tribe; they will no longer belong to one other. That separation was already prepared for, however, by their time at the Cottages, which tests whether the students will stay together as a "family" or go their separate ways. They quickly decide to separate.

The separation occurs partially as a result of their trip to Norfolk with Chrissie and Rodney. They undertake the trip to find Ruth's possible, the otherwise normal people from whom the students were cloned. It is also in Norfolk where Chrissie and Rodney first discuss the possibility that two clones truly in love might defer their donations for a time. In their childhood, Norfolk was jokingly described as the place where items lost in one's lifetime end up. And it is in Norfolk where Tommy and Kathy find the long-lost Judy Bridgewater cassette (or one like it). This seemingly trivial serendipity alters the plot's trajectory significantly; the students' love for one another in this case also sets them at odds later. Despite having originally led the effort at Hailsham to recover the lost tape, Ruth is unsettled to find the Norfolk tape among Kathy's things at the Cottages.[41] No doubt sensing what this could otherwise mean, especially given the recent revelation of deferrals and their connection to genuine love, Ruth tells Kathy that Tommy would not be interested in her as a lover, owing to Kathy's prior erotic trysts: "You must know what I mean. Tommy doesn't like girls who've been with … well, you know, with this person and that. It's just a thing he has. I'm sorry, Kathy."[42]

Ruth's actions here and elsewhere place her in an unfavorable light; on the surface, she seems to be the story's villain, acting as the

foil to the true romance between Kathy and Tommy. Yet neither ultimately forsake her; indeed, she eventually serves as the means by which Kathy and Tommy are finally brought together. Her apparent mendacity is in fact only her own poorly formed or educated affection, as her relationship with Tommy, to say nothing of the way she betrays Kathy's confidence at crucial times, serves to keep the group together, at least as she sees it.[43] In other words, Ruth uses love (her erotic relationship with Tommy) to preserve the friendship between the trio; an erotic match between Kathy and Tommy would leave Ruth outside looking in. But because the condition of their friendship—of the Hailsham group remaining together—depends on a certain deception, the secrecy necessary to preserve the friendship and their erotic relationships ultimately undermines both.[44] Sensing her own isolation, Kathy elects to become a donor without telling Ruth or Tommy; later, not long before her second and final donation, Ruth admits she and Tommy had all but split up before either became donors themselves. Life at the Cottages ends with the students being more isolated from one another than at any point in the novel.

Caring and Donations

The third part of the book covers the time after the Cottages and brings the reader to the present with Kathy's story. It covers the second-to-last phase of the life of a clone but ends before Kathy begins her own life as a donor. In terms of the plot, the third part includes the final time all three are together for their trip to the seashore, as well as Kathy and Tommy's visit to Miss Emily and Madame to learn if the deferrals are real. Both instances are clearly related: superficially, the trio reunite after an extended period apart, long enough presumably that the ill will engendered at the Cottages gives way to a sincere desire to be together again. More fundamentally, their trip to the seashore is redemptive; Ruth reveals after the ordeal that she has found where Madame now lives, thereby acting as the means by which Kathy and Tommy will be paired, perhaps for an extended length of time. Not only are Kathy and Tommy—the two seemingly meant for one

another—finally brought together in an erotic relation, but the catalyst is none other than the one who kept them apart since their time at Hailsham. In a sense, Ruth's future becomes equivalent to the possibility of Kathy and Tommy receiving a deferral; her last substantive act in the novel opens a new future for Kathy and Tommy, one in which love triumphs over the immediacy of death because of a fateful act of friendship. Their final time together therefore brings friendship and love back into dramatic harmony; Ruth is said to complete not long thereafter.[45]

Ishiguro's beautiful texturing here—his use of Kathy's memories to explore the notion of memory as such—heightens the plot's drama; soon Kathy and Tommy are off chasing after Madame, hoping to say and do just the right things that will allow them to remain together. And yet, Ruth's heroism affects a harmony that cannot last; no sooner are the three reunited then their differences reemerge. Both Ruth and Tommy stress during the reunion that things are different when one becomes a donor, and because she is not yet herself one, Kathy cannot understand what life is like for them. The bond that develops between donors separates Tommy and Ruth from Kathy despite the fact that Kathy is not like most carers; not just their childhood friend, Kathy is also said to be a remarkable carer, having an extraordinary eleven-year career during which her donors consistently do better than expected, have impressive recovery times, and are rarely classified as agitated.[46] Moreover, Kathy's experiences as a carer allow her to push back against their subterranean suspicions, some of which border on the conspiratorial.[47] In other words, Kathy's wider knowledge of the world shows the limitations and faults of Tommy and Ruth's self-understanding. In a parallel reminiscent of what happened earlier in the Cottages, the promise of love is undercut by an inchoate bond of friendship.

The triad of characters—Kathy, Ruth, and Tommy—allow for three separate pairs combined at different times through the interplay of love and friendship. All three grow together as siblings. Kathy and Ruth are friends in the beginning and by the end; Ruth and Tommy begin as lovers, only to discover later their friendship;

and Kathy and Tommy begin as friends and end as lovers. The triangulation of the three in these discrete pairs is what allows Ishiguro to explore both harmonies and tensions within love and friendship, a pair itself less harmonious than otherwise thought. Yet it is the tension within this pair that gives Kathy's memories their meaning; the faulty self-knowledge possessed by Tommy and Ruth is subsequently replaced by Kathy and Tommy's more accurate knowledge of the real world—that there are no, and never were any, deferrals for the students.[48] Tragic enough in its own right, this revelation prompts both to undertake a more serious introspection. And both come to a more accurate self-evaluation, which cannot be separated from their relationship with Ruth; each regrets Ruth not living long enough to learn that the rumor of the deferrals was just that. Kathy laments, "When I say I wish she'd found out the whole score, it's more because I feel sad at the idea of her finishing up different from me and Tommy. The way it is, it's like there's a line with us on one side and Ruth on the other, and when all's said and done, I feel sad about that."[49] Only in the end, when knowledge of the world and knowledge of self are brought together, is there an understanding of the need each has always had for the others. Yet the book also ends with the completion of this recollection, that is, a unity of thought in Kathy's mind that never fulfills her desire for a coherent bond with Ruth and Tommy.

Decency as Hope in the Contemporary World

Contrary to the dark surface, and despite what critics have noted, Ishiguro himself did not intend to join the genre of dystopian literature, especially as it relates to contemporary society. Moreover, Ishiguro's insistence that this was his most hopeful novel provides an invaluable clue to its interpretation. *Never Let Me Go* not only explores the broad meaning of love and friendship today, but also, at least according to its author, demonstrates the possibility of hope in the face of their (and perhaps our own) dark circumstances.[50] In other words, the fact that the students remain decent toward themselves and to one another suggests there is hope—optimism—in spite of the dark, seemingly meaningless world in which they find

themselves.[51] So too, then, is there hope for our world, whose concerns are mirrored, however distorted, in the world of the novel. Nevertheless, the relationship Ishiguro sees between hope and decency requires more than a bit of explanation, especially in light of the novel's seemingly tragic arc.

To see the ingenuity behind Ishiguro's intention, it is useful to begin with the sentiments of critics and readers alike: the themes at play in the novel's dark plot suggest there was little hope for the students of Hailsham, and that because those students lacked any future in which their identities mattered or were integral parts in something that mattered. To be sure, this was Ishiguro's intent all along; to explore love and friendship in the context of mortality required literary devices and techniques that severed the students from any notion of transcendence. How the students act and relate could only be developed properly by creating a context in which any possibility of immortality was ruled out. Creating such a world requires a metaphor of sorts; Ishiguro acknowledged that the dark themes surrounding human cloning and organ harvesting—no doubt of special interest to contemporary society—held no special relevance for him.[52] They were, in a manner of speaking, merely the devices necessary to make the context work. How the students can and eventually will love one another is thus prepared for only once their past and future are denied. Casting the students as clones whose organs are to be harvested is the literary mechanism that makes immanent their existence. For this reason, they have neither history nor family, no notion of religion, and no real ambition.

It therefore goes without saying that the purpose of the students was to be purposeless, at least on their own terms; they are clones produced to be harvested for the sake of others, not individuals in their own right with qualities to be cultivated, celebrated, or admired.[53] Their lack of a future is in many ways connected to their lack of a past; having no family means they were created, not born, and then presumably transferred to an orphanage shortly thereafter.[54] The characters are identified by their first name and a last initial (e.g., Kathy H.) that does not indicate a

surname but rather a differentiation from other clones who may share the same first name.[55] As clones, they have neither parents nor any special familial bond with their guardians, who are said to harbor secret revulsions toward the children.[56] In turn, the students are sterile; they cannot have children, meaning the possibility of passing on their identity to future generations is denied to them beforehand.

Likewise, the students have no religion that could offer promise or hope. The only mentions of religion in the novel are by way of the occasional ironic joke, and in reference to Keffers, the old man who tends (poorly) to the Cottages where the students go after leaving Hailsham.[57] Whether because the society in which they were raised was already secularized, or because as clones the students were deemed to have no souls, God and/or the divine play little to no role in the students' life. There is nothing for which the students can hope, no sense in which the misery of this life might be redeemed in the felicity of the next. Such hope would presuppose a transcendent notion of justice, which allows suffering only with a view to a greater good or eternal redemption. It would also, reflexively, give the students a sense of injustice, one that may accept the inevitability of this world but which nonetheless sees and hence judges that inevitability against a higher standard. The students never truly manifest a sense of injustice, however; with perhaps one possible exception, the students show no indignation toward their situation.[58] Their sense of purpose is wholly internalized, and despite the immediacies of their situation, they do not question the extent to which there may be other, grander designs. Without this larger sense of purpose, the students are not inclined to raise their existence to the level of a question. And without that question, the students are never forced to grapple seriously with their future, or lack thereof.

Finally, the students of Hailsham, quite apart and contrary to the elite education they received, demonstrate little-to-no ambition. Again, mostly because of how they were taught to internalize the reason they were created, few of them consider what they might be in the future or what sort of ambition they might harbor

with propriety. For those with any inkling of the future whatsoever, there is talk about being a grocery clerk or an office worker.[59] The most extravagant, and thus the most ambitious, of dreams is to be a movie star, which would require moving to the United States.[60] As might be expected of the students, their dreams are tinged with a fantastical irony; of those who do harbor any ambitions, their goal is either the mundane or theatrical, an imitated hope of those with an imitative life. This stands in stark contrast to what should be their natural ambition or the kind of life expected for those who grow up reading Proust, Joyce, and *The Odyssey*, among other classics. The very education that was meant to help them lead decent lives is curiously silent and ineffectual regarding the most important question for these students—the meaning and eventuality of their futures.[61] It comes as no real surprise, then, that few wait longer than they have to before assuming their role as carers and donors.[62]

Taken together, the absence of family, religion, and ambition from *Never Let Me Go* indicates an absence of the future, or of what is possible when genuine choices are available. To use the looking-glass metaphor we mentioned earlier, *Never Let Me Go* shows how modern man loses hope when the conventions and institutions that gave meaning to his life lose their meaning, that is, when he ceases to believe in them anymore.[63] And yet, when he ceases to believe in them, he also paradoxically ceases to believe in himself, for often unbeknownst to him, they shape or form his identity, his sense of his purpose or of who he is. The reason critics and readers alike have fixated on the novel's dark resonances is because it gestures to the twilight of our own idols; our current condition can be said to lack the meaning or purpose it once possessed, which now portends the rise of despair, resignation, even nihilism. Accordingly, the end of our history should be one in which we invent our own happiness, and then blink in unison.[64]

On this point, however, critic and reader part company with the author. Whereas most see beautiful though overwhelming sadness, Ishiguro himself saw hope, for the darkness, according to him, points beyond itself, toward a more permanent or reliable

ground for optimism. Ishiguro emphasized the most basic fact of the students' existence that persisted throughout their travails: quite regardless of their situation, they remained decent throughout.[65] That is to say, the students never behaved indecently toward one another, or toward themselves, regardless of their feelings or emotions at any given time. None of this suggests the students are perfect; far from it, they behave in ways perfectly predictable for children, adolescents, and then young adults. Yet their imperfections make an otherwise wholly abnormal situation normal; Miss Emily alludes darkly to other clones not lucky enough to be a Hailsham, the Glenmorgan House, or the Saunders Trust.[66] With this gesture, Ishiguro indicates how the preservation of innocence in their childhood—the one thing Miss Emily most desperately sought[67]—opens up the possibility of decency, regardless of the world's even greater indecency. To express this in a slightly different way: the antidote to meaninglessness is a small dose of innocence.

Above all, Ishiguro grounds his hopeful optimism in this enduring sense of decency, suggesting his fear, above all others, was what would become of our world as the old conventions and practices lose their meaning. In other words, would our society become solipsistic, antinomian, hedonistic, even barbarous? Ishiguro's hope is that genuine decency remains a distinct human possibility because the desire for friendship and love are always present, regardless of convention. That we wish to be together as friends and lovers means we wish to remain social out of a heartfelt, perhaps natural desire, and thus that behaving well toward one another persists as a genuine possibility, regardless of the state of society or its conventions. Human beings at their core are possessed of a capacity to love and to act humanely, quite apart from what may or may not be true of their world. All that is necessary is for us to preserve the innocence of childhood, which allows the bonds of love and friendship to take root, and hence to provide the very condition of decency. Or, to use Ishiguro's own words, we need only remain committed to "being told and not told."[68]

The Past Becomes Prologue: Substituting Memory for Hope

To be sure, reading the novel with a view to Ishiguro's optimism provides for a majestic interweaving of theme, characters, and setting; *Never Let Me Go* comes to sight as a love story, one that redeems the value and importance of love and friendship, regardless of the situation or context. Kathy and Tommy begin as friends and end as lovers, or perhaps their friendship was merely an interlude that showed their deep and abiding connection. And the three of them together—Kathy, Tommy, and Ruth—begin and end as friends, with an interlude in the middle caused only by love, however mistaken. Regardless of their idyllic upbringing, their harrowing plight, or even their unceremonious completion, the lives of the three Hailsham students are inextricably intertwined, a fact each discovers as they reunite one last time. This deep connection each feels for the other(s), and the resulting decency that characterizes their relations, is the hope Ishiguro finds in the novel, which persists despite the inevitable conclusion.

Ishiguro has been careful, however, about warning against reading the novel as a form of romanticism; in the end, even love is not strong enough to overcome fate.[69] The clones do eventually complete, and thus their purpose is ultimately realized. As Kathy and Tommy learn, there are no deferrals, and even if there had been, what difference, they ask themselves, would a few extra years make anyway.[70] Our mortality truly is an end for us all, a sobering fact that helps explain why none of the students ever attempt to run, or why Ishiguro himself was uninterested in a story about noble and rebellious slaves.[71] Love and friendship mean so much to Ishiguro precisely because they cannot conquer fate; our ability to love within the context of our fate is what gives us the possibility of our humanity. And yet, however hauntingly beautiful, reading the novel this way—as the author himself intended it—creates any number of problems, more perhaps than it solves.

We suggested earlier that Ishiguro succeeds in demonstrating, maybe unintentionally, that memory rather than decency best characterizes the students and that recollection of the past, not hope (which implies optimism toward the future), is the theme that

connects the book. The argument of the novel thus connects its action in this way; the novel's structure projects backward, as Kathy recounts her tale while preparing to transition from carer to donor. Her inevitable fate leaves her no future, nothing for which she can hope. Kathy's only recourse is to the past, to her memories of those experiences that define her identity and from which she draws some sweet, sentimental satisfaction. By design, the novel looks backward and downward, to the past and to the beginning—to her beginning—to give an account of her life as she understands herself.[72] Yet the contour of this structure is deeply ambivalent; Kathy seemingly tells her tale to a silent interlocutor, one who will carry her memories with them, even after her own life has completed.[73] That silent interlocutor is similar dramatically to one of her first actual donors, the one who wishes to substitute her memories and identity for his own on the occasion of his death.[74] But unlike that situation, the interlocutor here is never named; Kathy does not tell us to whom she is speaking, whether it be to a silent character, as in Plato's *Republic*; to us as reader, thereby making us characters in the novel's dramatic action; or even to herself, in silent soliloquy.

This latter possibility—that Kathy is recounting her tale to herself—demonstrates the truly dark texture of *Never Let Me Go*. The novel gives no evidence to whom or for what reason the tale may be told, to say nothing of the possible fallibility of Kathy's memory. That she refers in the beginning to experiences had by another, to a "you" who is presumably other than herself, does not suffice to establish the existence of a silent character. Indeed, one wonders, given the exhaustion of her Hailsham colleagues, to whom she could possibly be speaking. At the point in her life when she recalls the story, Kathy is no longer a carer and therefore cannot be thought to be speaking to another donor. And she has not yet herself become a donor, which means she cannot be speaking to her own carer. More than likely, the other—the listener—is simply fictitious, a fabrication of her own mind that makes possible a lived recollection of her inner experiences. Put another way, Ishiguro can be said to have created a figment within Kathy's mind

that makes possible the novel's internal dialogue, but which does not require collapsing the distance between character and audience, a distance necessary for the novel to serve its purpose.[75] However that may be, the fact that the future prompts Kathy's exploration of the past also means that it serves as an end of that exploration, or the end of the very memories it resurrects. Those memories are hers alone, fated to suffer the same tragic end for which she was destined; Kathy's monologue may really be only to and for herself, and once her candle flickers, so to speak, the light will be gone forever.

Thus, within his project of exploring love and friendship against the backdrop of morality, Ishiguro's own metaphors indicate the loss of immorality necessitates the turn to memory as a substitution for hope. Kathy's recollections are themselves the only thing left worth cherishing. That is, in a flattened world with no families, no gods, and no ambition, hope in the future is replaced with a fondness for the past.[76] The novel's argument is indeed its own action; memories of the past rather than promises of the future are what must never be let go. The possibility the clones are models of genuine decency is then seriously jeopardized, and the temptation to read the novel literally, as critics and readers have done, is in a sense justified. And because Ishiguro forces us to look at ourselves, our love, and our friendships in the context of mortality, he also forces his reader to ask if the sentimentality toward the past in the modern world is itself the consequence of our own loss of the future.

Conclusion

By way of a literary looking glass, Kazuo Ishiguro gives us an often hard and surprisingly unsentimental look at contemporary life in *Never Let Me Go*. And yet, in spite of the dark and deeply unsettling themes that permeate the novel, Ishiguro understood the novel to be hopeful, or at least the most hopeful of all his novels.[77] The miasmatic elements that presage the coming of a dark, technological dystopia—so seemingly pregnant with meaning in the contemporary context—were merely the tools necessary for getting

the work of the novel done. That work, the genuine heart of the novel, is an exploration of love and friendship in contemporary society, or more specifically, the possibility of such affections when set "against the backdrop of mortality."[78] The novel's central characters show how such affections—partly familial, partly as friends, and partly as lovers—keep the three bound to one another, and thus make possible the decency that characterizes their lives.[79] Despite their frailties and the condition of their tenebrous fate, the three nonetheless come to a fuller appreciation of what they mean to one another through an engagement with the experiences and memories of their short life. Perhaps not coincidentally, they each also come to some measure of self-knowledge regarding their inextricably intertwined fate.

And yet, the very power of Ishiguro's tale asks of his readers that they too explore their experiences and memories, especially insofar as the novel offers not just a window into the psyche of contemporary society but also a mirror, one whose reflection clarifies at the same time it refracts. Intentionally or not, *Never Let Me Go* casts serious doubt on both the possibility and viability of the very decency Ishiguro indicates as the source of the novel's genuine hope. In other words, whereas Ishiguro suggests that the remarkable fact about the clones is just how decent they are despite the utter bleakness of their lives, we contend that their decency is much more problematic than it appears. Ishiguro saw the innocence and affection of childhood as the conditions necessary for decency today, which perseveres despite our mortality, or the unassailable fact that death is the end for us, no matter our situation. Put less poetically, hope remains possible because deception remains plausible. Humanity retains the possibility of decency because it can deceive itself, at least for a (crucial) time, about the ultimate fate of our individual identities. Ishiguro thus finds a foundation for basic human affections in deception and therefore exacts no small victory against the truth of our unforgiving postmodern condition.

We have argued, however, that the students' decency reveals an unresolved tension within the novel: memories rather than

hope structure the novel's plot, indicating the past rather than the future is the twofold source of meaning and understanding. True, the students are as Ishiguro intended them—genuinely decent at heart, owing almost exclusively to their upbringing. But their unique experience of innocence does not survive them; indeed, as Ms. Emily tells Kathy and Tommy, the Morningdale scandal foreclosed Hailsham's future,[80] and thus also the innocence necessary for future decency. Adapting the metaphor just slightly, the novel seems to show that a society beyond good and evil will sacrifice the conditions necessary for decency not in spite of but precisely because that very decency is at odds with larger cross-currents. To be sure, this had been true all along—the very love and affection Ishiguro connects to the students' decency is also the root of the cloning and donations program in the first place.[81] Love and affection may therefore presuppose innocence, but they do not for that reason maintain a memory of that connection. If anything, the opposite seems true; Ms. Emily is quite open about the extent to which society wished to forget its debt.[82] In more ways than one, Kathy's memories indicate she is the last of her kind. The novel ends where it begins: Kathy's story must be remembered, though memories of her need to be forgotten.

Unfortunately, this literary ambiguity extends even further, raising questions of the text that call for further analysis. For instance, does the novel really show what is truly human about us, in the face of impossible odds? Or is humanity itself no longer truly human, having lost or forgotten something about who we are (or were)? Did the clones then lack some core feature of humanity, thereby showing us our condition or fate without hope or memory? Were there in fact no deferrals? Or did Kathy and Tommy fail when this crucial feature of their humanity was tested and found lacking? In other words, were the clones not actually human, and hence was Hailsham really a praiseworthy sham?[83] Were they unable to prove they were in love because in fact they were not, because love requires a soul neither possessed?[84] Would they have been given a deferral if they had only been able to say they loved

one another? If they were only able to say to one another that they loved each other?[85]

Or were there once deferrals, but no longer? Were those deferrals once part of what Madame recalled when she said: "I saw a new world coming rapidly. More scientific, efficient, yes. More cures for the old sicknesses. Very good. But a harsh, cruel world. And I saw a little girl, her eyes tightly closed, holding to her breast the old kind world, one that she knew in her heart could not remain, and she was holding it and pleading, never to let her go."[86] Were they once part of our world, when society offered the promise of hope, and thus of a future? When men and women could love, but for that very reason could also hate? When they truly had souls, and for that reason could never let them go? In this respect, as in so many others, Ishiguro asks us to wonder about the genuine humanity of the clones, and hence whether most people today would fare any better.

Notes

1. The authors would like to thank Sara Henary, Kim Hurd Hale, Harvey Mansfield, Chaninah Maschler, Tilo Schabert, and the anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments and suggestions.
2. The novel only obliquely describes the scientific context into which the story is set, and that only toward the end. Cf. Kazuo Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go* (New York: Random House, 2005), 261–64.
3. This is the interpretation of at least one influential scholar recently. Cf. Harvey C. Mansfield, "Science and Non-Science in Liberal Education," *The New Atlantis: A Journal of Technology and Society*, vol. 39 (2013), 22–37.
4. Take, for instance, two high-profile reviews: Michiko Kakutani, "Sealed in a World That's Not as It Seems," *New York Times Book Review*, April 4, 2005; and Margaret Atwood, "Kazuo Ishiguro's Creepy Clones," *Slate*, April 1, 2005, http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/books/2005/04/brave_new_world.html.
5. Kazuo Ishiguro, interview by Susannah Hunnewell, "The Art of Fiction No. 196," *The Paris Review*, vol. 184 (2008), https://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/5829/kazuo-ishiguro-the-art-of-fiction-no-196-kazuo-ishiguro. This aspect of Ishiguro's intentions has been mostly overlooked

by scholars, who continue to see and explore only the darker aspects of the novel, especially those that touch on issues in bioethics. The starkness of this difference between author and critic can be seen in a remarkable observation made by Richard Storrow, who notes that as of 2009, the Library of Congress lists *Never Let Me Go* as one of only two works of fiction dealing with human organ donors. Cf. Richard Storrow, "Therapeutic Reproduction and Human Dignity," *Law and Literature*, vol. 21 (2009), 258.

6. Kazuo Ishiguro, interview by Karen Grigsby Bates, *Day by Day*, NPR News, May 4, 2005, https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4629918.
7. Ibid.
8. In addition to winning both the Whitbread and Booker prizes in literature, Ishiguro was also awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2017.
9. In this respect, we part ways with critics who see little to no internal development in the students. Cf. Mark Currie, "Controlling Time: Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*," in Sean Matthews and Sebastian Groes, *Kazuo Ishiguro: Contemporary Critical Perspectives* (London and New York: Continuum, 2010), 100.
10. Cf. Ishiguro, "The Art of Fiction."
11. The theoretical framework from which we derived our approach to this particular novel was developed and elaborated on at length by Seth Benardette. For an explanation and examples of the way(s) in which the framework has been employed, cf. Seth Benardette, *The Argument of the Action: Essay on Greek Poetry and Philosophy*, eds. Ronna Burger and Michael Davis (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).
12. Although Kathy does mention two possible mistakes or errors (Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go*, 8, 13), for the most part she retains an unusual clarity regarding her cherished memories, which she draws attention to after having recounted them (286).
13. Cf. Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go*, 37.
14. Kathy recalls her memories in the context of a conversation with a silent interlocutor. The various possibilities surrounding the interlocutor's identity create certain incongruences that affect the novel's interpretive structure. We consider the most plausible structure in Part III.
15. Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go*, 70.
16. Ibid., 77, 90.
17. Ibid., 3.
18. Ibid., 237.

19. Ibid., 116.
20. Ibid., 3.
21. Ibid., 5.
22. Ibid., 211.
23. Cf. Atwood, "Kazuo Ishiguro's Creepy Clones."
24. Kazuo Ishiguro, interview by Tim Adams, "For Me, England Is a Mythical Place," *The Guardian*, February 19, 2005, https://www.theguardian.com/books/2005/feb/20/fiction.kazuoishiguro.
25. Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go*, 81.
26. Ibid., 77.
27. Ibid., 260.
28. Consider Atwood's note on this point: the novel inverts a commonplace of our world, in which Tommy is shunned for being good at what we praise (sports) while having no interest in what we typically disregard (art). Cf. Atwood, "Kazuo Ishiguro's Creepy Clones."
29. Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go*, 15.
30. Ibid., 28.
31. Ibid., 81.
32. Ibid., 268.
33. Ibid., 108. This suggests that earlier she did not believe the art would, in fact, matter. One wonders if earlier she also doubted the clones' very humanity.
34. Ibid., 110.
35. Ibid., 120.
36. Ibid., 212.
37. Ibid., 117.
38. It is worth mentioning that the entire story is told by Kathy in the late 1990s, which, in our case, might be the time television and the internet became as important as the family in shaping customs and mores. On this point, cf. Anne Whitehead, "Writing with Care: Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*." *Contemporary Literature*, vol. 52 (2011), 65.
39. Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go*, 212.
40. Ibid., 213.
41. Ibid., 191.
42. Ibid., 201.
43. Ibid., 232.
44. Cf. Ishiguro, 232. Ruth later reveals that she too had strong sexual desires.
45. Ibid., 235.
46. Ibid., 3.
47. Ibid., 225–26.

48. Ibid., 258.
49. Ibid., 285.
50. Cf. Ishiguro, "The Art of Fiction."
51. Cf. Film Independent, "Kazuo Ishiguro Discusses His Intention behind Writing the Novel, *Never Let Me Go*," YouTube video. Posted September 2010, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_jCB59pPG7k.
52. Ibid.
53. A rather good example of this is the way the students are said to "complete" rather than die, unceremoniously demonstrating their nihilistic teleology.
54. When recalling her personal history with Ruth, Kathy indicates that her memory only extends back to the time she was five or six. There is no other indications about the students' lives before, including when they were first brought to Hailsham, and where they had been prior. Cf. Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go*, 45.
55. This is a point also emphasized by Whitehead. Cf. Whitehead, 69.
56. Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go*, 269.
57. Regarding Keffers, cf. Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go*, 133. Consider also the rather casual, throwaway mentions of religion on pp. 23 and 215.
58. Cf. Ibid., 275. The one noteworthy exception to this remarkable fact is Tommy, whose rage comes to the fore early in his life (as a result of the teasing he receives from his lack of creativity), and at the end, when he learns the deferrals are not real. Both he and Kathy come to agree that his rage was tied to knowledge that he alone amongst the students possessed. Kathy's explanation is worth quoting at length: "I was thinking … about back then, at Hailsham, when you used to go bonkers like that, and we couldn't understand it. We couldn't understand how you could ever get like that. And I was just having this idea, just a thought really. I was thinking maybe the reason you used to get like that was because at some level you always *knew*."
59. Cf. Ibid., 81, 143–44.
60. Ibid., 81.
61. In a rather pregnant passage worthy of its own interpretive focus, Ishiguro has Madame broach this very question during the conversation with Kathy, Tommy, and Miss Emily. As the hard truth about the deferrals begins to set in, and without quite knowing yet what she's asking, Kathy questions the very purpose of Hailsham, and thus the liberal education it represents: " 'Not just that,' I said quietly. 'Why did we do all of that work in the first place? Why train us, encourage us, make us produce all of that? If we're just going to

give donations anyway, then die, why all those lessons? Why all those books and discussions?'" (259). Madame immediately raises Kathy's intuition to the level of an existential question: "Why Hailsham at all?" And perhaps only in passing, she gives a brief, tantalizing answer: "It's a good question for you to ask."

62. Whitehead makes a similar point but goes further in suggesting their education is actually complicit in making them passive recipients of their fated purpose. Cf. Whitehead, 56–57.
63. In a similar vein, Ishiguro often refers to the effects of globalization on literature, which he terms the "graying" of professional writing. That is, the increasing tendency of authors to write for "universal audiences" leads to the overall loss of local idioms, cultural referents, memories, etc. Loosing this particularity creates a "gray" literary homogeneity without flair, texture, and individual uniqueness. And without these features, literature loses not only its distinctiveness but paradoxically also its access to universality. Cf. Kazuo Ishiguro, interview by Linda Richards, *January Magazine*, October 2000, https://www.januarymagazine.com/profiles/ishiguro.html.
64. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Prologue, trans. Common (New York: Russell & Russell), section 5.
65. Cf. Ishiguro, "The Art of Fiction."
66. Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go*, 261.
67. Ibid., 268.
68. On this score, it is useful to compare Ishiguro's thoughts on education, deception, and innocence with at least one of his intellectual inspirations: Plato's *Republic*, 377a3–5.
69. Cf. Film Independent. Along these same lines, consider also Tommy's rather haunting words on this score: "I keep thinking about this river somewhere, with the water moving really fast. And these two people in the water, trying to hold onto each other, holding on as hard as they can, but in the end it's just too much. The current's too strong. They've got to let go, drift apart. That's how I think it is with us. It's a shame, Kath, because we've loved each other all our lives. But in the end, we can't stay together forever" (Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go*, 282).
70. Ishiguro, *Never Met Me Go*, 244.
71. Cf. Film Independent.
72. In this regard, *Never Let Me Go* has a similar dramatic structure to Plato's *Phaedo*, a dialogue with which Ishiguro has expressed some familiarity (cf. Ishiguro, "The Art of Fiction"). For an indication of what this means, cf. Eva Brann, Peter Kalkavage, and Eric Salem,

"Introduction," in Plato's *Phaedo*, trans. Brann, Kalkavage, and Salem (Newburyport, MA: Focus Philosophical Library), 9.

73. The best evidence Kathy is all the while speaking to an unnamed counterpart is in Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go*, 13, where she seems to indicate her immediate audience is someone who, at the very least, was also themselves a "student." For reasons we indicate later, however, our reading of the novel suggests this personification is a figment of Kathy's imagination.
74. Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go*, 5.
75. For the novel to be a looking glass, the audience cannot be made into a character in the novel. There would then be nothing to analogize to, or, the novel could not be thought to be about the audience, or about "our" situation of love and friendship set against the backdrop of mortality.
76. In this regard, future scholarship would do well to account for the influences of Proust, another of Ishiguro's acknowledged inspirations.
77. Ishiguro, "The Art of Fiction."
78. Ibid.
79. Ibid.
80. Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go*, 264.
81. Ibid., 263.
82. Ibid., 263, 265. The novel brings love and friendship into harmony only in memory; innocence and hope are united only in the mask of storytelling, that is, only in an act of deception.
83. Obviously, most scholars come to quite different interpretations about the status of the clones, and thus what Ishiguro was attempting to say about them. Cf. Storrow, 267–69.
84. Cf. Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go*, 253. Narrating the story through Kathy's internal monologue allows these questions to develop in relation to one another, as each presupposes the concept of memory. If not quite the essence of humanity exactly, memory is nonetheless the means, for Ishiguro, by which that essence is preserved.
85. Note that the text never gives an example of Kathy and Tommy explicitly saying to one another that they love the other. Consider Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go*, 252; cf. 282.
86. Ibid., 272.