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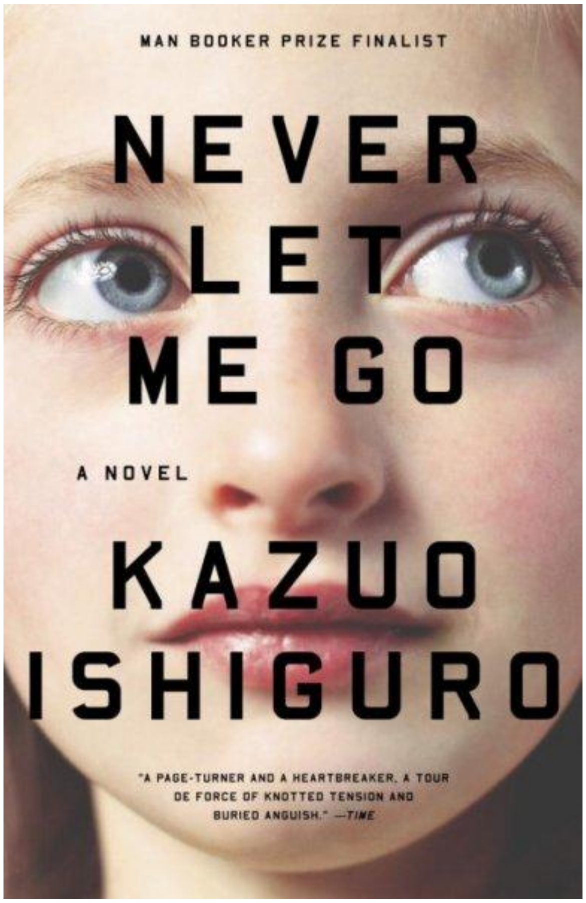
MAN BOOKER PRIZE FINALIST
NEVER LET ME GO
A NOVEL
KAZUO ISHIGURO
"A PAGE-TURNER AND A HEARTBREAKER, A TOUR DE FORCE OF KNOTTED TENSION AND BURIED ANGUISH." —TIME

A thirty-one-year-old woman named Kathy narrates this haunting tale, drawing the reader gradually into her recollections of her life at Hailsham, the idyllic boarding school where she grew up. She and her best friends, Ruth and Tommy, were encouraged by their teachers to create works of art from an early age, to collect cherished objects, and to take good care of their health. There are no parents in their world, only a handful of teachers, some of whom seem to be deeply troubled by their position at the school. Kathy's friend Ruth is bossy and manipulative, while Kathy herself is gentle and self-contained. Both are drawn to Tommy, a boy given to explosive fits of temper. What is revealed, as Kathy's reminiscences accumulate, is a life of preparation for a special role in a world that has begun to exploit the medical possibilities of genetic technology.

About the Author

Kazuo Ishiguro was born in Nagasaki, Japan, on 8 November 1954. He came to Britain in 1960 when his father began research at the National Institute of Oceanography, and was educated at a grammar school for boys in Surrey. Afterwards he worked as a grouse-beater for the Queen Mother at Balmoral before enrolling at the University of Kent, Canterbury, where he read English and Philosophy. He was also employed as a community worker in Glasgow (1976), and after graduating worked as a residential social worker in London.

He studied Creative Writing at the University of East Anglia, a member of the postgraduate course run by Malcolm Bradbury, where he met Angela Carter, who became an early mentor. He has been writing full-time since 1982. In 1983, shortly after the publication of his first novel, Kazuo Ishiguro was nominated by *Granta* magazine as one of the 20 'Best of Young British Writers'. He was also included in the same promotion when it was repeated in 1993.

In 1981 three of his short stories were published in *Introductions 7: Stories by New Writers*. His first novel, *A Pale View of Hills* (1982), narrated by a Japanese widow living in England, draws on the destruction and rehabilitation of Nagasaki. It was awarded the Winifred Holtby Memorial Prize. It was followed by *An Artist of the Floating World* (1986), which explores Japanese national attitudes to the Second World War through the story of former artist Masuji Ono, haunted by his military past. It won the Whitbread Book of the Year award and was shortlisted for the Booker Prize for Fiction.

Ishiguro's third novel, *The Remains of the Day* (1989), is set in post-war England, and tells the story of an elderly English butler confronting disillusionment as he recalls a life spent in service, memories viewed against a backdrop of war and the rise of Fascism. It was awarded the Booker Prize for Fiction, and was subsequently made into an award-winning film starring Anthony Hopkins and Emma Thompson. His next novel, *The Unconsoled* (1995), a formally inventive narrative in which a concert pianist struggles to fulfill a schedule of rehearsals and performances in an unnamed European city, was awarded the Cheltenham Prize in 1995.

Kazuo Ishiguro's fifth novel, *When We Were Orphans* (2000), is set in Shanghai in the early part of the twentieth century, and is narrated by a private detective investigating his parents' disappearance in the city some 20 years earlier. It was shortlisted for both the Whitbread Novel Award and the Booker Prize for Fiction.

He has also written two original screenplays for Channel 4 Television, *A Profile of Arthur J. Mason*, broadcast in 1984, and *The Gourmet*, broadcast in 1986. He was awarded the OBE in 1995 for services to literature and is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature. He was awarded the Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres by the French government in 1998. His work has been translated into over 30 languages.

Kazuo Ishiguro lives in London with his wife and daughter. His latest novel is *Never Let Me Go* (2005) and he has also completed his first full-length screenplay for *The Saddest Music in the World*, a melodrama set in the 1930s, starring Isabella Rossellini.

Reviews

The Guardian
The children of Hailsham House are afraid of the woods. In the days when their guardians were much stricter, the school myth goes, a boy's body was found there with its hands and feet removed. Sometimes that dark, threatening fringe of trees can cast such a shadow over the whole school that a pupil who has offended the others might be hauled out of bed in the middle of the night, forced to a window, and made to stare out at it.

When not applying peer pressure in this curious way, Hailsham children seem to have a nice life. The school places considerable emphasis on self-expression through art and, especially, on staying healthy. There are frequent, exhaustive medical check-ups. Smoking is a real crime, because of the way it can damage your body. Yet despite the care lavished on them, their world has a puzzlingly second-hand feel. Everything they own is junk. Teaching aids are rudimentary. Sometimes you get the feeling they're being taken care of on the cheap.

In fact, they are; and their fear of the woods reflects, in a distorted but fundamentally accurate way, their fate. They're organ donors, cloned to be broken up piecemeal for spares. The purpose of Hailsham is to prepare them for their future - to help instal the powerful mechanisms of self-repression and denial that will keep them steady and dependable from one donation to the next.

Never Let Me Go is the story of Kathy and Tommy and Ruth, and of the love-triangle they begin at Hailsham. Ruth is the controlling one, Tommy is the one who used to find it hard to keep his temper: they hope that love will save them. They've heard that love - or art, or both - will get you a deferral. Kathy - well, Kathy is a carer by nature as well as profession: she watches her friends break themselves against the inevitable, but never lets them go. After Hailsham, they grow from puzzled children to confused young adults. They live in a prolonged limbo, waiting for the call to donate. They're free to wander. They write essays, continue with their artwork, learn to drive, roam Britain looking for their "possibles" - the real human beings they might have been cloned from.

Their lack of understanding of the world is funny and touching. They stare into the window of an ordinary office, fascinated by the clean modern space. "It's their lunch break," Tommy says reverently of the office workers, "but they don't go out. Don't blame them either." The clones look in at the society that made them, failing to understand its simplest social and economic structures.

As readers we're in a similar position. What Kathy doesn't know, we have to guess at. This sometimes excruciating curiosity propels us along; meanwhile, Ishiguro's careful, understated narration focuses on the way young people make a life out of whatever is on offer. Nothing is more heartbreaking than received wisdom, and Hailsham students, carefully sheltered not just from any real understanding of their fate but from any real understanding of the world in which it will be acted out, have nothing else to go on.

Their sense of suspension, in a present where they neither make nor understand the rules, is pervasive. Childishly snobbish about the proprieties, they're as puzzled by what's proper as anyone else. Small fashions of behaviour come and go. Far into adulthood Kathy, Tommy and Ruth dissimulate and bicker and set teenage behavioural traps for one another.

Inevitably, it being set in an alternate Britain, in an alternate 1990s, this novel will be described as science fiction. But there's no science here. How are the clones kept alive once they've begun "donating"? Who can afford this kind of medicine, in a society the author depicts as no richer, indeed perhaps less rich, than ours?

Ishiguro's refusal to consider questions such as these forces his story into a pure rhetorical space. You read by pawing constantly at the text, turning it over in your hands, looking for some vital seam or row of rivets. Precisely how naturalistic is it supposed to be? Precisely how parabolic? Receiving no answer, you're thrown back on the obvious explanation: the novel is about its own moral position on cloning. But that position has been visited before (one thinks immediately of Michael Marshall Smith's savage 1996 offering, *Spares*). There's nothing new here; there's nothing all that startling; and there certainly isn't anything to argue with. Who on earth could be "for" the exploitation of human beings in this way?

Ishiguro's contribution to the cloning debate turns out to be sleight of hand, eye candy, cover for his pathological need to be subtle. 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. It's about knowing that while you must keep calm, keeping calm won't change a thing. Beneath Kathy's flattened and lukewarm emotional landscape lies the pure volcanic turmoil, the unexpressed yet perfectly articulated, perfectly molten rage of the orphan.

By the final, grotesque revelation of what really lies ahead for Kathy and Tommy and Ruth, readers may find themselves full of an energy they don't understand and aren't quite sure how to deploy. *Never Let Me Go* makes you want to have sex, take drugs, run a marathon, dance - anything to convince yourself that you're more alive, more determined, more conscious, more dangerous than any of these characters.

This extraordinary and, in the end, rather frighteningly clever novel isn't about cloning, or being a clone, at all. It's about why we don't explode, why we don't just wake up one day and go sobbing and crying down the street, kicking everything to pieces out of the raw, infuriating, completely personal sense of our lives never having been what they could have been.

Salon

One of the things you figure out pretty quickly about Kathy H., the narrator of Kazuo Ishiguro's devastating new novel, "*Never Let Me Go*," is that that's really her name. It's not an arch literary device, and Kathy isn't hiding anything. Like the other students at Hailsham, a peculiar boarding school somewhere in the English countryside -- Kathy doesn't quite know where -- she just has a first name followed by an initial. Once you've got that fact in your grasp, the wrenching and suspenseful skein of "*Never Let Me Go*" begins to unfold before you. It's a shame to give much of this novel away, but it's even more of a shame not to entice you into reading it.

Ishiguro, the Japanese-born British author of "*The Remains of the Day*," "*An Artist of the Floating World*" and several other novels, has a reputation as a difficult and serious writer that isn't doing him any favors. True, his books aren't exactly lighter-than-air confections and his endings tend toward the mercilessly downbeat, but he's one of the few literary authors with the storytelling chops of popular fiction. (One also thinks of Margaret Atwood, Denis Johnson and Robert Stone.) "*Never Let Me Go*" is a work of meticulous, pitch-perfect writing, but it's also an obsessive page turner that kept me up almost till dawn and left me feeling emotionally shattered.

Kathy is now an adult of 31, recalling her Hailsham years and her two best friends, Ruth and Tommy, who were the other two legs of an unstable teenage romantic triangle. These characters are so convincingly rendered, and the incestuous, quasi-Gothic atmosphere of Hailsham so lovingly captured, that "Never Let Me Go" would still make a compelling read if that was all there was to the story. Ruth is the domineering alpha-female type; she recruits Kathy to a secret society when they're about 8 -- and later expels her -- and always has to have the last word on every subject, from chess to sex to the fiction of George Eliot (even if she can't play chess, is a virgin, and hasn't read "Daniel Deronda").

Tommy is an entirely different matter. He's the school's star athlete, but is so hot-tempered and childlike in manner that the other boys torment him until Ruth and Kathy adopt him and groom him to be more socially presentable. Most of "Never Let Me Go" tracks the evolving relationship of these three as they move through Hailsham and then out into the world, but their teenage passions and enthusiasms are increasingly shadowed by the larger question of their destiny -- theirs and those of every other Hailsham student.

The New Yorker
Kazuo Ishiguro’s “*Never Let Me Go*” (Knopf; $24) is a novel about a young woman named Kathy H., and her friendships with two schoolmates, Ruth and Tommy. The triangle is a standard one: Kathy is attracted to Tommy; Tommy gets involved with Ruth, who is also Kathy’s best friend; Ruth knows that Tommy is really in love with Kathy; Kathy gets Tommy in the end, although they both realize that it is too late, and that they have missed their best years. Their lives are short; they know that they are doomed. So the small betrayal leaves an enormous wound. As is customary with Ishiguro, the narrator, Kathy, is ingenuous but keenly desirous of telling us how it was, the prose feels self-consciously stilted and banal, and the psychology is not deep. The central premise in this book is basically the same as that in the book that made Ishiguro famous, “The Remains of the Day” (1989): even when happiness is standing right in front of you, it’s very hard to grasp. Probably you already suspected that.

It is always a puzzle to know where Ishiguro’s true subject lies. The emotional situation in his novels is spelled out in meticulous, sometimes comically tedious detail, and the focus is entirely on the narrator’s struggles to achieve clarity and contentment in an uncoöperative world. Ishiguro is expert at getting readers choked up over these struggles—even over the ludicrous self-deceptions of the butler in “*The Remains of the Day*,” the hopeless Stevens. But he is also expert at arranging his figurines against shadowy and suggestive backdrops: post-fascist Japan, in “*A Pale View of Hills*” (1982) and “*An Artist of the Floating World*” (1986); an unidentified Central European town undergoing an indeterminate cultural crisis, in “*The Unconsoled*” (1995); Shanghai at the time of the Sino-Japanese War, in “*When We Were Orphans*” (2000). It seems important to an understanding of “*The Remains of the Day”* that the man for whom Stevens once worked, Lord Darlington, was a Fascist sympathizer. But it is not particularly important to Stevens, who has no political wisdom, and who is, in any case, preoccupied with enforcing his own regimen of emotional repression.

The shadowy backdrop in “*Never Let Me Go*” is genetic engineering and associated technologies. Kathy tells her story in (the novel says) “England, late 1990s,” so the book seems to belong to the same genre as Philip Roth’s “*The Plot Against America*,” counterfactual historical fiction. Conditions in this brave-new-world Britain, and exactly how Kathy and her friends fit into them, are all spooky authorial surprises, and (as is the case with most things) when you’re reading the novel it is best to begin without too many prior assumptions. Kathy is a “carer”; her patients give “donations,” occasionally as many as four. Inch by inch, the curtain is lifted, and we see what these terms mean and why the world is this way. The strangeness, like the strangeness in Ishiguro’s most imaginative novel, “*The Unconsoled*,” is ingeniously evoked—by means of literal-minded accounts of things that don’t quite add up—and teasing out the hidden story is the main pleasure of the book. In “*The Unconsoled*,” the story is never fully sorted out; at the end, we remain in the hall of mirrors. Unfortunately, “*Never Let Me Go*” includes a carefully staged revelation scene, in which everything is, somewhat portentously, explained. It’s a little Hollywood, and the elucidation is purchased at too high a price. The scene pushes the novel over into science fiction, and this is not, at heart, where it seems to want to be.

But where the novel does want to be is even less obvious than usual. Ishiguro is praised for his precision and his psychological acuity, and is compared to writers like Henry James and Jane Austen. In fact, he says that he dislikes James and Austen. He also says that he has never been able to get beyond the first volume of Proust; it’s too dull. On the other hand, although his novels are self-consciously “set,” they are not historical novels, and the facts don’t seem to interest him very much. Ishiguro was born in Japan, but his parents moved to England with him when he was five. He cannot speak Japanese very well; he has not expressed any particular admiration for Japan or its culture; and he set his first two novels in Japan without revisiting the country. He appears to have done some research for “*When We Were Orphans*”; but in “*Never Let Me Go*,” even after the secrets have been revealed, there are still a lot of holes in the story. This is not because things are meant to be opaque; it’s because, apparently, genetic science isn’t what the book is about.

Ishiguro does not write like a realist. He writes like someone impersonating a realist, and this is one reason for the peculiar fascination of his books. He is actually a fabulist and an ironist, and the writers he most resembles, under the genteel mask, are Kafka and Beckett. This is why the prose is always slightly overspecific. It’s realism from an instruction manual: literal, thorough, determined to leave nothing out. But it has a vaguely irreal effect.

Beckett’s subject, too, was happiness, and, though Ishiguro’s characters seem so earnestly respectable, they have the same mad, compulsive, quasi-mechanical qualities that Beckett’s do. There is something animatronic about them. They are simulators of humanness, figures engineered to pass as “real.” What it means to be really human is always a problem for them. Can you just copy other people? Would that take care of it? “I have of course already devoted much time to developing my bantering skills,” Stevens explains at the end of “The Remains of the Day,” “but it is possible I have never previously approached the task with the commitment I might have done.” Genetic engineering—the idea of human beings as products programmed to pick up “personhood skills”—is a perfect vehicle for a writer like Ishiguro.

For reasons that belong to the story’s secret, the characters in “*Never Let Me Go*” all feel obliged to create works of art. Tommy is slower to develop creatively than his schoolmates, and when he starts to make drawings they are pictures of animals. He finally shows them to Kathy:

> I was taken aback at how densely detailed each one was. In fact, it took a moment to see they were animals at all. The first impression was like one you’d get if you took the back off a radio set: tiny canals, weaving tendons, miniature screws and wheels were all drawn with obsessive precision, and only when you held the page away could you see it was some kind of armadillo, say, or a bird. . . . For all their busy, metallic features, there was something sweet, even vulnerable about each of them.

The passage almost certainly derives from Henri Bergson’s famous definition of comedy: the mechanical encrusted on the living. The creatures Tommy draws are imagined versions of himself. They are funny and pathetic at the same time, because people behaving like wind-up toys, even when they can’t help it, even when it makes them fall down manholes, make us laugh. This is why Beckett is a comic writer, and it’s why Ishiguro’s novels, though filled with incidents of poignancy and disappointment and cruelty, are also, weirdly, funny. His sad characters can’t help themselves.

Literary Criticism

Taking off into the realm of metaphor: Kazuo Ishiguro's Never Let Me Go

In the quarter century since he published his first novel, *A Pale View of Hills* (1982), Kazuo Ishiguro has been engaged in an increasingly conflicted relationship with his audience. Unlike many other writers who distrust and avoid interviews, Ishiguro has been willing to submit to a surprisingly large number for a writer whose literary output has been restricted to six novels. Such willingness to discuss his novels may suggest that he himself senses the need to confront (mis)readings of his work, especially after the appearance of *The Remains of the Day* (1989), which propelled him onto the literary scene. *Remains* earned him the coveted Booker Prize, along with accolades from the committee's chair, David Lodge, who spoke of it as a "cunningly structured and beautifully paced performance" (Wroe). The novel has achieved further power as a cultural icon with the popular and critical success of the film adaptation by the renowned team of Ismail Merchant and James Ivory, whose casting of Anthony Hopkins as the butler Stevens and Emma Thompson as the housekeeper Miss Keaton was no small factor in the film's success. The filming of the novel, however, as yet another costume drama in the Merchant/Ivory repertoire, convinced Ishiguro all the more that his novel was being misread as the celebration of an England he thought he was satirizing, an England that never existed, or existed only as a figment of the literary imagination and the tourist board's marketing programs to advance a Thatcherite "heritage industry."

It is in the interviews regarding *The Remains of the Day* that we begin to see the surfacing of Ishiguro's growing awareness of a disconnect between the novel he thought he had written and the novel his audience was (mis)reading. In one interview, for example, he comments,

> With *The Remains of the Day* it's like a pastiche where I've tried to create a mythical England. Sometimes it looks like or has the tone of a very English book, but actually I'm using that as a kind of shock tactic of this relatively young person with a Japanese name and a Japanese face who produces this extra-English or, perhaps I should say, a super-English novel. It's more English than English. (Vorda and Herzinger, 139, emphasis in original)

As these frequently cited comments make clear, Ishiguro constructs this novel with the awareness of a tension between the apparent Japanese identity of its author and the pastiche of English-ness the text is performing. Yet another aspect of this sense of a disconnect between the writer and his readers probably includes the rather small and selected readership of his first two novels, *A Pale View of Hills*, and the novel that followed it four years later, *An Artist of the Floating World* (1986). Because these two novels had led to the shelf-labeling of Ishiguro as a "writer of Japanese novels," the first having Japanese central characters in an English setting, the second having both Japanese characters and setting, Ishiguro's loyal readers certainly could not have been prepared for *The Remains of the Day*. In any case, Ishiguro is revealing in the passage cited above his clear sense that author awareness of reader expectations plays into the process of narration, if the term narration may include not only the production of narrative but also the sense of how the narrative might be received by its reader or listener.

In this way, Ishiguro records his awareness of how reader expectation can function as a major element in the construction of narrative. He is in a sense putting his readers on notice they can expect a high degree of edginess in his conception of narrative. Like the recent film *Gosford Park*, Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* reveals its postmodern orientation by evoking, and satirizing, a nostalgia for the culturally conservative myth of an England of "great houses," whose existence rested heavily on the backs of a loyal, or submissive, working class, re-presented by Merchant/Ivory without a smidgeon of irony. Similarly, the film misreads Ishiguro's novel as a minor tragedy of unrequited love between Miss Kenton and Stevens by allowing the butler to read into the voice-over the Kenton letter which even the Stevens of the novel suspects he may be overreading. Once the tacky boardwalk lights have gone on at the end of the story and Stevens has had his "good cry," he will condemn himself to solitary confinement in "the remains of the day," left to one who has "worked and slaved" for Darlington. Like the book Miss Kenton extracted from his hands after he fell asleep reading it in his inner sanctum, the story Stevens has been "telling" is also "simply a sentimental love story," a specimen of the deja lu, the "already read," (6) that he is rewriting as he narrates this novel.

In these ways, *The Remains of the Day* serves as a model for misreading, especially relevant to Ishiguro's latest novel *Never Let Me Go*, in yet another, and perhaps more telling, fashion. In one respect, his comments on the misapprehension of his intent in Remains strikes even closer to his narrative methods in all of his novels, before and after his best-known. Clearly, Ishiguro is attracted to the comforting deceptions of the familiar, a familiarity that can turn itself inside out to reveal a radical otherness. Although the focus in the interview earlier cited may be Remains, his comments on his method in the first two novels, and by extrapolation his later fiction as well, are particularly useful. After arguing for the "England" of Remains as more "myth" than history, he continues,

> I'd have to say that my overall aim wasn't confined to British lessons for British people because it's a mythical landscape which is supposed to work at a metaphorical level. *The Remains of the Day* is a kind of parable. Yet this is a problem I've always had as a writer throughout my three books. I think if there is something I really struggle with as a writer, whenever I try to make a particular setting actually take off into the realm of metaphors so that people don't think it is just about Japan or Britain, but also give it that sort of ability to take off as metaphor and parable. Because ultimately I'm not that interested in saying things about specific societies; and, if I were, I think I'd prefer to do it through nonfiction. (Vorda and Herzinger 140)

Accordingly, in *Remains*, for example, Ishiguro is less interested in the accuracy of his depiction of the lost culture of English country gentry than in the metaphor of Stevens as the mythically loyal servant, bent on restaging for his audience the way in which he aspires to achieve "dignity"--one of his favorite words--by "mastering," as he would see it, the grief for a dying father or the distraction of Miss Kenton's implicitly pleading with him to save her from a loveless marriage. In this way, *Remains* offers the best example of how Ishiguro has established the poet's struggle to find the most potentially rich metaphor to explore in his novels.

Ishiguro's insistence that he is less "interested in saying things about specific societies" than in "try[ing] to make a particular setting actually take off into the realm of metaphors" is particularly useful in contesting the tendency of the early readers of *Never Let Me Go* to ground its "take-off." Just as many readers of *When We Were Orphans* were led by book reviewers to see him exploiting the genre of detective fiction to make statements about Western imperialism in East Asia, so too the earliest readers of *Never Let Me Go* have been encouraged to read this latest novel as an expression of Ishiguro's trying his hand at speculative fiction, perhaps even science fiction. Thus, rather than being an attempt to bring to his reader's attention the dangers of yet another perversion of technology-as Margaret Atwood focuses on the evils of genetic engineering in her *Oryx and Crake*-Ishiguro, I would argue, seeks to draw his reader into the metaphor implicit in the situation of his narrator and viewpoint character Kathy H.

Because some early readers, especially book reviewers, have (mis)read *Never Let Me Go* as Ishiguro's attempt to use the detective fiction structure again, they have focused attention on the novel's "revelations." In the process they have encouraged readers not to share those revelations with the uninitiated in one of those conspiracies of readers/viewers evident a decade ago when audiences of *The Crying Game* conspired not to reveal the sexual identity of a leading figure in the film. Lev Grossman, for example, feels it necessary to sound what he terms a "spoiler alert." Jennings also finds it appropriate to speak directly to his readers: "Stop reading now if you don't want to know." These infantilizing efforts to protect the reader and not to "give away the ending" can only continue the misreading of a narrative aimed at exploring the metaphor of a setting, or situation. In this way, early misreadings of *Never Let Me Go* turn the poetry of a sensitive, imaginative exploration of a situation into a detective story, less a whodunit than a story of what's-being-done to Kathy H. and other students at Hailsham.

If the first three novels provide the paradigm of re/constructing Japan and England as mythical worlds for their metaphorical implications, *Never Let Me Go* stresses that the "England" of Kathy H. is clearly an "alternative world." Almost immediately, readers experience a sense of puzzlement in entering Kathy's world--if, of course, they have been fortunate enough to resist dust-jacket blurbs, book reviews, and word-of-mouth comments. The narrative generates the sense of Kathy H.'s world as being different in ways similar to the worlds of speculative fiction, and certainly science fiction, and yet Kathy H.'s world is already the past for readers in 2005, and a quite recent past at that. Because *Never Let Me Go* offers a reprise of the earlier novels in which first-person narrators are recalling childhood, this sense of an "alternative world" is produced by the reader's own experience of the past as a painfully familiar but now alien world for which one's citizenship has been revoked. Because of her experiences since the beginning of the so-called revelations in her adolescence, Kathy H. can be expected to feel a sharp sense of alienation and isolation, given that so many whom she knew and loved are no longer living. Like Melville's Ishmael, she might quote the messenger in Job who reports, "And I only am escaped alone to tell thee," although Kathy has hardly "escaped."

The pastiche of the detective story, then, may be appropriate to this first-person narrator's memoir of her early life, as it is coming to an end. Like *The Remains of the Day*, this latest novel is an exploration of what Ishiguro in his interview with Graham Swift calls the "terribly treacherous terrain" of memory. This memoir can be read as the effort of a young woman to make sense of her life as a series of confrontations with a very special but not ultimately unique experience. Hailsham, as readers discover by the end of Kathy H.'s narrative, was part of a system of producing clones whose body parts could be harvested, like so much fruit, until the donor has "completed." Uppermost in her narrative, and thus obviously in the novel itself, is not so much her sense of horror at the inhumanity of this farming of transplantable organs, much less the need to sound the alarm against such cruel exploitation, but Ishiguro's exploration of what it would have felt like to be the thirty-one-year old Kathy H., who is a "carer," providing psychological support to friends such as Ruth and Tommy who were also students at Hailsham.

On the face of it, *Never Let Me Go* seems to be reprising the pastiche of the detective story simply to draw in its readers with the tantalizing promise of revelations to come. In this context, Christopher Banks of *When We Were Orphans* is a forerunner for Kathy H. Just as Christopher postponed until early middle age the "big case" for which all of his professional work seems to have been preparing him, and even then it took only an interview with "Uncle" Philip to expose what he should have already known from childhood, Kathy H. seems preoccupied in her "memoir" with how long it took for her to figure out the true nature of Hailsham and the "future" it promised, or threatened, for its students. Thus it becomes psychologically appropriate for her to take on the function of a detective to trace the development of her consciousness in her early life. In one sense, her roles as narrator, memoirist, and detective are closely interrelated, for not only is narrative essentially a "detective story," as Margaret Atwood reminds us, but memoir is inevitably a kind of detective work.

As narrator, Kathy H. almost immediately establishes a framework for her narrative by describing one of her recent donors who apparently initiated the impulse to tell this story. She tells us,

> He'd just come through his third donation, and it hadn't gone well, and he must have known he wasn't going to make it.... What he wanted was not just to hear about Hailsham, but to remember Hailsham, just like it had been his own childhood. He knew he was close to completing and so that's what he was doing: getting me to describe things to him, so they'd

> really sink in, so that maybe during those sleepless nights,
> with the drugs and the pain and the exhaustion, the line would
> blur between what were my memories and what were his.
> That was when I first understood, really understood, just how
> lucky we'd been-Tommy, Ruth, me, all the rest of us. (5-6)

This foregrounding of the narrative framework makes a postmodern gesture of reminding the reader that what follows is a story within a story, one that Kathy is impelled to tell and may be grasping at the apparently flimsiest justification for doing so, in much the same way that Stevens constructs a less experienced "person in service" to function as his listener/reader and to justify his narrative of "what really happened" at Darlington Hall, as opposed to what the tabloids apparently have published about his former master.

Additionally, Kathy H. as narrator assumes her audience's familiarity with the jargon she immediately intrudes on her memoir-terms such as "carer," "donor," "donations," and "completing." That assumption further alienates readers struggling to orient themselves in this cloistered world with so few markers for the outside world. A case in point is the Hailsham term "completing," as in the passage cited above, describing the donor who provides the rationale for this memoir. Told that this man "knew he was close to completing", the reader may be left to wonder what "completing" represents, i.e., whether he has completed the customary four donations and can now go on with his life as an ex-donor, or whether he is scheduled to die during the fourth donation, if, say, the fourth donation is his heart. Although the setting for this narrative is "England, late 1990s," there is a chilling sense of a futuristic dimension. This sense becomes more pronounced when readers do a bit of arithmetic and discover that this enterprise of raising children to serve as an orchard of organs to be harvested when they come of age must have started in the middle of the past century. The chilling experience for the reader occurs not so much within a framework such as Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* but, as Caryn James has suggested, within an "Orwellian" framework such as *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. The jargon of conscripting recruits for live donations of organs masks a cruel system of apparently conditioning children to look forward one day to "volunteering" their organs to strangers without questioning the discourse of this Final Solution to the scarcity of transplantable kidneys, livers, and lungs, as well as even hearts presumably. The very "exclusivity" of Hailsham, which is legitimating the narrative--"I don't know if you had 'collections' where you were" (38), Kathy tells her audience--contributes measurably to the dominant sense of isolation. Hailsham seems to exclude not merely ordinary students, but also the larger world of contemporary English society beyond its grounds.

As a writer of what purports to be a memoir, Kathy duplicates the sense of doubleness, or duplicity, inherent in that form. Obviously, she knows what has happened yet moves her audience back to Hailsham and to an unspecified age, perhaps the so-called age of reason of seven or so, when she began to be more aware of her world and, what's more important, started to ask questions. Very quickly she becomes the child as detective, searching for the clues to penetrate the mysteries of the adult world--in this case, the world of the "guardians," or teachers, at Hailsham. From the outset, readers note that there are no references to the families of these students, and it is probably not possible for readers to suppress awareness that the Ishiguro novel just before *Never Let Me Go* was entitled *When We Were Orphans (*2000). Because the adult world almost universally cordons off certain kinds of knowledge from the young-knowledge being power, as many recognized centuries before Michel Foucault theorized that principle-bright and inquisitive children automatically enact the role of detectives. We recall, for example, the narrator in James Joyce's early masterpiece "The Sisters" as that boy struggles to make himself as unobtrusive as possible when adults are speaking, because he has figured out that if they forget about his presence they are likely to say, or at least imply, more than they mean to, dropping clues for the child-detective to assemble and analyze.

The adult Kathy, who is telling this story, thus constructs herself as child detective at Hailsham. In this way, she confirms that in the struggle to figure out the adult world the child joins the memoir writer as a detective/ storyteller working through the "clues," leading to those desired revelations the child/detective/storyteller might be seeking. The Kathy who informs Tommy toward the end of this narrative that she has found Madame--"'It was just like detective stuff'" (243)--is the adult Kathy who will begin to tell the story with her early childhood. The trope of memoir also eases the anxiety that storytelling is a fiction, or fabrication, a tall tale that's "having on" the reader. Then too, as Peter Brooks reminds us, narrative is always a "repetition," a "working through," of events that are always already the past, a past whose meaning the storyteller is attempting to understand by deftly reading the "clues." And also as Brooks theorizes, the storyteller's narration is analogous to the analysand's, energized by a kind of repetition compulsion, a return to/of childhood and its ghosts which need to be exorcized. Once the past has been successfully invoked, the storyteller, like the analysand, is prepared for that "transference," that moment of transformation in which the past is acknowledged--and shed--as the past, opening the door into the future.

One focus of Kathy's detective work is the enigma of Madame's visits. Ostensibly, Madame makes periodic visits to collect the best artwork of Hailsham's students for her presumptive Gallery. Therein lie the questions. Kathy asks Tommy, as though he were her Dr. Watson, "What is this gallery? Why should she have a gallery of things done by us?" and goes on to explore answers to her own questions through Tommy's agency as her audience: "It's got something to do with what Miss Lucy said to you. About us, about how one day we'll start giving donations. I don't know, but I've had this feeling for some time now, that's all linked in, though I can't figure out how" (31). And Kathy is not alone in her detective work. When Ruth advances the theory that Madame may be more frightened of the students than they are of her, a small group organizes the experiment of jumping out of the bushes to surprise Madame on another of her unannounced, although never entirely unexpected, visits: "Ruth had been right: Madame was afraid of us...in the same way someone might be afraid of spiders" (35). Laura asks, "If she doesn't like us, why does she want our work?" (35). Not surprisingly, the clarification of this mystery will be left until the end of the story, when the narrative will follow the convention of dystopian fiction (11) and allow Kathy and Tommy to have their meeting with the Powers That Be.

Much of this novel's success or failure for its readers depends, therefore, on the crucial role of Kathy as narrator. We might begin by noting that the reviews of this novel and Kathy's role in its narration have not been universally positive. Jay Jennings, for example, writes that although a "naive and unreliable narrator can be a powerful engine for a novel," in his opinion, "Kathy is simply bland and inept." Because "she remains obtuse about the nuances" of the roles of Hailsham students, he thinks "she fails drastically as a storyteller." Jennings ends his review by commenting on "how we feel through much of this strange and unsatisfying novel--on the outside, neither hearing nor getting the joke, and not laughing ourselves." Ishiguro himself may have anticipated just such a negative reading of his novel when he indicated it was never his intent to write a mystery novel with the true nature of the children as its revelation: "If information does trickle gradually [Ishiguro indicates] it's because the children themselves do not realise who they are. The reader is on a sort of parallel journey, but it is not a mystery story. My focus is elsewhere" (qtd. by Wroe). If as Michiko Kakutani asserts, "The truth of what is going on at Hailsham dawns on the reader slowly," that slow dawning is the product of Kathy's difficulty in learning "the truth of what is going on" as well as her reluctance to move this memoir toward that gruesome truth. Anticipating a point whose exploration has to be deferred, it might be said that Ishiguro masterfully develops the very human difficulty of not so much figuring out the truth as learning how to live with it.

As narrator, Kathy provides ample "clues" (12) so that most readers will not be surprised by Miss Lucy's revelation on p. 81 "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." Clearly enough, Kathy has provided the clues for perceptive readers to figure out that the "donations" the students will one day begin to make are scarcely in the form of checks to their favorite charities. Through Kathy, the narrative manages the disclosure of information to forestall surprise--conventionally associated with inferior narrative--and to replace it with the suspense by which readers lean forward toward revelations they may anticipate on some level yet whose truth they are not so certain of as to find its disclosure boring and obvious. The operative term in Miss Lucy's remarks about the role of the students is undoubtedly "created," with its range of meanings from the students being "created" by God or "developed" by the guardians to confront one day the grimmer reality of their having been "engineered" or "built" with a single purpose in mind. Accordingly, Miss Lucy's choice of words anticipates the second revelation, if indeed it represents a "revelation" by the time it actually appears.

That revelation surfaces when as young adults who have graduated from Hailsham to the halfway houses of The Cottages, Ruth and the others begin to talk about their "possibles," those who serve as their "models." The journey to Norfolk provides one of the novel's most moving sequences. Because they are older and a couple, Nicholas and Crissie sit in the front seat, while the trio of Tommy, Ruth, and Kathy sit in the back, with Ruth in the middle so she can spend much of the trip talking to her idols, while ensuring that her younger friends will have to struggle to talk around her. Ruth has been led to anticipate, or as we eventually discover dream, that her "possible" is an attractive, professional woman who lives out Ruth's aspiration to work in an office, rather than end her life as a "donor." When it becomes evident to Ruth that she has been deluding herself with these self-gratifying fantasies, it seems logical that she might see what she takes to be the truth as grimmer than it is. Ruth responds, however, with this sarcastic outburst: "We all know it. We're modeled from trash. Junkies, prostitutes, winos, tramps. Convicts, maybe, just so long as they aren't psychos." Ruth goes on to focus on the woman working in the same office as her failed "possible" as an example of "normal people": "'Do you think she'd have talked to us like that if she'd known what we really were? What do you think she'd have said if we'd asked her? "Excuse me, but do you think your friend was ever a clone model?"'" (166).

As in the earlier disclosure by Miss Lucy of what it means to be a "donor," the revelation in Ruth's apparently accidental voicing of the term "clone" is scarcely a surprise. This recognition moves the novel's readers into that "elsewhere" that Ishiguro as reader of his own novel identifies as its "focus." With the anger and pain of Ruth's outburst, it becomes more readily apparent that the "truth" that the students are all clones is hardly one they relish confronting. That unwillingness to acknowledge their origins helps in part to explain how long this narrative must go on before the truth can finally be "outed," primarily because it operates in that psychological closet of truths we all would prefer not to open. And beyond that, Ruth's revelation that the students are indeed clones is probably less important than the actuality of who their models undoubtedly were and how the revelation opens up the caste system in contemporary society. How could the better established social strata be induced to allow themselves to be cloned and then be expected to live with the horror of knowing their body-doubles were going to be sliced up for transplantable organs? Better to mine society's inevitable "garbage heaps" of irredeemable human specimens who might be induced through offers of money or other forms of "candy" to participate in such a grisly business. As Jonathan Swift made clear centuries ago, a society that constructs itself as an organism that consumes the well-being of its most oppressed members might just as well literalize the metaphor and eat the young whom the system has already succeeded in dehumanizing.

Undoubtedly, the most interesting "revelations" are those provided by Miss Emily. When, late in the narrative, Tommy and Kathy, no longer exactly child detectives, track down Madame in hopes of gaining a deferral of Tommy's fourth donation on the grounds that it is more than casual sex that binds them as a couple, they encounter a bonanza of revelations from Miss Emily, who just happens to be visiting Madame. But here again, Tommy has already voiced a theory about why Madame collects their art work, and although he is not completely right his answer is close enough to keep Miss Emily's final revelations from being total surprises. Hailsham, Miss Emily explains, was established as an experimental institution for raising clones whose organs were to be harvested. She and the other guardians worked against the more popular prejudices against these clones, namely that they were not really "human." The art work was to be evidence the clones were indeed "human," and had "souls." Because Miss Emily and Madame were well intentioned, they assumed the demonstration of this humanity would eventually lead to better conditions for all the clones, and not merely those at Hailsham. Not surprisingly, the effect was just the opposite, because it forced their society to acknowledge that the desire to extend life for their loved ones and for themselves was not so much a matter of picking apples off trees but the grisly business of vivisection which earlier generations had condemned as horrible even when practiced on animals. In a sense, it was as though the Hailsham experiment was demonstrating that chimpanzees and gorillas have something very similar to the souls that humans have consistently believed were a monopoly of homo sapiens. It is exactly here that we may locate Ishiguro's "focus."

Once again, Ishiguro's reading of his own writing is useful. Nicholas Wroe helpfully notes Ishiguro's comments on his attraction, "as usual," to metaphor in framing his narrative, a function of metaphor in fiction making gestures to the ability of film to generate itself out of a central metaphor. Ishiguro has admitted his very keen affection for film, including movies such as The Magnificent Seven and Beverly Hills Cop. Indeed, he is enough of a film buff to have a private viewing room in his London home. He explains, "Sometimes popular film will tap into certain general fears and aspirations of their audience without the audience overtly realising what has happened. So they get the story on its own terms but it has an additional emotional impact because of the metaphorical reverberations. At some level that story taps into something deeper" (qtd by Wroe). As with the comment earlier cited regarding his focus "elsewhere," Ishiguro in reading his own work insists on the need to acknowledge the power of metaphor in constructing an imaginative context whose surface may seem slight or even banal, but metaphor allows that surface ultimately to open itself out to reveal a world of resonating depth and power.

Ishiguro's attempt to focus his reader's attention on *Never Let Me Go* as metaphor is especially important because, as he himself must have anticipated, his latest novel has been easy to misread as merely a "clone story." Unlike Margaret Atwood's latest novel, *Oryx and Crake*, which she indicates is "speculative fiction," *Never Let Me Go* very definitely is not. If Atwood writes her novel in part to enjoin her readers, especially her American readers, to be more cognizant of the disastrous effects of global warming and genetic engineering, Ishiguro is less interested in making any such "point." He is less concerned with warning against a future in which clones will supply organs for transplanting than he is in inviting readers to experience vicariously what it might feel like to be such a clone whose sole purpose in life is to "donate" those organs most in demand until the clone finally "completes." Although Ishiguro has admitted he did some reading in biotechnology, he strongly emphasizes his intent was not to write a "clone story." Indeed, the novel offers little evidence that Ishiguro gained much more from his reading about biotechnology than what his readers themselves could be expected to know about cloning. The surprise in *Never Let Me Go* may be less the revelation that these "students" are clones than his dating of the first human cloning over a generation ago. Readers ought not to be completely surprised, however, since experimenting with cloning humans has undoubtedly already been quietly carried out somewhere in the world. As science-fiction writers have argued for some time, if the technology to clone human beings is available, cloning will inevitably be done, despite legislative prohibitions and social disapprobation.

Central to the metaphor of Kathy H.'s world and a source of hostility among some early readers of *Never Let Me Go* has been the placidity or plasticity of these "students" in their willingness to serve as spare parts "on the hoof." One reviewer points out their "slow awakening to and acceptance of the gruesome sacrifice that will be expected of them." It seems difficult for most readers to accept the unquestioning acquiescence to the horrible lot these "students" drew when they were bio-engineered for "sacrifice." The narrative reveals a fascination with the capacity of human beings to "go along" with expectations of them, even when those expectations clearly entail the physical pain of surgery and its psychological corollary of "maiming," in addition, of course, to eventual death when they "complete," or exhaust their usefulness as organ donors.

One obvious explanation, as earlier noted, is the raising of the students in isolation from the "real world." Early contact with the world outside Hailshaw might have introduced them to alternate forms of behavior such as self-protection, dereliction of duty, rebelliousness, and the impulse to panic in the face of one "donation" after another, impelled, it would seem, by the desire to complete the full course of four donations. In the first of the major revelations in this narrative, Miss Lucy serves in part as the renegade guardian who feels that her students need to know what they have been "created" for, and yet she, too, is enough of a guardian to lecture them on their obligation to "do the right thing," when it comes time to donate. In the passage cited earlier, Miss Lucy informs the group, "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 were brought into this world for a purpose, and your futures, all of them, have been decided [...]. If you're to have decent lives, you have to know who you are and what lies ahead of you, every one of you" (81). Behind her comments here is a traditional moralism, encouraging the young to acknowledge who they are and what they must do to acquit themselves honorably as human beings. Her sentiments may sound oddly "Victorian" to the later 20th century ear. Perhaps those sentiments are merely an extension of modern psychology with its ethical "realism," enlisting the young to become "healthy and productive members of society" and not ask too many questions about how that society is constituted.

If the students have seemed "obtuse" in their docile acquiescence to the system of "donations," some early readers of *Never Let Me Go* have scarcely been less obtuse in condemning their apparent passivity. So much of the past century's history is replete with evidence of such "docility" or passivity. One recalls, for example, the painful representations of the suicidal advances across no man's land in the so-called Great War, all the way from R. C. Sherriff's smash hit drama of 1928, *Journey's End*, to the Mel Gibson vehicle *Gallipoli*, exploring the callous "sacrifice" of Australian troops to Turkish machine guns to "save" the Empire, or at least their British fellow combatants up the coast. Or one recalls the quiet resignation of Jews going to their certain deaths during the Holocaust, for example, in D. M. Thomas's *The White Hotel* with its depiction of Soviet Jews at Babi Yar, the men and boys stripped naked, lined up covering their genitals with their hands, and marched to the designated places along the cavernous trench where they were to be shot, some years before the Nazi engineers devised a more economical strategy for the Final Solution. (17)

Miss Lucy's emphasis on the "lot" of the students, as well as their radical difference from "normal people" such as the guardians and their society, encourages honest readers to ponder whether most of us would have done any differently. We would like to celebrate our own courage in "speaking out," but at the same time we cannot ignore reports of the power of military camaraderie that often keeps combatants from voicing their perceptions of the purposelessness of the war in which they must risk death and maiming, because to speak out might undermine the ability of others to function, even to survive. And like those who fight in wars of which they may disapprove, Ishiguro's students seem intent on serving with distinction, much as millions have gone to their deaths with quiet resignation because they believed that if death is inevitable they could certify the value of their lives by dying with dignity and thereby demonstrating their superiority to other animals. When the possibility of survival is denied, the next best hope often lies in avoiding the futile attempt to survive at the cost of one's humanity.

It is in the context of these issues that Ishiguro became attracted to the metaphor of clones. What would it feel like to discover in later childhood that one had been cloned from society's "human garbage heap" to supply "normal people" with organs until one eventually "completed" on the operating table? How to bear the horror of knowing that the sole means of legitimating one's worth in a society that considered one "subhuman" might be to submit to one sacrifice after another, knowing that one day there would be no "coming to" in the bright and painful buzzing world of the recovery room? And if it is not risking a move too far into the very world of speculative fiction Ishiguro warned his readers of Never Let Me Go not to expect, it is difficult not to be drawn into speculating about what it would be like to be a "normal" person in Kathy's world. Those who see themselves as "right-minded" people have often sanctimoniously presumed that unlike the Germans who must have been able to smell the burning corpses at nearby Dachau they as the "right-minded" surely would have "done something" to stop the extermination. Similarly, most of Ishiguro's readers might well find the system that produces clones for their organs abhorrent until they themselves might be confronted with the dilemma of hoping against hope for a "clean" transplant, or simply accepting the first available organ, no questions asked, to save a loved one or themselves. Horrible as the option of accepting the transplant of a Kathy H. might seem at first, few would long resist the cynical impulse to say, "Well, she's just a clone, that's what she was made for, and she really wants to help me save my child."

If there are elements in *Never Let Me Go* that are reminiscent of "speculative fiction," however, they may involve the novel's implicit urging of its readers to explore not so much the idea of human cloning to supply organ transplants but what it would feel like to be one of those clones, or even more what it would feel like to be part of a society allowing such a system to persist simply because one day any one of the "normal people" might become sufficiently desperate to extend his or her life or a loved one's life by appropriating a clone's heart. Ishiguro brilliantly constructs this metaphor from which his impulse to write this story was generated. In this context, the narrative invites the reader to experience not so much the speculative-fiction fantasy of "what if' an earlier generation in our civilization had already cloned humans simply to exploit for organ transplants so much as what would it feel like to discover in young adulthood that one were such a clone. Would such clones, enraged at the perversion of what we usually considered the essence of our humanness, attempt to escape a practice very much like vivisection of animals? How powerful is cultural or social conditioning as a determinant of our willingness to serve our functions as social beings, even when those functions seem to be an utter denial of our humanity? Additionally, as suggested earlier, would we all refuse to participate in the horrors of organ-transplant cultivation if the next recipient were a loved one? These are the "tough questions" implicit in the central metaphor of this novel. As such, they suggest one very strong reason why readers may have seized on the palliative of Never Let Me Go as "speculative fiction," an exploration of the possibility that clones could be produced to provide transplants, with the corollary of course that we ought to stop such horrors from happening before such a system is developed.

In his attraction to the metaphor of cloning humans for transplants, Ishiguro took a risk as large as he had in his earlier fiction. (18) In *Never Let Me Go*, he risked having his novel (mis)read as merely a "clone story," or merely as "speculative fiction." If, however, we follow his lead in reading his novels as explorations of metaphors, it becomes easier to see the shared vision for which the metaphor provides the vehicle. Ishiguro continues to demonstrate a fascination with the figure of the isolate, a fascination enhanced by allowing the isolate to tell his or her own story, thereby creating the angst of a claustrophobic, solipsistic world in which readers are forced to guess what's going on beyond the narrator's actual words. Stevens, for example, might be one of Italo Calvino's many characters who are self-immersed readers--in the case of Stevens, a reader of sentimental love stories. Christopher, in *When We Were Orphans*, may be another instance of an "obtuse" narrator who finally figures out the whodunit that represents his life, only to fail miserably at incorporating such knowledge into his future, almost as though Oedipus had faced the dazzling truth of his unwitting crimes, but instead of blinding himself at its horror he simply consoled himself with a more obtuse response such as "I may have killed my father and married my mother, but at least I have eliminated two mistakes I'll never have to worry about repeating." Ishiguro has a healthy awareness that Truth is not something we always rush to acquire nor something we always know what to do with once we gain it. In contrast to the confidence of our culture that we have only to know the truth to be free, Ishiguro offers in Kathy and the other students something closer to the reality of our own everyday lives in which we know, yet ignore, the inevitability, say, of our own deaths, a reaction that might well seem "obtuse" to wiser visitors to our planet from other worlds. Paradoxically, by inviting his readers into the bizarre metaphor of the clone engineered to provide others with body parts, Ishiguro allows us to explore an otherness that in the end may serve as a reflection of our innermost experiences as "normal" human beings.

Source: Ingersoll, Earl G. "Taking off into the realm of metaphor: Kazuo Ishiguro's Never Let Me Go." Studies in the Humanities 34.1 (2007): 40+. Literature Resource Center. http://www.aadl.org/research/browse/books

Discussion Questions

1. Kathy introduces herself as an experienced carer. She prides herself on knowing how to keep her donors calm, “even before fourth donation” [p. 3]. How long does it take for the meaning of such terms as “donation,” “carer,” and “completed” to be fully revealed?

2. Kathy addresses us directly, with statements like “I don’t know how it was
where you were, but at Hailsham we used to have some form of medical every week” [p. 13], and she thinks that we too might envy her having been at Hailsham [p. 4]. What does Kathy assume about anyone she might be addressing, and why?

3. Why is it important for Kathy to seek out donors who are “from the past,” “people from Hailsham” [p. 5]? She learns from a donor who’d grown up at an awful place in Dorset that she and her friends at Hailsham had been really “lucky” [p. 6]. How does the irony of this designation grow as the novel goes on? What does Hailsham represent for Kathy, and why does she say at the end that Hailsham is “something no one can take away” [p. 287]?

4. Kathy tells the reader, “How you were regarded at Hailsham, how much you were liked and respected, had to do with how good you were at ‘creating’” [p. 16]. What were Hailsham’s administrators trying to achieve in attaching a high value to creativity?

5. Kathy’s narration is the key to the novel’s disquieting effect. First person narration establishes a kind of intimacy between narrator and reader. What is it like having direct access to Kathy’s mind and feelings? How would the novel be different if narrated from Tommy’s point of view, or Ruth’s, or Miss Emily’s?

6. What are some of Ruth’s most striking character traits? How might her social behavior, at Hailsham and later at the Cottages, be explained? Why does she seek her “possible” so earnestly [pp. 159–67]?

7. One of the most notable aspects of life at Hailsham is the power of the group. Students watch each other carefully and try on different poses, attitudes, and ways of speaking. Is this behavior typical of most adolescents, or is there something different about the way the students at Hailsham seek to conform?

8. How do Madame and Miss Emily react to Kathy and Tommy when they come to request a deferral? Defending her work at Hailsham, Miss Emily says, “Look at you both now! You’ve had good lives, you’re educated and cultured” [p. 261]. What is revealed in this extended conversation, and how do these revelations affect your experience of the story?

9. Why does Tommy draw animals? Why does he continue to work on them even after he learns that there will be no deferral?

10. Kathy reminds Madame of the scene in which Madame watched her dancing to a song on her Judy Bridgewater tape. How is Kathy's interpretation of this event different from Madame's? How else might it be interpreted? Is the song's title again recalled by the book's final pages [pp. 286–88]?

11. After their visit to Miss Emily and Madame, Kathy tells Tommy that his fits of rage might be explained by the fact that "at some level you always knew" [p. 275]. Does this imply that Kathy didn't? Does it imply that Tommy is more perceptive than Kathy?

12. Does the novel examine the possibility of human cloning as a legitimate question for medical ethics, or does it demonstrate that the human costs of cloning are morally repellent, and therefore impossible for science to pursue? What kind of moral and emotional responses does the novel provoke? If you extend the scope of the book's critique, what are its implications for our own society?

13. The novel takes place in "the late 1990s," and a postwar science boom has resulted in human cloning and the surgical harvesting of organs to cure cancer and other diseases. In an interview with January Magazine Ishiguro said that he is not interested in realism.* In spite of the novel's fictitious premise, however, how "realistically" does *Never Let Me Go* reflect the world we live in, where scientific advancement can be seemingly irresistible?

14. The teacher Lucy Wainright wanted to make the children more aware of the future that awaited them. Miss Emily believed that in hiding the truth, "We were able to give you something, something which even now no one will ever take from you, and we were able to do that principally by sheltering you. . . . Sometimes that meant we kept things from you, lied to you. . . . But . . . we gave you your childhoods" [p. 268]. In the context of the story as a whole, is this a valid argument?

15. Is it surprising that Miss Emily admits feeling revulsion for the children at Hailsham? Does this indicate that she believes Kathy and Tommy are not fully human? What is the nature of the moral quandary Miss Emily and Madame have gotten themselves into?

16. Critic Frank Kermode has noted that "Ishiguro is fundamentally a tragic novelist; there is always a disaster, remote but urgent, imagined but real, at

the heart of his stories" [London Review of Books, April 21, 2005]. How would you describe the tragedy at the heart of *Never Let Me Go*?

17. Some reviewers have expressed surprise that Kathy, Tommy, and their friends never try to escape their ultimate fate. They cling to the possibility of deferral, but never attempt to vanish into the world of freedom that they view from a distance. Yet they love the film The Great Escape, "the moment the American jumps over the barbed wire on his bike" [p. 99]. Why might Ishiguro have chosen to present them as fully resigned to their early deaths?

18. Reread the novel's final paragraph, in which Kathy describes a flat, windswept field with a barbed wire fence "where all sorts of rubbish had caught and tangled." She imagines Tommy appearing here in "the spot where everything I'd ever lost since my childhood had washed up" [p. 287]. What does the final sentence indicate about Kathy's state of mind as she faces her losses and her own death—stoicism, denial, courage, resolution?

19. In an interview, Ishiguro talked about *Never Let Me Go*: "There are things I am more interested in than the clone thing. How are they trying to find their place in the world and make sense of their lives? To what extent can they transcend their fate? As time starts to run out, what are the things that really matter? Most of the things that concern them concern us all, but with them it is concertinaed into this relatively short period of time. These are things that really interest me and, having come to the realization that I probably have limited opportunities to explore these things, that's what I want to concentrate on. I can see the appeal of travel books and journalism and all the rest of it and I hope there will be time to do them all one day. But I just don't think that day is now." How do these remarks relate to your own ideas about the book? [Interview with Nicholas Wroe, *The Guardian*, February 2, 2005.]

Multimedia

***Never Let Me Go: A Tale of a Challenging Friendship* (Radio Broadcast)**
http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=129859871
A discussion of the novel on NPR.

***Never Let Me Go* (Movie)**

http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1377750
(Call number: DVD Drama Never)
Kathy, Ruth, and Tommy are best friends who grow up together at an English boarding school with a chilling secret. When they learn the shocking truth that they are genetically engineered clones raised to be organ donors, they embrace their fleeting chance to live and love.

Further Reading

Genetics and Genetic Engineering by Lisa Yount
http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1134721
(Call number: 576.5 Yo)
Profiles geneticists and highlights discoveries they have made; includes Gregor Mendel and the laws of inheritance, James Watson and the structure of DNA, and Stanley Cohen and genetic engineering.

The case against perfection: ethics in the age of genetic engineering by Michael J. Sandel
http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1287957
(Call number: 174.957 Sa)
Breakthroughs in genetics present us with a promise and a predicament. The promise is that we will soon be able to treat and prevent a host of debilitating diseases. The predicament is that our newfound genetic knowledge may enable us to manipulate our nature--to enhance our genetic traits and those of our children. Although most people find at least some forms of genetic engineering disquieting, it is not easy to articulate why. What is wrong with re-engineering our nature? The Case against Perfection explores these and other moral quandaries connected with the quest to perfect ourselves and our children.

When we were orphans by Kazuo Ishiguro
http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1169360
(Call number: Fiction Ishiguro)
Born in early-twentieth-century Shanghai, Banks was orphaned at the age of nine after the separate disappearances of his parents. Now, more than twenty years later, he is a celebrated figure in London society; yet the investigative expertise that has garnered him fame has done little to illuminate the circumstances of his parents' alleged kidnappings. Banks travels to the seething, labyrinthine city of his memory in hopes of solving the mystery of his own, painful past, only to find that war is ravaging

Shanghai beyond recognition-and that his own recollections are proving as difficult to trust as the people around him.

Author' official website
http://www.faber.co.uk/author/kazuo-ishiguro/
Information, news, and resources from Ishiguro's publisher.

Read-Alikes

Oryx and Crake by Margaret Atwood
http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1203175
(Call number: Fiction Atwood)
The narrator of Atwood's riveting novel calls himself Snowman. When the story opens, he is sleeping in a tree, wearing an old bedsheet, mourning the loss of his beloved Oryx and his best friend Crake, and slowly starving to death. He searches for supplies in a wasteland where insects proliferate and pigoons and wolvogs ravage the pleeblands, where ordinary people once lived, and the Compounds that sheltered the extraordinary. As he tries to piece together what has taken place, the narrative shifts to decades earlier. How did everything fall apart so quickly? Why is he left with nothing but his haunting memories? Alone except for the green-eyed Children of Crake, who think of him as a kind of monster, he explores the answers to these questions in the double journey he takes - into his own past, and back to Crake's high-tech bubble-dome, where the Paradice Project unfolded and the world came to grief.

The Plot Against America by Philip Roth
http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1227414
(Call number: Fiction Roth)
In an astonishing feat of empathy and narrative invention, our most ambitious novelist imagines an alternate version of American history. In 1940 Charles A. Lindbergh, heroic aviator and rabid isolationist, is elected President. Shortly thereafter, he negotiates a cordial "understanding" with Adolf Hitler, while the new government embarks on a program of folksy anti-Semitism. For one boy growing up in Newark, Lindbergh's election is the first in a series of ruptures that threaten to destroy his small, safe corner of America-and with it, his mother, his father, and his older brother.

Frankenstein *by* Mary Shelley
http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1061055

(Call number: Fiction Shelley)
Shelley's suspenseful and intellectually rich gothic tale confronts some of the most important and enduring themes in all of literature--the power of human imagination, the potential hubris of science, the gulf between appearance and essence, the effects of human cruelty, the desire for revenge and the need for forgiveness, and much more.

Mappa Mundi by Justina Robson
http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1273033
(Call number: Science Fiction Robson)
From one of Britain's most acclaimed new talents comes a novel of hard SF exploring the nature of identity both inherited and engineered.

Double Helix by Nancy Werlin
http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1227156
(Call number: Teen Werlin)
Rich and suspenseful with a hair-raising conclusion, this is Nancy Werlin's most dynamic novel yet--one that explores the ethics and amazements of genetic engineering.

Where Last the Sweet Birds Sang **by** Kate Wilhelm
http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1227156
(Call number: Science Fiction Wilhelm)
Author Kate Wilhelm was born in Toledo, Ohio on June 8, 1928. Since publishing her first novel in 1963, she has written over thirty books in many genres including science fiction, mystery, and fantasy. She and her husband, Damon Knight, taught many authors and helped establish the Clarion Writer's Workshop and the Milford Writer's Conference. She currently lives in Eugene, Oregon.

Summaries from AADL.org Catalog

Extra!

"*Never Let Me Go*" examines many facets of friendship. Go around as a group and discuss a powerful friendship each person has had, whether positive or negative.