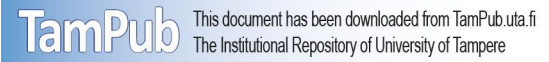


Friendship, care, and politics: Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*



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A political reading of the novel may implicate many kinds of reading strategies. A novel of ideas, for example, can by definition offer a plenitude of open and contrasting political statements made by both the characters and the narrator. I have argued elsewhere that it is extremely misleading, for example, to read J. M. Coetzee's *Elizabeth Costello* only by foregrounding Costello's early, polemical declarations on the treatment of animals, that is, without noticing the author's reading guidelines and other modifying moves (Hyvärinen 2008). This article continues my efforts to pinpoint the political relevance of key narratological distinctions. Kazuo Ishiguro's novel *Never Let Me Go* (Ishiguro 2005) presents a character-bound narrator, whose discourse seems to be entirely oriented towards friendship and care, ignoring politics entirely. To read the novel politically, to my understanding, the reader needs to see the difference between the narrator and the implied author, and to see the particular situation of narration and the narrative audience. Ishiguro has already established his position as one of the most prominent authors writing in English language, partly because of his nuanced narrative techniques which keep challenging the reader's interpretative skills. Political events and issues are never introduced neutrally but always through a particular, slanted, biased or limited consciousness.

In his earlier novels, *The Remains of the Day* (1989) and *When We Were Orphans* (2000), Ishiguro had already cultivated his mastery with this character-bound and, thus, perspectival narrator. In both earlier novels, the narrator does not properly understand the political and ethical settings wherein he acts, does not report everything the readers might understand as being relevant, and significantly blurs the reporting for various personal reasons. All these instances induce difficulties regarding an overly direct political reading of what characters and narrators say. Using the concepts suggested by the literary theorist Wayne Booth, we should rather start with the tension between *implied author* and *unreliable narrator* (Booth 1961, 158–159). Both are concepts that are useful for a rhetorical reading of novels, that is, reading novels in a communicative setting that extends between actual authors and actual, "flesh-and-blood" readers. By introducing these concepts, Booth maintains that

the implied author consistently leaves enough traces for a keen reader to realize the limits of the narrator and his or her narration.

In structuralist narratology, the implied author was often understood only as a feature of the text. James Phelan, in discussing the critical reception of the term, has instead emphasized the relationship between the real-life and implied author. He suggests that the implied author should rather be seen as a *version* of the real one, by maintaining that “the implied author is a streamlined version of the real author, an actual or purported subset of the real author’s capacities, traits, attitudes, beliefs, values, and other properties that play an active role in the construction of the particular text” (Phelan 2005, 45, italics removed). In introducing the idea of “the version”, Phelan obviously tries to solve a dilemma of the concept of an implied author; that is to say, while the narrator may express values that are antithetical to those of the author, it sounds artificial to assume such a polarity of values between the (real-life) author and the implied author. At least it would be hard to locate any textual traces of such disparity. Following this idea, it might be more accurate, in discussing the novel *Never Let Me Go*, to refer to the “Ishiguro-of-this-novel” rather than to use the shorthand “Ishiguro”.

The charm and political relevance of unreliable narration is connected to the fact that, just as in lived experience, the world opens up through one particular consciousness. Third-person narration can, of course, use a similar *inner focalization* (Genette 1980) and present the world predominantly or entirely through one consciousness, but in the case of character-bound narration the language use is equally as-if controlled by the character. In *The Remains of the Day*, the artificially formal and distanced language of the narrator, Stevens, is a vital element of his identity as a good butler. A novel using one and the same character-bound narrator from the beginning to the end appears to the reader as if being written or spoken directly by this character, drawing on such genres as autobiography and confession.

Phelan argues that each narrator has three cognitively different roles: to report, to interpret (to read) and to evaluate. In his terms, *reporting* is about characters, facts and events; *interpreting* in turn refers to observation and knowing; and *evaluation* belongs to the ethical axis of narration. He suggests that narrators can give either entirely wrong, incomplete or correct reports in regard to these axes. By juxtaposing these aspects, he arrives at six categories of unreliable narration: misreporting and underreporting; misreading and underreading; and finally misregarding and

underregarding (Phelan 2005, 50–53). Unreliable narration is thus not limited to the simple case of intentionally mischievous reporting.

The suggested conceptual scheme is, of course, more or less metaphoric. Novels consist of words and sentences that seek to represent human minds and events. But the fundamental narratological list of instances from (flesh-and-blood) author, implied author, narrator, character and authorial audience to (flesh-and-blood) reader (Phelan 1996, 2005) necessarily intervenes in the political reading of novels and complicates conclusions on authorial meanings that are too direct. The point of these distinctions is not to maintain that the source of uttered observations or values could be unequivocally located, quite the contrary. As Lisa Zunshine (2006) expertly shows, authors test readers' "source monitoring skills" by creating ambiguous mental representations, as much as readers test their skills in finding these sources. Complications such as these should not, however, be read as a barrier to the political reading of novels but should serve, rather, as its very rationale. There are few reasons to believe that authors would have particularly important political ideas, as such, apart from the literally created, complex contexts of (mis)understanding.

Phelan's distinctions help to locate the operation of political reading on three different levels. *Narrators* read more or less correctly the political situations they are telling about, and as a matter of fact, report and evaluate other characters' readings. *Implied authors* offer second level readings by leaving contrasting traces in the wake of narrators' limited or misguided readings. *Scholars* with their readings come in at the third stage and only then, when they are alert enough to follow the implied author's clues and guidelines, are they included as part of the *authorial* audience.

### Never Let Me Go

The literary theorist Gary Saul Morson (1999, 2003) has emphasized the relevance of the first reading of novels, arguing that the openness of the first reading resembles the contingent quality of lived life. Therefore, instead of summarizing first what the book is about, in my reading, I try first to follow how its story-world unfolds itself to its readers. Indeed, Ishiguro's novel opens in a rather perplexing way:

My name is Kathy H. I'm thirty-one years old, and I've been a carer now for over eleven years. That sounds long enough, I know, but actually they want me to go on for another eight months, until the end of this year. (Ishiguro 2005, 3; hereafter, NLM)

It is immediately clear that Kathy H. is telling her story to someone other than to an ordinary English listener. The receiver of her story already knows what “carer” and “they” signify. We others keep asking questions such as: why is she not able to continue her line of work as long as she pleases? One can immediately recognize the slightly skewed reality, in contrasting the words on the flyleaf: “England, late 1990s”. Very soon, the narrator addresses her listener more directly: “I know carers, working now, who are as good and don’t get half the credit. If you are one of them, I can understand how you might get resentful – about my bedsit, my car, above all, the way I get to pick and choose who I look after. And I am a Hailsham student – which is enough by itself sometimes to get people’s backs up” (NLM, 3).

Why should anyone, in the England of the late 1990s, be envious of a small car and a bedsit? Who exactly is this carer picking up to be cared for, and why? The narrator identifies herself as “a student” of the school “Hailsham”, once again a phenomenon generating envy. Just in passing, Kathy mentions that she has looked “after donors brought up in every kind of place” (NLM, 4).

With a few, swift moves the author has relocated his character-bound narrator. The receiver of the story, *the narratee*, is also a character of the story-world. As a competent member of this world, he or she already has contextual knowledge we, the readers, do not yet have. To be an unreliable narrator, for us, the actual readers, Kathy H. does not need to be dishonest, deceitful or react oddly to the realities of the world – she is simply not telling her story to us. We are indeed systematically disregarded by the narrator. With the help of this particular narrative technique, Ishiguro is able to postpone the explication of many decisive facts until the end of the novel. Detective stories characteristically employ the technique of abridged narration, cutting the story just before informing the reader too much too early, but here we have something entirely different. Kathy H. seems to be telling her story without an intention to mislead, freely, and trustingly– but to a person with a completely different background and different world-knowledge than the real readers have at their disposal. As Toker and Chertoff (2008) have noticed, the narration generates in each chapter expectations that are met only in the consequent chapters.

Early on, however, Kathy expresses her frustration with some aspects of her job as a carer. “You try and do your best for every donor,” she maintains, “but in the end, it wears you down” (NLM, 4). “Donors” turn out, more specifically, to be organ donors, instead of philanthropists. Still there are some confusing elements for the conditions of donating. Why are the donors discussed in terms of

their bringing up – and on top of it, in various institutions? There is also a disturbing temporal qualification in the quote above; at the point where the caring “in the end” wears “you” down. Has something catastrophic happened in this parallel world, necessitating a particular group of people to take care of donors?

Often, Kathy says, she has wanted to forget the whole Hailsham experience, but it seems to have held a great deal of significance for some of the donors. In the middle of a paragraph speculating on the meaning of Hailsham, she mentions curtly: “He’d just come through his third donation, it hadn’t gone well, and he must have known he wasn’t going to make it” (NLM, 5). Swiftly Kathy moves back to recalling Hailsham, and the years spent there. This is clearly a story about friendship and love between Kathy, Tommy and Ruth. The book reads here – almost – like any story about young people growing up in a boarding school milieu. Of course it sounds a bit alarming that teachers are called “guardians”, a term known well, for example, from translations of Plato’s *Republic*. Plato’s discourse, in turn, has both its utopian and totalitarian aspects, among others. But as Leona Toker and Daniel Chertoff (2008, 165) suggest, the name of the school already signals a moral ambiguity, “Hailsham is a ‘sham’ which people ‘hail,’ i.e. hold in high regard.”

To tell and not to tell

Very soon, Kathy H. is outlined as a narrator who recognizes the limits of her own knowing. The story about her years at school turns out to be a web of secrets and half-truths. The whole story of friendship begins with Kathy’s realization of Tommy’s fierce fits of temper, which led to merciless bullying by his schoolmates. The reason for the tantrums is the acknowledgement of Tommy’s lack of creativity, and his consequent inability to produce anything for the “Change”. The kids write poems, paint, produce artefacts for exchange. It is naturally against all contemporary lay knowledge or folk psychology (Hutto 2008) to assume that uncreative kids would be bullied in ordinary schools.

In Hailsham, the issue was nevertheless deadly serious and threatened Tommy’s future acutely. Quite surprisingly, his tantrums abruptly disappear without obvious explanation. One of the guardians, Miss Lucy, had told Tommy that it is not a serious problem not to be creative, and that he should not pay attention to the circulating gossip. The conversation between Miss Lucy and Tommy might sound almost trivial, but as Tommy recollects it, he emphasizes that “when she said all this, she was *shaking*” (NLM, 28). She was shaking out of concealed rage, yet the reason for the

rage remains, at the time, unaccounted for. A similar complex tangle of secrets surrounds the whole operation of Hailsham.

But there is quite another reason to recognize Tommy's comment on the concealed rage. Against all gendered stereotypes on school boys, Tommy is a very keen observer of complex emotional states, and just like Kathy and Ruth, is also verbally skilful and confident enough to ponder aloud such emotional phenomena. In dealing with emotions, the students of Hailsham are growing up in the best spirit of nineteenth-century novels. Stevens, the butler from *The Remains of the Day*, had embraced elements of upper-class English in terms of grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation, yet he was almost thoroughly illiterate in regard to other persons' and his own emotions.

The description of the "Sales", the day when students can purchase commercial products, lays open a new piece of information: students seem never to go out of the school area (NLM, 41–43). When Kathy recounts the history of how she got to know Ruth, we learn even more bizarre things. The relationship goes back to the time when they were "juniors" and played in a sandbox (NLM, 43). What is a school where children start at the sandbox age? None of these children had left Hailsham by then, and the reader was not informed of anyone's home or relatives.

Moreover, these youth have a genuine fear of the forest above the school; so real that they themselves can punish dissidents by forcing them to gape at the woods. Conjoined with these fears is a tale, often told, never authenticated by the guardians, maintaining that a boy had "run off beyond the Hailsham boundaries" after a fight, and that his "body had been found two days later, up in those woods, tied to a tree with the hands and feet chopped off" (NLM, 50). Was the purpose of the story just to scare the children, to make them more obedient, or is it a product of childish paranoia? As so often in the novel, the tale is left as it was, without any conclusive decision about its validity or original source. The reader takes the students' place, knowing (that something is wrong) and not yet knowing (for sure), being told, and yet being .

The themes of secrecy and creativity clash in the crucial episode in which the jazz song *Never Let Me Go* is played in Kathy's room. The most valuable results of the students' creativity were annually picked up to be taken to the supposed "Gallery". The secretive and authoritative person connecting the "Gallery" and the school was "Madame", whose visits to the school aroused excitement and nervousness. Madame was not a guardian, yet the wildest speculations and thickest secrecies surrounded her. One day, Kathy is listening to the music of this jazz song on her tape and

dancing with her pillow, imagining that the song is about a woman who would like, but cannot have, a baby. In the middle of the song, she realizes that Madame is standing at the door and watching her. Kathy is frightened, but quite to her surprise she realizes that Madame is crying and leaving quickly. Kathy recounts her experience only a few years later, to Tommy, with her now broadened consciousness about her situation. In this initial reading, Madame's reaction might express deep sympathy with Kathy, because by that time in their lives the students already know that they will not conceive any babies of their own (NLM, 72).

At another time, a group of students is gathered in the small pavilion, watching the rain, and chatting about their future wishes, about going to America, becoming an actress, whatever. Miss Lucy, however, overhears the discussion and gathers them together to give a fierce speech, foreclosing all options of going to America, becoming a star or supermarket employee. Their lives are already all planned and arranged, and after becoming adults and before getting old or "even middle-aged", the students will "start to donate [their] vital organs" (NLM, 80).

This episode has a particular role in the novel. Some students downplay the significance of Lucy's talk, simply saying that this is something they have always known. As an adult, Tommy returned to the event with a theory. He thought that throughout the years the guardians had manipulated what the kids knew, and told them everything so "that we were always just too young to understand properly the latest piece of information (NLM, 81). Kathy is not entirely convinced, yet she found some point in the argument. As a matter of fact, almost everything the guardians shared with the students was held in reserve, evasive and circuitous – evoking all kinds of paranoid attitudes. Paranoia, of course, has been one of the major ingredients of political novels since the advent of cold war era.

Nevertheless, the crux of Tommy's comment lies elsewhere; that is, it lies on the level of narration, where it foregrounds the narrative strategy of the novel itself. The same ambiguous tension between already-knowing and not-yet-entirely-believing is vital for the narration. When beginning from the end, the traces are clear and consistent, much clearer than during the first reading. The signs are veritably alarming, indeed, but Kathy's soothing narration and the intricacies of friendship encourage the reader to sustain hopeful thinking. Again, it seems to be an invitation by the implied author to the reader to share the wishfully paranoid reality of Hailsham, at least momentarily.

However much Miss Lucy's talk clarified the situation, neither she nor the reminiscing Kathy was entirely candid at the moment. It is only much later, when Kathy is relaying her first months after leaving Hailsham, and the mysterious topic of *possibles*, that the key facts are mentioned explicitly:

The basic idea behind the possibles theory was simple, and didn't provoke much dispute. It went something like this. Since each of us was copied at some point from a normal person, there must be, for each of us, somewhere out there, a model getting on with his or her life.  
(NLM, 137)

So it takes 137 pages of the total 282 before explicitly revealing that the "students" (the term now receiving a distinctly Orwellian character) of Hailsham and equivalent institutions are clones, produced for the purposes of organ harvesting. After all, this is a very political novel indeed. Yet it is just as obvious that a political reading of the situation, not to mention the politicizing of the situation, does not belong to Kathy's purposes in her narrative. As Mark Jerng (2008) has convincingly argued, this novel does not at all follow the model of slave narratives, portraying clones struggling for emancipation and elevation to that of human status. Even after revealing the fact of cloning, many facts about the past remain unclear, and the novel proceeds by unpacking the remaining paranoia, ignorance and wild theories. But before the decisive revelations, the novel has managed to position the reader alongside the clones, to co-experience the atmosphere of youthful vitality, lack of knowledge and the pressure of menacing omens.

#### Kathy H. as a narrator

Even though the reader receives the crucial facts, confirmed only at a very late moment, this does not implicate a need for cover-up on Kathy's side. Kathy is giving an account of her story to a clone from another institution. I will return to this problem of the listener a bit later. Although we can often experience Kathy's story as being inadequate and sometimes patchy, her story is not necessarily unreliable within the horizon of its listener. Let us only say that the narration puts us, the *humans* and real readers, into a confusing position. We read everything as-if we were donors like the addressee, yet we do not share the same resources of story-world information (see Toker and Chertoff 2008, 168).

Despite Miss Lucy's revelation in the episode mentioned earlier, the reader is still left somewhat in the dark. Kathy does not say much about the reception of the revelation, for instance. You don't go



to America, you don't become an actor, you start donating your organs as your career, Lucy says. But where is the sadness, disappointment, even rage? Jerng is correct; these clones are not fighting for their human life. This is one of those moments when Kathy's tender and calm narration may appear unconvincing, almost perverse. But is the case more about *under-reporting* (Kathy does not report the agitation that possibly followed the announcement), *misreporting* (the event went on quite differently), *misreading* (Kathy does not read the "human" and political consequences of the talk correctly) or rather *under-regarding* (she does not evaluate the cruelty and unfairness of the situation properly)? The lack of rage, hatred and disappointment renders the episode almost ghostlike. In contrast to this ostensible lack of emotion, Kathy is perfectly equipped and sensitive enough in recognizing and reporting the slightest shifts of emotions between the clones. More specifically: she had no qualms at all in later reporting her anger at Tommy or her disagreements with Ruth. She often reads other minds perfectly and enthusiastically, yet here she is giving rather behavioural account.

Dialogue – even a dialogue reported by a character – is a method Ishiguro often uses in order to introduce a crack and let other perspectives stir the hermetic world of character-bound narration. The failed hunt for Ruth's "possible" – the origin of the copy – ends with such a scene, for example. The youths have arrived at an art gallery, and after the "possible" left the place, they ended up chatting with the owner. Reflecting on the situation, the frustrated Ruth airs her feelings:

That other woman in there, her friend, the old one in the gallery. *Art* students, that's what she thought we were. 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 really asked her? 'Excuse me, but do you think your friend was ever a clone model?' She'd have thrown us out. (NLM, 164)

Ruth's outburst exposes straightforwardly the racism against clones, which is concealed in Kathy's narration on human relations. To be a clone is a shameful thing, and the "normals" do not want to socialize with them. Finding a "possible" could have destabilized this absolute distinction between normals and clones, and it might have rendered for Ruth at least a frail vision of a different future. It is remarkable how the students, in spite of Lucy's outpouring, had kept on fantasizing about normal occupations. In a genuine lower-class style, the fantasy was just to become a salesperson in a clothes shop, a bus driver, or office clerk, nothing more spectacular.

The Hailsham Mission

The third part of the novel draws closer to the time of the narration, a time when Kathy already works as a carer, and both Ruth and Tommy are organ donors. It is only now that Kathy and Tommy's friendship turns into a love affair, coloured already by a feeling of loss: why not then, when both of them were free from the approaching end, the anguish of donating?

Since leaving Hailsham, the students had heard the wishful story about the deferral of the forthcoming donations, even by several years, if Hailsham students were able to verify to a real *love* affair. While no-one had ever figured out to whom such a love affair should be reported to, the greatest hopes were attached to the finding of the mysterious *Madame*. This grave ignorance on the most vital facts about their lives was a central part of the donor's life. In addition to love, *arts* and creativity seemed to have an inexplicable connection to the future. After his failure at school, Tommy feverishly continued filling his notebooks with peculiar animals, just in order to be able to document his creativity at some decisive juncture, even though he realized perfectly well that his creative schoolmates regularly end up as donors as well.

The drama culminates when Ruth finds out Madame's whereabouts, and Kathy and Tommy end up at her door. It turns out that Hailsham's previous principal, Miss Emily, lives with her in the same apartment. The episode ironically reiterates detective novels portraying a master-mind private eye who summons a final meeting with all the potential culprits – except for the critical difference that now the detectives have lived in complete darkness as regards Hailsham's bigger scheme. After the war, so goes the report, science had advanced enough to make the production of clones possible. As Toker and Chertoff (2008, 165) observe, the technology of cloning was much further advanced than the precarious transplant surgery. In full silence, it was decided to manufacture clones as living organ-storage units. People wanted new organs without knowing where they actually came from; a state of affairs which is not entirely fictitious in regard to the contemporary organ trade. As Miss Emily and Madame relate in unison, the early institutions were harsh, totalitarian, and brutish establishments. It is here that Hailsham and its mission comes in. The reformers thought that with a good upbringing, an emphasis on the arts and creativity, even clones could be cultivated into something better. Hailsham indeed provided the students with at least some shelter, and a better life than the previous institutes did.

Ishiguro often exposes, with obvious irony and sarcasm, great political projects that render their advocates more or less blind as regards the actual outcomes. The mission to rear clones in a

humanitarian way also motivated the gathering of students' art works for the Gallery. As Miss Emily maintains, "We took away your art because we thought it would reveal your souls. Or to put it more finely, we did it to *prove you had souls at all*" (NLM, 255). The issue of souls is critical to old discourses of race and discrimination, in which we keep asking whether slaves, Africans, heathens, or women could have a soul. It is no coincidence that so many national projects have fought to document the artistic creativity of particular peoples. In the novel, the mission to make known the existence of clone souls was a remarkable movement in the 1970s:

Before that, all clones – or *students*, as we preferred to call you – existed only to supply medical science [...] We selected the best of it [the art] and put on special exhibitions. In the late seventies, at the height of our influence, we were organizing large events all around the country. There'd be cabinet ministers, bishops, all sorts of famous people coming to attend. (NLM, 256)

It is edifying to see how the Hailsham activists had a good time in the movement, "cabinet ministers, bishops, all sorts of famous people coming to attend", while the clones were kept uninformed, or rather quite manipulatively misinformed on what was going on. Normal artworks take the role of synecdoche in representing the artist ("I bought a van Gogh"); in the case of the clones the connection between the artwork and the anonymous artist was entirely severed. This period of flourishing reforms ran into trouble after what was referred to as the "Morningdale scandal". In Morningdale, the scientists pushed the cloning to its extreme by seeking optimal features in the children. The idea of cultivating certain qualities of the human race by genetic technology is a well-known cultural nightmare and a topic of science fiction. But it is remarkable that, in this novel, the figure receives an entirely different meaning. As Miss Emily has it:

It's one thing to create students such as yourselves, for the donation programme. But a generation of created children who'd take their place in society? Children demonstrably *superior* to the rest of us? Oh no. That frightens people. (NLM, 259)

What is Miss Emily actually saying and meaning here? Even her monologue, of course, is part of a dialogue reported by Kathy; and of course Miss Emily is imitating the predominant political attitude of the 1970s, and partly expressing her own thought. But which one is dominant above? "Oh no. That frightens people" seems to move the responsibility away from Miss Emily, indicating an ironic imitation of prevailing thought. The main function of this imitation is to make the source of the

utterance radically ambivalent; at the same time it is shared and distanced. But only a moment earlier Miss Emily had boasted how “we” (in Hailsham) “never quite lost touch with reality” (NLM, 257). Ironic double-voicing endeavours to raise Miss Emily and her programme above the prevailing attitudes and the Morningdale experiment, without taking any definite responsibility for the outcome.

Perhaps, still, the most crucial problem is elsewhere, “*But a generation of created children who’d take their place in society?*” This of course had nothing to do with the Hailsham project. The objective was to produce clones with a partly humanist upbringing and artistic talent, ready to donate their organs and have an ideally full life, not at all bringing the donations to an end or risking the borderline between normals and clones. The Morningdale experiment could have abolished the clone/human distinctions and relationships entirely and thus have marked an end to the Hailsham project as well. The relevance, even absoluteness of these distinctions becomes obvious when the principal sardonically begins recalling Miss Lucy, the sole truth-teller among guardians:

...she began to have these ideas. She thought you students had to be made more aware. More aware of what lay ahead of you, who you were, what you were for. She believed you should be given as full a picture as possible. [...] Lucy Wainwright was idealistic, nothing wrong with that. (NLM, 262)

Lucy Wainwright (probably the only person with her whole name in the novel) exacted for the “students” proper knowledge of their situation. Even she did not go as far as to suggest any change in the life prospects of the clones, yet she was “an idealist”. She simply had proposed to inject a modicum of public sphere into the life of the school. The principal, instead, as a real guardian, was convinced about Hailsham’s capacity to give the students something inalienable by sheltering the students, understanding the inevitable practicalities.

Hailsham’s progressive mission was based, from the beginning, on this idea of sheltering, of acting on behalf of the clones. There was no talk about giving clones adequate information on their position or future. The humanist education and the arts should demonstrate that clones had a soul, but even the propagandists of the soul did not think that the clones should have rights to proper knowledge, not to mention the right to have some bodily self-determination.

Because of the subtle and systematic lying, the Hailsham students were never able to know exactly what was true and what was not. So a mythic tale about deferral earned by true love was born, in spite of all attempts at invalidating it. Kathy and Tommy came to talk about the possibility of continuing their lives, at least for a time; nevertheless Miss Emily complains that she has to shorten the visit, because “in a short while some men are coming to take away my bedside cabinet”, and “(y)ou never know with these men. They handle it roughly, hurl it around their vehicle, then their employer claims it was like that from the start” (NLM, 251–252). The protection of the principal’s bedside cabinet prevails over the issue of some clones’ inevitable death. Eventually, Madame takes care of protecting the cabinet, and shouts of outrage at the workers. Kathy as a narrator does not comment on this situation with a word, yet the cockiness and unconcern jointly inform the reader of Miss Emily’s and Madame’s ethical quality, marking them as rather authoritarian characters in a class society. Still there is not the first word of open criticism or protest in Kathy’s account.

The cruelty of the episode is dramatized when these self-appointed reformers start taking pity on themselves. It is all about the ungratefulness of the youths, who do not consent to understand their altruistic toil:

‘Don’t try and ask them to thank you,’ Madam’s voice said behind us. ‘Why should they be grateful? They came here looking for something much more. What we gave them, all the years, all the fighting we did on their behalf, what do they know of that? They think it is God-given. Until they came here, they knew nothing of it.’ (NLM, 260)

Madame and Miss Emily have lived peacefully into their retirement years; still they do not see any real problem with the fact that Tommy was facing his death within months. They had been afforded a priceless present, because within their own horizon Kathy and Tommy had received a great life – for a clone. Behind all of the reformist pathos they share the true conviction that clones undeniably are not humans, and humans do not need to bother imagining themselves in a clone’s place. Therefore, it is good and reasonable to lie to clones, in order to protect them. Hypocritically enough, Miss Emily exalts the youths as her own products, “Look at you both now! I’m so proud to see you both. You built your lives on what we gave to you. You wouldn’t be who you are today if we hadn’t protected you” (LMN, 263).

Two disconcerted young adults, facing donations and premature death, in quest of some truth and clarity in the middle of obscure myths and sagas, and then the laudatory evaluation: “*Look at you*

*now!*” In a parallel situation, many a “human” might have summoned the police and his or her lawyer to ask for the severest possible penalties for such a fraud. But clones should be happy to have found out the truth and have tracked down the principal, even going there without a proper permit and evading the controlling authorities. Ironically, through her admiration, Miss Emily tries to impose the thought model of a slave narrative on Kathy and Tommy.

Afterwards, Kathy reports not knowing even herself the reason why she blurted out her awkward comment at the end of the episode: “*Madame never liked us. She’s always been afraid of us. In the way people are afraid of spiders and things*” (NLM: 263). Kathy’s metaphor is apposite, suggesting that clones are categorized as animals or things. Now Miss Emily has difficulties in concealing her rage:

‘Marie-Claude has given *everything* for you. She has worked and worked and worked. Make no mistake about it, my child. Marie-Claude is on your side and will always be on your side. Is she afraid of you? We’re *all* afraid of you. I myself had to fight back my dread of you all almost every day I was at Hailsham. There were times I’d look down at you from my study window and I’d feel such revulsion...’ (NLM, 263–264)

*My child.* So much for the praise; now Miss Emily wants to take back her positions as a principal, guardian and benefactor. The “pride”, generously pronounced just a moment earlier, finds its proper place when Miss Emily airs her normal and self-evident dread for clones. It is not a moral defect of humans to produce clones industrially; it is the defect of the clones themselves to be so abominable by being industrial clones. But what exactly prompts this sudden outburst in the middle of this well-disciplined conversation? Kathy has indeed done something extraordinary, something she has never done or reported earlier; she has *challenged a normal* by saying something potentially critical about a human being to whom she should be so grateful. Eventually it turns out that the episode which provides the title of the novel was something entirely different than what Kathy and Tommy had speculated. Madame explains how she had seen a new, more scientific and harsh world coming, “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” (NLM, 267). Madame witnessed a social tension, without much empathy for, or interest in, Kathy’s private concerns.

The Politics of Clones?

As Mark Jerng (2008) has it, this novel does not follow the model of slave narratives. The clones are not looking for emancipation. There is indeed very little to be seen in terms of resistance, protest, or politics. Kathy, Ruth, and Tommy are not growing into humans; they rather seem to give up many human qualities during the course of the novel. The novel reads like an inverted *Bildungsroman*, accounting for the growing up of the clones without the final emancipation as an individual or as a group. The entry into the society remains unfinished.

But possibly *Never Let Me Go* is only secondarily interested in the *particular* problem of cloning. The author displays no great interest in the scientific or administrative details of cloning, even the extent of cloning remains ambiguous throughout the novel. On the other hand, clones seem to have very few particular clone-like characteristics, quite the contrary. The students are exceedingly normal, exhibiting jealousy, ambition, and power-games among themselves, if not even characterized as exceptionally well-behaving children and youths. The novel is much more about the general horror before difference; that is, while cynical humans produce clones to solve their own problems of illness and mortality, they are then in complete dread of their own creations. The tale about the boy, bound to the tree and brutally murdered and mutilated, may not have been necessarily just a myth or intimidation.

As Judith Butler (2004, 25) writes, “[E]ssential to so many political movements is the claim of bodily integrity and self-determination”. But precisely this bodily self-determination is denied the clones, in their case the “body has its invariably public dimension” (p. 26) in such a dominating way that the clone only appears as a protector or shelter of this publicly owned body. In Butler’s language, these clones exhibit the utmost amount of vulnerability, waiting to be mutilated. The extreme vulnerability of clones is motivated by the human fear of vulnerability, a wish for being always reparable and in control of bodily contingences with the help of these surrogate resources.

The novel systematically criticizes the complacent middle-class politics on behalf of others; in a similar way that *The Remains of the Day* portrayed the limits of Lord Darlington’s upper-class politics endeavouring to replace the parliamentary institutions in British foreign policy, or *We Orphans* the self-importance of British missions in China. Stevens, from *The Remains of the Day*, and the clones are equal in the sense that they do not see themselves as citizens or active participants of political struggles. Stevens, as a butler, had actively assigned the role of the thinking

and acting citizen to his esteemed employer; the clones, instead, were neither given an active role in the school nor in the world outside it.

The story about the friendship, quarrels and final parting before death between Kathy, Ruth, and Tommy renders the clones deeply human right from the beginning, whereas the “normal” human beings present themselves as unreliable, unethical and thus in one sense of the word, as *inhuman* guardians. Nevertheless, this leaves unresolved the issue regarding the absence of protest and resistance by the Hailsham students. Why did they yield themselves to the human abuse as mildly as sacrificial lambs? This is an issue which should be examined both on the level of created story-world (the narrated) and on the level of Kathy’s narration.

Of course there is the thread of hidden totalitarianism. As Miss Emily testifies, the conditions in the schools, or should we rather say, breeding institutions, were merciless before the Hailsham reforms. This old and plain fear of death lived in the stories about escaped students and speculations on the electric current of the fences. The shadow of terror lived as a fear of the forest. Hailsham children did not have any personal contacts outside the school, just the consciousness that they were not “normal”, and the reflection of their own repulsiveness in the eyes of the “normals”. Hailsham’s educational reforms had their own strict limits. The children lived constantly within a tangled and complicated web of lies, paranoia and strictly controlled information. As classical as the Sherlock Holmes novels are, they were censored from the students for health reasons – they were, after all, bred to produce healthy organs, organs that belonged to society, not to the clones.

The only instances of breaking the order in Hailsham were Tommy’s early tantrums against the compulsory creativity. The children knew they were discriminated against, and the institutional leaders were passionate about discriminating and disciplining those who deviated from the Hailsham aspirations. A question posed to the guardians that was too direct was a cause for torment. The fear to cross the absolute border between guardians and “students” is well established and cherished.

The meeting at Miss Emily’s home is, of course, the most obvious crossing of the border between humans and clones. In one particular sense, Miss Emily is consistent in her praise over Kathy and Tommy: however unrealistic their wishes were, they brought along Tommy’s odd pictures, and their shared belief in love. They neither protested, nor harmed their valuable organs, nor did they even mention trying suicide. They believed after all in the Hailsham credo: love and arts can



ennoble the short life of clones. But even the arts and love cannot break the economic rules of the organ industry and make their short lives any longer. The idea of ennobling love does not imply that the youths had consumed sentimental literature; after leaving Hailsham they discussed Tolstoy, Kafka as well as Picasso. On one level, the novel portrays Kathy not as equal to humans but as an exceptionally well-read, literate person, to whom the Hailsham heritage seems to ultimately offer some limited dignity of life, despite its shortness. The arts do not greatly change the course of her life, but they provide tools to live within the niche of a clone and a carer as richly as possible.

Sleep away, my reader?

The absence of conflict is still a different issue on the level of narration. Earlier, it was established that Kathy's audience is, at any rate, one of the clones. Why should any normal indeed listen to her? During the telling, Kathy already is a carer. She explicitly mentions how solitary she is at work, driving mostly through the country, from one clinic to another. She presumes she will get a bit more time and company after finishing as a carer and moving on to donating herself.

Right in the beginning of the novel, Kathy mentions a donor who intensely wanted to hear everything about Hailsham: "What he wanted was not just to hear about Hailsham, but to *remember* Hailsham, just like it had been his own childhood" (NLM, 5). To remember Hailsham, to remember the utopia, which nevertheless provided more in terms of identity than the sheer portrait of a donor? All the cues indicate that Kathy is telling her story to a donor from another institution. He or she has both time and interest to listen. Kathy is telling her audience the distant home she or he never had. The next thing is to look a bit closer at Kathy as a carer. As she says early on:

My donors have always tended to do much better than expected. Their recovery times have been impressive, and hardly any of them have been classified as 'agitated', even before fourth donation. Okay, maybe I *am* boasting now. But it means a lot to me, being able to do my work well, especially that bit about my donors staying 'calm'. (NLM, 3)

Kathy's extraordinary talent and self-image is to keep her donors calm. Shall we read this creation of calmness into her narration as well? If that is the case, it substantially changes the interpretation of the novel. The donors well know their fates; their battles have already been fought. They know what the announcement of childlessness and obligatory donation of organs felt like. Maybe they collectively know cases when clones did not take the announcements as equably as in Kathy's story.

A half-serious Hailsham legend reported that Dorset was the place where all the things lost at school finally ended up. Kathy and Tommy had once again found the title song cassette from a Dorset town. The book closes with scenery, where Kathy re-visits Dorset, just after Tommy's death, or, as they say about clones, as he had "completed". The death of a clone is not a failure or loss; it means the completion of the teleological assignment. Listening to the flapping of torn carrier bags, stuck to the branches of a tree, she is still able to feel Tommy's strong presence. Could any other closure be more soothing for a clone, waiting for his or her own death?

It is due to the knowledge she shares with her listener and the purpose of her narrative to provide her narratee with tranquility that Kathy does not actively read into nor regard more critically the important meeting with Madame and Miss Emily. In sharp contrast to her tendency to speculate all emotional aspects of encounters with other clones, she does not unpack the meeting, and therefore does not read it politically. The consequences of such speculation might be all too devastating and disheartening. As a considerate carer, she is a selective narrator, who no longer embarks on shaking up the balance of last days by reading politically the totalitarian discrimination and ruthless abuse by human beings, and the failure of these last visions of Hailsham exceptionalism. Political reading belongs to those who remain. Indeed, there is a reminder for an acute reader on the flyleaf: "England, late 1990s". All this discrimination already exists, and organs are purchased from China and elsewhere. The novel poses a question, for us the readers, and for the literature in general: do we only need narratives to fall asleep with?

As Toker and Chertoff (2008, 168) argue, the novel puts its reader in a complex situation. At first, the reader is there in close proximity to the donor to whom the story is being told. As the story of Hailsham unfolds, the reader is kept in a similar state as the clones themselves, that of knowing-but-not-yet-believing. When the discrimination and crimes against the clones are gradually revealed, the reader cannot but sympathize with the clones against all humans. The reader cannot find the first "human" to identify with; and while the clones do not protest and struggle for emancipation, there are no consoling and alleviating plotlines available. Perhaps, following Butler's language, the only remaining alternative is the grief for the most vulnerable, and the resistance to fantasies of total control of vulnerability.

Yet this reading leaves some disturbing, unanswered questions. Does Kathy's identity as a calming carer and narrator and as a committed carrier of Hailsham ideology make her also an accomplice to

the the cloning project, and why not, the clones themselves? Do we not see that both Ruth and Tommy turn their backs on Kathy and her Hailsham idealism, and choose to identify with other donors instead? Should we think that Kathy, after all, is an unreliable clone in her caring mission as well? This is difficult to argue without imposing some universal standards (and here, *human* expectations); on the other hand, the unresolved final tension between the key characters leaves Kathy's account more or less suspicious.

Advancing in the political reading of novels thus requires acknowledgement of key distinctions of literary narratology. This is particularly relevant in the case of programmatically self-conscious authors who experiment with methods of narration. An author's political comments or ideas are not necessarily present in the form of explicit rejoinders, and if they are, they are seldom particularly interesting. In order to avoid reductionist short-cuts, it is necessary to resort to analytic operations provided by such concepts as implied author, narrator, narrative, unreliable narrator, and focalization. If the political character of novels has something new and disruptive to say to us, it is grounded in rich tensions between these narrative instances, not in direct declarations by the author. The one-sided interest in the projected story-world (Herman 2002), the events and actions of the novel, tends to disregard the perspectival and limited ways of knowing this world. Ishiguro seduces his readers into seeing the world from the perspective of clones, and into recognizing the harsh, prejudicial and hypocritical human world, full of segregationist impulses.

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