

The Fragility of Life: Kazuo Ishiguro's Worldview in *Never Let Me Go*

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Abstract

本稿は、カズオ・イシグロの*Never Let Me Go* (2005) にみられる作者の世界観を論じたものである。その世界観とは、生は泡沫のごとく脆い、という認識である。イシグロは、従来、大人をつく嘘に守られた子供の世界を泡に喩えていた。事実、前作の*When We Were Orphans* (2000)では、少年時代に形成された妄想が成人期に崩壊する様が描かれており、それが作品の中心テーマになっている。一方、*Never Let Me Go*では、この子供時代の脆さが、クローンの生全体、ひいては人間の生そのものを表象するものとしてテーマ化されている。本稿の目的は、この生の脆弱さが、最新の長編小説に反映された、作者の世界観の核となる概念であることを説明することにある。具体的には、まず本作の創作経緯をたどり、次にクローンの幼少期の泡の形成と破壊の過程を通観し、さらにその過程を読者に追体験させることが作者の意図であることを指摘し、そうした過程を経たクローンと読者が直面する生と死の制御不能性を示す比喩を確認したうえで、最後に、生の脆弱さという認識こそが作者の世界観の根底をなすものであると述べる。

Key Words: Kazuo Ishiguro, worldview, bubble, clone, *Never Let Me Go*

Quite a few reviewers of Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* (2005) have rightly been nonplussed both by its thematic obscurity and by its narrative implausibility. Louis Menand, Sarah Kerr, and Andrew Riemer, for instance, all express puzzlement at the sheer difficulty of locating its central theme, while Philip Hensher, Michiko Kakutani, and Jay Jennings cast doubt on the plausibility of its conclusion—namely, that the clones end up unconditionally accepting their fate of offering their vital organs to those from whose embryos they were apparently created. The first group of those reviewers poses an unexpressed question, ‘What is Ishiguro writing *about*?’ implicitly requesting that the author be clearer in what he has to say. The second, meanwhile, puts another, ‘Why do they turn out *so* passive and helpless?’ impatiently demanding that the cloned students, if closer to humans, be more rebellious.¹⁾ This will suggest that the author's seemingly improbable rendition of human nature with any equivocal messages encoded in it has doubly

baffled some of his top-notch readers. But in fact the whole novel is predicated on the assumption that the clones' very helplessness is that of human beings, who are generally as helpless as the clones in the way of having very few options to exercise in what they can do with their lives; and virtually no choice but to accept their mortality. And that assumption, in my view, constitutes the author's worldview as well as the central theme of the novel. The paragraphs that follow are then devoted to analysing how this worldview is represented in his latest novel.²⁾

Two Frameworks

The whole project of composing *Never Let Me Go* was launched in 1990, one year after the author got his third novel, *The Remains of the Day*, published, though somehow the project was later stuck and temporarily abandoned, according to Ishiguro (Wong and Crummett 211). He then returned to it after *The Unconsoled* (1995) but tried in vain to complete it again. His third trial, made in the year following the publication of *When We Were Orphans* (2000; *Orphans* hereafter), finally brought him a sudden breakthrough with an inspiration coming to him while he was listening in his study to a radio programme that featured great advances in biotechnology: a 'framework' for beginning 'a story that was simple, but very fundamentally, the sadness of the human condition' (*BookBrowse*). The narrative framework is obviously to do with cloning but more specifically with the clones' fate—still in their twenties most of them should undergo a series of donations and die prematurely. But it should be noted that their fate is quite distinct from the one that befell his original human characters the author was developing in the early 1990s. Ishiguro reminisces that one of his own notes taken during his first go, touching on this story, reads 'The Student's Novel', which was 'definitely *Never Let Me Go*', he stresses, in view of its narrative atmosphere; and yet the fate hanging over these human students concerned itself with 'nuclear weapons and a cold war mentality' (Wong and Crummett 211).

The atomic bombing of Nagasaki is a frequent subject in the discussions of Ishiguro's first novel, *A Pale View of Hills* (1982), the bulk of whose narrative unfolds in postwar Nagasaki. For example, in the article 'Life after the Bomb' published by *The Guardian* in February of the year the novel came out, Nicholas de Jongh the reviewer did mention the bomb, while paying due respect to the young writer by making it clear that his artistic design lay in describing the haunted lives of those who survived the bomb rather than exploring the issue of the bomb itself.³⁾ Yet one and a half years later Ishiguro wrote a critical article for the same newspaper in which he took exception to the then flourishing business of some writers leaping at nuclear issues for their subject matters simply to attract attention from the general public.⁴⁾ Ishiguro's scepticism towards them arose entirely from his unease about the possibility that such 'shoddy' and 'mediocre' works, motivated by nothing other than the Cold War 'opportunism', might make for the tendency to

‘familiarise, even glamorise, the holocaust terrain, until it begins to resemble sci-fi territory’ (‘I Became’ 9).⁵⁾

No doubt in order to underline the fact that his motive for writing his first novel originated in his more intimate relation to Nagasaki, Ishiguro had the same article begin with the description of a rather personal impression he once had of the atomic bomb dropped on Nagasaki nine years before he was born: he took the bomb for granted as a child to such a degree as to believe that every town had one bomb or two dropped onto it—‘I had grown up without any conception of the significance of that bomb . . . and I had been *allowed the childhood security of believing* the adult world around me safe, stable and morally ordered. It was strange, then, to realise in adulthood the extent to which that same world must have been fraught with uncertainty and upheaval’ (‘I Became’ 9; my italics). Obviously, as his word ‘allowed’ suggests, Ishiguro conceived the ‘childhood security’ to be a necessary, even beneficial one, but then as the ‘believing’ indicates, he also knew that it had depended on restrictions, imposed by adult persons, especially by his parents, on furnishing information to protect him from confronting the cruel as opposed to his imaginary world.⁶⁾ Ishiguro himself reflects upon a case of such information constraint: while relating some of her experiences of the war, his mother did not at all fill him in on the calamitous consequences of the atomic bomb. Indeed, it was not until her son brought out his first short stories in 1980 (‘A Family Supper’ and ‘A Strange and Sometimes Sadness’—the latter dealing quite directly with the bomb claiming a friend of the protagonist’s) that she began to tell him about her memories of her friends who had died from the bomb (Mackenzie, ‘Between Two Worlds’ 14).⁷⁾

For Ishiguro, thus, this absence of the atomic bomb as a household topic stands for what he calls ‘the childhood security’ in which he was carefully sheltered from the knowledge of the tragic implications of the bomb. It may follow then that the idea of the nuclear atmosphere as the framework for the original version of *Never Let Me Go* might have been conceived from his renewed interest in reliving his own sense of having been securely guarded from—or kept in prelapsarian ignorance of—the adult’s fuller knowledge of the implications the nuclear disaster entails, and of the way he came to lose that sense in the process of climbing into adulthood. Ishiguro recalls in his article above that his shock, when he realised that the adults’ world was not working as he had always thought, was so considerable that the fact ‘came as a curious revelation’ to himself (‘I Became’ 9).⁸⁾ But after all, this initial framework did not work at all. The possible reason is that although it could evoke at once a sense of childhood security and a sense of the loss of it, two senses Ishiguro himself experienced from childhood to adolescence, and which have been more or less represented in *Orphans* in the form of Christopher Banks’s loss of his parents,⁹⁾ the novelist must have thought that the nuclear framework itself could not function adequately enough as a universal metaphor for, in his own phrase, ‘how we all live’ (Freeman 197). In

Ishiguro's view, a life is fragile from beginning to end, a worldview which informs his occasional references to extremely deterministic aspects of our lives such as the life's uncontrollability and mortality.¹⁰ His newly discovered framework of cloning, on the other hand, seems to have struck him as evoking more precisely our extremely helpless condition from childhood through adulthood to death through the clones' 'artificially' (Bates 202) shortened life-spans, in which they are afforded no choice in their lives but to sacrifice their lives for human beings. Ishiguro says that he wants his readers to 'face the same questions' (Freeman 197) by reading the novel as they face somewhere in their individual lives. Those questions, whatever they are, can be scaled down to this: to what extent are our lives fragile? Ishiguro's answer to that will be: very extremely.

In the Bubble of Hailsham

Childhood security, a cocoon generally spun by adult persons, but mostly by parents, to shelter a child from the complicated world, as borne out by Ishiguro's childhood, has been characterised by the novelist as a 'protective bubble' (Bates 199). However, this protective bubble is, by nature, fragile: even with a delicate touch upon the film it bursts open, the boundaries between the inner and the outer space vanishing sometimes in an instant—like Banks's—and sometimes in slow motion—like the clones'. Although the cloned students have been snugly enveloped in their guardians' protection and deception as well as in their own fantasy and ignorance, little by little they get an inkling of the fact that they are all predestined to premature death and that they are totally helpless about it. The examination of the way in which Ishiguro creates and then shatters this bubble of Hailsham will follow to the end of this section.

Hailsham is a school completely quarantined from the world outside. The students living in it are strictly forbidden to go beyond the estate boundary by their guardians, who while teaching subjects like geography, fine arts, and hygiene would not give their students any explicit clues about their bleak future. Indeed, their role is first and foremost to guard their students from approaching the very knowledge. Though sheltered in this way, the students on their side seek private spaces in which to indulge in weaving various fantasies of their own, and thus Kathy H. and her classmates enjoy their privacy in many such places as the 'pavilion' (*Never Let Me Go* 6-7; hereafter page numbers alone), the 'dorm after lights-out' (15), the 'little footpath' (44), and other 'hiding places, indoors and out' (43). These sanctuaries are by and large not so safe, however, as to prevent them from being detected by their headmistress, who keeps a wary eye on her students to safeguard them even from their free-form fantasies.¹¹ Nevertheless, fantasies thread their way through the headmistress's vigilance into each student's mind, quickly spreading within Hailsham. The mechanism of the creation and dissemination of fantasies works in this way: a metaphorical wall to shelter the students inevitably functions as a barrier to block their

view of the worlds both outside and inside;¹²⁾ hence their narrow vision, in turn, drives them into filling in information gaps by creating what Siddhartha Deb appropriately names ‘the mythology of Hailsham’ about familiarly unfamiliar persons and incidents as diverse as ghosts seen in the wood behind the Hailsham plot, Miss Lucy’s vague yet frightening warnings about their future, the possible existence of the Gallery, to name only three examples.

But then fantasies are fantasies, far from the harsh reality which awaits the students. They all vaguely sense this: a fear that their fragile fantasies might ultimately bring to them what they do not want to face is always hovering on the fringes of their minds. This vague disquietude appears in Kathy’s account of their Secret Guards fantasy, whose mission it is to protect their most favourite guardian from the conspiracy of some other guardians’ to abduct her.¹³⁾ Despite the Guards’ claim that they have accumulated enough evidence for the plot, they would not actually take any practical measures at all because ‘I think’, confesses Kathy, ‘we must have had an idea of how precarious the foundations of our fantasy were. . .’ (51). They hesitate to go further because they are dimly aware not just that there is no such plot or ruse going on, but also that even the foundation of their own existence may be shaky—such is their fear that ‘those of us who’d grown close to her [Ruth, their leader], we each played our part in preserving the fantasy and making it last for as long as possible’ (52).¹⁴⁾ Their belief that they *are* the guards of their favourite guardian, moreover, affords them a comfortable sense of being protected by their own fantasy, so much so that Kathy explodes at Moira B., a former member of the Secret Guards, when the latter mocks at their enterprise as silly and jejune. Kathy’s analysis of her own emotional reaction against Moira’s ridicule is this: ‘What it was, I suppose, is that Moira was suggesting she and I cross some *line* together, and I wasn’t prepared for that yet. I think I sensed how beyond that *line*, there was something harder and darker and I didn’t want that. Not for me, not for *any of us*’ (55; my italics). Actually, she makes numerous remarks upon how she and others are not yet prepared for stepping into other such territories: Madame ‘territory’ (37), Miss Lucy ‘territory’ (69), their possibles ‘territory’ (137), and their donation ‘territory’ (274). Their Norfolk theory—all things lost can be recovered in Norfolk—is another case in point. When in a geography lesson they learn that Norfolk is called ‘a *lost corner*’ (65), it naturally becomes ‘like a fantasy world’ to them; but then understandably, they ‘never bothered to examine [the] Norfolk theory in any detail’ (66)—no doubt, lest it should incur the risk of crossing a crucial line between fantasy and reality.¹⁵⁾

The lines are there, however, to be crossed after all; indeed, the cloned students, though inadvertently, do cross one of such lines when they try ascertaining, by walking so close as to brush against their Madame, whether or not she really is scared of them.

. . . I glanced quickly at her face—as did the others, I’m sure. And I can still see it now, the shudder she seemed to be suppressing, the real dread that one of us

would accidentally brush against her. . . . Ruth had been right: Madame *was* afraid of us. But she was afraid of us in the same way someone might be afraid of spiders. We hadn't been ready for that. It never occurred to us to wonder how *we* would feel, being seen like that, being the spiders. (35; Ishiguro's italics)

Advancing into a forbidden territory brought them a sudden, icy shock:¹⁶⁾ they caught a glimpse of what it really means to be Hailsham students to an outsider like Madame, which they have partly known but have been unable to face squarely so far. This partial confrontation with their own identity makes them feel as frightened as if walking 'past a mirror you've walked past every day of your life, and suddenly it shows you something else, something troubling and strange' (36).¹⁷⁾ But in fact what makes Madame almost shudder is her chilling knowledge of her students' bleak future, a future quite insecure and dissimilar from what they imagined to be.

It is evident then that apart from the guardians' protective deception, the students' well-wrought fantasies, with which they struggle to eke out their scanty information, serve to inflate the Hailsham bubble, and that behind their playing with their imagination lies hidden a motive for procrastinating as long as possible a critical moment of accepting their cruel fate. To put it contrapuntally, their very unwillingness to confront what awaits them is the flip side of their 'willingness to invent little private mythologies' (Godwin 58).¹⁸⁾ Their psychological struggle to ward off this crisis is observed by Kerr (16) but more eloquently elucidated by Earl G. Ingersoll: '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' (49). Ingersoll says not just 'their' but 'we', for he perfectly knows that the story is quite tragic not so much because the clones' fate is crueller than ours, as precisely because theirs is as cruel; and that our stringent fate stipulates for our near helplessness about our existential uncontrollability and mortality. And here lie Ishiguro's intentions: a) he ventures to *artificially* shorten his clones' life-span to show that no matter how or when they die, both the clones and humans must die eventually—we share our fate of being mortal; b) by describing the helpless conditions of the clones who have no choice in the future other than to become donors, he manages to show that their human recipients are also almost helpless about their fate. Thus Ingersoll explicates our suffering as follows: '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' (48; my italics). John M. Harrison asserts that *Never Let Me Go* is a story about 'repressing what you know, which is that in this life people fail one another, grow old and fall to pieces' (26). This seems to be more or less true of the human conditions, and how it is to be perceived by the reader in the process of reading the novel in question will be explored in the following section.

Surprised by Similarity

Toker and Chertoff's observation that 'the binding fascination that characterizes the first time reading of *Never Let Me Go* is, to a large extent, parallel to the experience of the novel's characters' (163) succinctly describes the parallel relationship between the reader and the clones with regard to their confrontation with their shared fate. As stated above, the clones' being in the seclusion of Hailsham obliges them to have only limited perspectives about their own actual conditions; Ishiguro organises the narrative structure in a well-calculated way that allows the gradual process by which the cloned students make out and then come to terms with their fate to be followed along a trajectory by his readers—a process the author dubbed a 'parallel journey' (Wroe).¹⁹⁾ Thus, the readers, whose field of narrative vision is foggily blocked, are required to take as much time as the clones to penetrate into the consequence of the latter's fate. Peter Kemp perceives the strange obscurity of the narrative in Kathy's somewhat dim perception of the circumstances, while Herbert and Riemer describe the opaqueness with negations and questions, respectively: 'The students do not know, and the guardians do not fully explain, how and when the school began. The children are not initially told who they are and what makes them unique' (48); 'What is Hailsham? Who are the "donors" Kathy looks after? . . . And what will become of her when she ceases to be a carer?' (See also Hensher; Kakutani). Both the readers and the clones are, in short, parallelly stumbling in a blind manner towards the narrative destination.

By contrast, Sarah Howard highly praises this puzzling obscurity as owing much to an artistic dexterity on Ishiguro's part of 'building suspense' (24). Indeed, other reviewers, as if dealing with a detective novel, guiltily reveal what they think is a crucial fact in the novel, brandishing self-justifying banners of 'spoiler alert': 'read no further than the end of this paragraph . . . Now seriously, no kidding, stop here' (Grossman 62); 'Stop reading now if you don't want to know . . .' (Jennings 44); 'Warning . . . don't read on' (Onstad); 'I've gotten letters [from one of his readers] . . . criticizing me for revealing too much about books. So I give you, as a kind of public service, all the endings . . . Let's add one more to the list: They're clones' (Watman 61). These obviously exaggerated precautions are not perhaps much more than well-meant (though banal enough) signs typical of notices. Ingersoll, however, seems vexed by them; indeed, he contends that the narrative is manipulated from the outset to 'forestall surprise'.

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. (48)

The readers are somewhat prepared for coming ‘revelations yet [they are] not so certain of [their truth] as to find its disclosure boring and obvious’ (48). Thus Ingersoll flatly spurns those spoiler alerts above, asserting that ‘[t]hese 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’ (43; my italics). Ingersoll is definitely right. The reviewers’ ‘efforts’ also seem to be laced with mischievous humour, as their expressions bespeak it.

But this verdict also sounds too obvious nonetheless; in fact, it is equally possible to see the reviewers’ uniform precautions as making almost the same impact on the reader as the precaution made by Miss Lucy (the only rebellious spirit among the guardians) does on her students. As she attempts to protect them by warning them of their future, so the reviewers just did their utmost to ‘protect the reader’ (to quote Ingersoll’s term)—be they aware or not—by perhaps warning thus: what we’re going to do is show you something you should *not* know if you haven’t yet read the book, but then that is ultimately what you *should* know. As a matter of fact, this is precisely what Miss Lucy does to her cloned students. The guardian’s surprise at finding that what they really should know has not been taught enough—for example, the fact that they have been afforded from the start no vocational option to choose from—compels her to allude to it before them, unwittingly betraying her anger against her fellow guardians and the authorities above them (28-29; 80). In the same vein, the reviewer’s surprise at the students’ very identity must have forced them to hesitantly disclose it to the reader—quite a natural reaction.

More to the point, however, is not so much whether or not as when to reveal the fact that the clones’ fate nearly approximates to the readers’;²⁰⁾ for what is at stake here is the readers’ confrontation with the uncontrollability of their lives as well as their mortality. What Ishiguro has done is organise the narrative in such a way as to lead both his clones and readers synchronically and gradually to confront their dreadful common fate.²¹⁾ Ishiguro’s intention is by no means to evoke any suspense, but to urge the reader to follow exactly the same steps by which the naïve, ignorant clones pick their way through the narrative towards their final realisation that their secure childhood is nearing its end, and that their inevitably early death is now imminent. In other words, Ishiguro’s readers are encouraged to be baffled and irritated at the obscurity and fogginess of the clones’ world, at least in the early stage of their reading, as the clones themselves are, but somewhere in the middle to be surprised not at the fact that the students are clones unlike them,²²⁾ so much as by an unexpected similarity between themselves and the clones in terms of their slow comprehension of their ultimate fate.²³⁾ Here the reviewers above have indiscreetly overstepped the line drawn in the narrative, as Miss Lucy does, since it has been drawn to be overstepped by his readers themselves in the process of their reading, just as by the clones when they cross boundary-lines from ignorance to knowledge. In this respect, James Wood puts it aptly: ‘We begin

the novel horrified by their difference from us and end it thoughtful about their similarity to us' (39; see also Takahashi 205). Their 'difference' is, of course, that they are clones unlike us, but their 'similarity' points, however hard it is to accept this, to our common fate: as soon as we are born, we irresistibly head, rapidly like the clones or more slowly like most of us, through several uncontrollable stages of our lives towards our eventual deaths.

Metaphors for the Lightness of Life

The parallelism between the clones and the reader is also reflected in their lightness as beings. The 'bubble' metaphor we have already seen mentioned by Ishiguro literally represents the way the clones are protected from the world beyond, as well as how brittle the sphere of their lives is, but also metaphorically expresses the fragility of human life. And this bubble metaphor will be the prototype of several distinct metaphors that articulate the feather-like lightness of life.

Kathy the carer receives the news from a Hailsham graduate that the school is closing, and the very same night she turns her mind to the episode of a few days ago when she found herself walking along a street close behind a clown who carried helium balloons.

. . . I could see [the clown's] fist, where all the balloon strings converged, and I could see he had them securely twisted together and in a tight grip. Even so, I kept worrying that one of the strings would come unravelled and a single balloon would sail off up into that cloudy sky. . . . I thought about Hailsham closing, and how it was like someone coming along with a pair of shears and snipping the balloon strings just where they entwined above the man's fist. Once that happened, there'd be no real sense in which those balloons belonged with each other any more. (209)

Inside as well as outside Hailsham, Kathy feels, she and others are anchored by their guardians' grip onto the metaphorical strings knotted around them. Yet the closing of their school means that the very strings will be cut off from the guardians' grip,²⁴⁾ forcing the students and graduates slowly but separately to float up, from the close-knit Hailsham community to which many of them are emotionally tied up, into the grey, sunless sky where they never will feel their sense of solidarity. Now each has to begin a one-way isolated journey to death.

This sense of eventual separation from each other is described by Tommy (Kathy's lover), too: 'I keep thinking about this river somewhere, with the water moving really fast. And these two people in the water, trying to hold onto each other, holding on as hard as they can, but in the end it's just too much. The current's too strong. They've got to let go, drift apart. That's how I think it is with us . . . we can't stay together forever' (277). Their firm grip onto each other is to slip in the end in the furious current, their being swept separately out into the fog-bound sea where they never can touch each other. This river metaphor is analogous to the balloon one above in

symbolising their lightness as helpless beings, and very reminiscent of an earlier scene charged with narrative anticipation, where Kathy and others, upon graduation from Hailsham, cluster together as though protecting themselves against their fate, just like a flock of birds against the wind, in front of the farmhouse at the Cottage: '[We are] . . . fearful of the world around us, and—no matter how much we despised ourselves for it—unable quite to let each other go' (118).

This passage also reminds us of Kathy's favourite song 'Never Let Me Go' and the novel's title of the same name. Kathy's interpretation of a part of the lyrics—'Baby, baby, never let me go' (70)—is that it is about a woman who had never been pregnant for some reason, but who finally had a baby by miracle, and now 'holds this baby very close to her and walks around singing' this phrase partly 'because she's so happy, but also because she's so afraid something will happen, that the baby will get ill or be taken away from her' (70). Kathy knows her interpretation is not consistent with the rest of the lyrics, but then still keeps holding tightly in her mind this image of the mother holding tightly her baby. This might well signify her futile resistance to separation from her secure childhood, or from other students (Jerng 386), or from 'even humanity' (Herbert 55),²⁵⁾ or simply signify her helplessness about her predestined future. *Never Let Me Go* is, in brief, a poignant echo of a faint, anguished cry for a life.

The clones' feather-light lives are most pathetically represented in the novel's last scene in which bunches of trash fluttering along the fences surrounding a vast Norfolk field will at any moment be blown away by the wind (281-82). The image of the flapping trash, wasted and then carried by the wind all the way from places miles away, does refer to the ultimate conditions of Kathy's and others' lives.²⁶⁾ Tommy's and Ruth's organs have been removed from their bodies and then implanted into human bodies unknown to the donors; their whole beings remain only in Kathy's memories, but even those memories will eventually disappear when in the very near future she undergoes the same transplant operations as did her friends, with her organs being scattered and her whole being lost in the world.²⁷⁾ Their metaphorically represented lives are weightless and uncontrollable and frangible, and they are utterly helpless about it.

Ishiguro himself came to realise in his mid-thirties—in around 1990—that his own life turned out to be more uncontrollable than it looked in his twenties (Wachtel 29-30). This unspecific sense of uncontrollability seems to have been built into the dream-like narrative in *The Unconsoled* as well as in the latter section of *Orphans*, too. But it seems to be stretched to the limit in his final version of *Never Let Me Go* by the circumstances in which the cloned students are rendered totally helpless about their fixed fate (Haldane 112 and Nagara 400)—actually it is hardly surprising at all, however, considering that Ishiguro's sense of uncontrollability of his own life was originally aroused in him more or less at the period when he began working on the original version of this novel. As we have seen, the clones' helplessness about their uncontrollable

lives is best represented in the trash metaphor above. In a sense we are all being toyed by our whimsical fate, just as the trash by the wind. And this metaphor is not necessarily irrelevant to the argument here, for Ishiguro comments on the unmanageable lightness of our existence, comparing fate to wind: ‘I realize that we can’t control our lives. Life might pick you up and drop you somewhere else. You just have to dignify the position you land in, because life is short, and you can’t defer death’ (Inverne 67).²⁸⁾ But then he must since adolescence have perceived what Tim Adams calls a ‘sense of the randomness of fate’—that just as the wind picks trash up then drops it somewhere else, the fate did pick him up from Nagasaki and then drop him onto the far-off country: in short, that his had been an uncontrollable life from the earliest stage. It is perhaps for this reason that he has Kathy close her narrative with this line: ‘I just waited a bit, then turned back to the car, to drive off to wherever it was I was supposed to be’ (282)—‘wherever’ simply because she has been and will be very much at the mercy of her own fate. Given that Ishiguro’s interest in ‘metaphor’ derives from his desire to describe the ordinary lives of people important to him (Wachtel 19), it can be deduced that while depicting the lightness of the lives of Kathy, Ruth, and Tommy, who were created and raised and used as suppliers of body organs for human beings, Ishiguro *is* articulating the unbearable lightness of our own beings *per se*.

Defining a Worldview

The outlook on life Ishiguro holds which is represented in his sixth novel would be primarily composed of the following views:

- a) Childhood should be arranged as a world protected against the adult world outside, but it must by definition be vulnerable like a bubble; for it is the world that is deliberately constructed for a child to inhabit for a very limited time.
- b) Adulthood, on the other hand, appears to be placed at an inhabitant’s disposal; more often than not, however, that is not the case. On the contrary, adulthood is no less brittle than childhood, and no less uncontrollable.
- c) Death hides in ambush. Before you are aware of it, it would assault you, smashing you like an eggshell into pieces and leaving no trace of you behind it. Unfortunately you are helpless about it.

Ishiguro’s worldview rests on the assumption that human beings are fragile from birth to death. His clones’ lives demonstrate the frailty and uncontrollability both of childhood and of adulthood. A sense of childhood security and a sense of the loss of it are coterminous with a sense of grip on adulthood and its resultant sense of the loss of it, even the border fading away with the loss of life itself. All these senses of loss do embody the fragility of life, which in turn constitutes Ishiguro’s worldview as represented in *Never Let Me Go*, a work composed possibly as his *memento mori*.

Notes

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- 1) Mark Jerng observes that a view of this sort is ascribable to readerly expectation about human nature, an expectation that demands of clones that they should rebel if closer to humans, because ‘humans are people who rebel’ (382). In Jerng’s opinion, that expectation is exactly what the novel tries to undermine (382).
- 2) *Never Let Me Go* has still been Ishiguro’s ‘latest’ novel, though *Nocturnes: Five Stories of Music and Nightfall*, the collection of his newly written short stories, has quite recently been published by Faber and Faber.
- 3) On the other hand, Edith Milton writes on the basis of the maxim—silence speaks volumes—that ‘the bombing of Nagasaki’, though only briefly referred to, lies at the heart of the novel (13).
- 4) Takayuki Shonaka obliquely criticises Ishiguro for taking such a position as justifies himself alone, referring to the fact that the novelist’s treatment of the bomb in his first novel was rather cursory (492), as well as to Clive Sinclair’s testimony that Ishiguro knew the advantage of selecting Nagasaki as one of the settings in the novel for attracting the literary market (497). In Shonaka’s view, it is doubtful that Ishiguro had any serious interest in this nuclear issue (505). This view may be correct, for Ishiguro himself honestly confesses that in the novel ‘set in Nagasaki, it was hard to ignore the atomic bomb’ (Tookey 34).
- 5) Ironically, *Never Let Me Go* is regarded by some critics as belonging to that ‘sci-fi territory’ (Hensher 32; Jennings 44; MacDonald 76; Watman 61-62), though others dismiss this categorisation as of no relevance to the authorial intention (Allen 25-26; Atwood; Godwin 59; Haldane 112; Harrison 26; Ingersoll 51). Marilyn Herbert argues that the novel might be more correctly described as ‘psych-fi (psychological fiction)’ (9).
- 6) The same year he wrote this article, *Granta* published one of his short stories, ‘The Summer after the War’, a story about the narrator’s grandfather who has lost his influence over his former pupils. The narrator, then still a little boy, is ignorant of his grandfather’s situation, partly because of his naivety and partly because adults manage to protect him from the crueller adult world in which his grandfather is faced with the reality that one of his former students is asking him to deny a crucial part of his past glory.
- 7) The narrator of ‘A Strange and Sometimes Sadness’ reminisces about her Nagasaki days spent with her close friend ‘Yasuko’, who died in the war. The similarity between the plot of the story and his mother’s account of her friends’ deaths invites speculation that he might have heard of the latter’s tragic tale much earlier than he thought or claimed.
- 8) Ishiguro’s full appreciation of the implications of the atomic bomb seems to be transformed, for

example, into the sudden revelation dawning on Christopher Banks, the protagonist of *Orphans*, when he finds the man in a picture is the same person that he saw some days before his mother's disappearance (113).

- 9) In addition to the loss of his parents, Banks is to be deprived of his own long-cherished fantasies about his parents' disappearances. His mother, who he believed had been kidnapped by some evil men, proves to have become a mistress of a Chinese warlord for the deliberate purpose of making a true gentleman of her only child in his homeland, who has been financially provided for by that very man, a sort of benefactor to Banks just as Magwitch to Pip in *Great Expectations*; and his father, too, who Christopher also believed was kidnapped like his mother, in fact, had left his wife and son for his mistress and died in a foreign country. Moreover, even Uncle Philip, who he thought had always been on his side, is found to be the betrayer, having involved himself in letting Banks's mother taken by the warlord as his mistress.
- 10) For uncontrollability, see Chapel; Gallix 152-153; Inverne 67; Mudge; Shaffer 169, 171; Welch; and Wroe. For mortality, see Inverne 67; Moore and Sontheimer; Rothenberg; Shibata 42; and Wong and Crummett 215.
- 11) Toker and Chertoff compares Hailsham to a panopticon in which the students are under constant surveillance by the guardians (169).
- 12) This idea of a double function of a wall created to protect children as well as to obscure their vision is borrowed from Ronald Fraser's analysis of his own childhood experiences (33).
- 13) In *Orphans*, Christopher and his Japanese friend, Akira, create a similar fantasy in which as detectives they always succeed in rescuing Christopher's father from the kidnappers.
- 14) Christopher too makes touching efforts to preserve Akira's childish fantasies (96).
- 15) Norfolk is where Ishiguro was from 1979 to '80, attending the creative writing course at the University of East Anglia, after he had relinquished a dream of becoming 'a rock musician' (Kridler 126). Nostalgia might have induced him to choose Norfolk as an imaginative treasure chest where anything lost can be found, as Ishiguro found another career replaced there.
- 16) Kathy also feels a similar yet personal fright in her rows with Ruth (53; 59-60; 122; 227).
- 17) Cynthia F. Wong comments on this mirror metaphor that it 'is particularly useful to Kathy as she links the events of childhood and young adulthood to make a startling revelation about the purpose of life for Hailsham students' (*Kazuo Ishiguro* 98). See also 83, 115.
- 18) Margaret Atwood holds that their unwillingness comes from a fear of undergoing donations involving physical pain, a fear which is symbolised in the lack of physical descriptions of their daily lives. For Ishiguro's apologia for the scarcity of physicality, see Rothenberg.
- 19) 'If information does trickle gradually', says he, 'it's because the children themselves do not realise who they are. The reader is on a sort of parallel journey...' (Wroe).

- 20) Ishiguro himself says that when to expose it is a trivial matter to him because the novel is not a 'mystery' (Ono 133; Wroe), but in fact the timing is crucial, as I shall argue.
- 21) Wong too notes the simultaneous 'transformation' of Ishiguro's characters and readers (*Kazuo Ishiguro* 102).
- 22) Rebecca L. Walkowitz contends that the reader is rather 'urged to see humans as clones', not the other way round, because 'even humans produced through biological reproduction are in some ways copies' (226).
- 23) There are also studies of surprise on readers' part at 'sympathy' roused in themselves for the clones by the narrator's intimate voice. See Bernstein 139; Kerr 16; MacDonald 79-80; Takahashi 205; and Toker and Chertoff 167-68. For criticism of Kathy's voice, see Hensher; Jennings 44; and Kermode 21. Ishiguro's view of the narrator's voice is offered in *BookBrowse*.
- 24) Toker and Chertoff maintains that Hailsham is 'a kind of maternal environment' with the guardians and the students tied into a tight knot by an 'umbilical cord' (166).
- 25) Eluned Summers-Bremner asserts that the novel's theme is 'the human tenacity in warding off thoughts of death' (154). For 'tenacity' in Ishiguro's view of life, see also Nagara.
- 26) Wong says that images of trash scattered in the novel are not used metaphorically enough—to which Ishiguro replies they are *not* metaphors at all (Wong and Crummett 216-17). I disagree with them both.
- 27) For the clone's fragmentariness, see Herbert 39. Tomoko Nakagawa speculates that their knowledge that their own bodies will someday disappear from the earth might cause the clones to invent this fantasy—that something lost can be found in Norfolk (94).
- 28) See also Smith 17 and Wroe.

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