

# Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*:

## Childhood Memories and Nostalgia

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### Introduction

Kazuo Ishiguro wrote the futuristic yet nostalgic dystopian novel, *Never Let Me Go* in 2005. Ishiguro has won international acclaim and honors with his highly regarded novels, and he is considered to be one of the most remarkable contemporary fiction writers in both English-speaking and non-English-speaking countries. He is also renowned as a postmodern writer and his favorite writing style, the first-person narrative.

His first novel, *A Pale View of Hills* received the Winifred Holtby Memorial Prize of the Royal Society of Literature in 1982. It was his brilliant debut in the literary world. In the same year, Ishiguro was selected as part of Twenty Best of Young British Novelists national promotion. Four years later in 1986, his second novel, *An Artist of the Floating World* received the Whitbread Book of the Year Award which is equally prestigious as The Man Booker Prize<sup>1</sup>. It was his third novel, *The Remains of the Day* (1989), which made him an honorable Booker Prize winner and firmly established his reputation throughout the world. *The Remains of the Day* was adapted to film, and the featured movie received eight Academy Award nominations and won three awards. He wrote *The Unconsoled*, his fourth novel, in 1995 and he won the Cheltenham Prize. In that year, Ishiguro received the Order of the British Empire (OBE) for services to literature. In 1998, he received the French Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres from the French government. In 2000, his fifth novel, *When We Were Orphans* was released and shortlisted for the Booker Prize. His latest novel, *The Buried Giant*, was published in 2015, and so far his work has been translated into more than forty languages.

In this thesis, I examine Ishiguro's sixth novel, *Never Let Me Go*, which is the winner of the Italian Serono Prize and the German Corine International Book Prize and was shortlisted for the Booker Prize. The film adaptation of *Never Let Me Go* was directed by Mark Romanek and released in 2010. It received a favorable response from film critics praising the excellent performances of up-and-coming young Hollywood

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<sup>1</sup> Prestigious British award given annually to a full-length novel written by a citizen of the British Commonwealth or the Republic of Ireland.

actors. The novel was also made into a play and television drama in Japan. The play was directed by a leading Japanese theater director, Yukio Ninagawa, in 2014 and the television show was aired in 2016.

The original story is about human clones who are meant to be donors and to provide their vital organs to others. Many people think the genre of the novel is Science Fiction, because the characters are human clones and they are supposed to sacrifice their lives to keep others alive in the cruel futuristic dystopian society where the medical technology is advanced at a rapid pace. However, my interpretation of the story is that human cloning is just an ostensible theme, and what Ishiguro truly wants readers to take away from *Never Let Me Go* is the significance of the precious memories of childhood. It is the key component that makes the readers feel nostalgic as they read. I believe childhood memories are generally very important as they shape people's lives. When people grow up and reminisce about their childhood, they tend to realize how peaceful their childhood environment was, and how carefully it was protected from the harmful adult world. Eventually, people take a step out of the childhood boundary and confront the fact that there are so many things in the real life that they cannot avoid as they grow older. Kazuo Ishiguro describes this carefully protected bubble-like innocent childhood as Hailsham, the special boarding school, where the clone students spend their school days. Matthew Beedham, points out that "the novels of Kazuo Ishiguro demand that readers look honestly at the past, to consider what they hold valuable, and to question how they live their lives" (4). The attitude that Kathy H, the narrator and protagonist of the story, cherishes her youthful memories under the horrible plight of her sacrificing her life shows the readers the importance of facing those unescapable situations and how to fulfill their lives. All her beloved friends died by donating their vital organs, however, they still live on in Kathy's memory.

In this thesis, Chapter One focuses on the relationship between Kazuo Ishiguro and Japan. I attempt to deepen the understanding of his connection with Japan, and how memories of his childhood in Japan influence his works. Chapter Two looks at Hailsham, the idyllic place for Kathy and other clones. The chapter examines Ishiguro's motive for describing Hailsham as a seemingly idyllic place. Chapter Three aims to compare *Never Let Me Go* with other dystopian novels and movies and see through Ishiguro's intentions of using the topic, human clones to mask his true theme. Chapter Four explores a better understanding of Ishiguro's favorite writing style, the first-person narrator. The chapter points out the fact that Kathy's reminiscence of her past is unreliable to a certain extent, and the readers can see the things only through Kathy's narration. In the final chapter, I examine three cassette tapes Kathy owns, and investigate the importance of precious memories attached to the three tapes. The cassette tapes themselves are just mass-copied products, however they remind Kathy of

her happy memories with her beloved friends, Ruth and Tommy, therefore they are valuable for Kathy. The chapter explores the important role of memories of a happy childhood in a full life. Throughout the thesis, I take Ishiguro's interviews into consideration and clarify Ishiguro's biography and its connection with his thoughts of 'childhood memories' and 'nostalgia' to consider the 'meaning of life.' By studying *Never Let Me Go*, I want to prove that the novel is not just a dystopian story and is in fact a novel that reveals the importance of having happy childhood memories.

## Chapter 1: Kazuo Ishiguro: A “Japanese-born British” Novelist

Kazuo Ishiguro is considered to be one of the most honored contemporary fiction writers in the world. He often uses first-person narrative style, and he is renowned as an important individual in postmodern literature. Haruki Murakami, one of the most celebrated contemporary fiction writers, praises Ishiguro: “[...] it is a joy to be blessed with a contemporary like Kazuo Ishiguro. [...] To picture what his new novels may look like is to picture my yet unwritten work as well” (viii). Ishiguro thinks himself as a homeless writer, because he has experienced an identity crisis in his childhood. This chapter explores Ishiguro’s background to examine the correlation of *Never Let Me Go* and his childhood memories, when he spent his early years in Japan and the UK. The chapter reveals the fact that Kathy’s idyllic childhood memories are connected to Ishiguro’s childhood memories.

A lot of critics bring into question his identity and ethnicity. How could a person of Japanese origin embody true “Britishness” in his novel? Does his childhood memory of Japan have an influence on his first two novels that are set in Japan? Barry Lewis points out that “the interesting question about Ishiguro’s writing is not ‘Is it Japanese?’ but ‘How Japanese is it?’” (20). Ishiguro’s life history seems an essential start point to analyze his writings.

Kazuo Ishiguro was born in Nagasaki, in 1954, nine years after the dropping of an atomic bomb on the city during World War II. At the age of five, he left Japan and came to Surrey, in southern England, with his parents and his elder sister. His younger sister was born in the UK. His father, Shizuo Ishiguro, an oceanographer, was to be employed by the British government to join a research project on the North Sea. It was supposed to be a temporary stay at first, however, they ended up settling in the town of Guildford for good. Ishiguro attended British grammar school in Surrey but spoke Japanese at home with his parents. Even though his parents provided him with Japanese magazines, comic books, and puzzles to keep him caught up with the culture of his homeland, his Japanese language ability remained at the same level when he was five years old. It was twenty-nine years later that Ishiguro returned to Japan. In an interview with Suanne Kelman, Ishiguro tells her his emotional motivation behind writing his first novel, *A Pale View of Hills*, with his personal history:

I grew up thinking I was going to return to Japan any day. And so I had this very powerfully imagined country in my head. And by the time I had more or less grown up, I realized that this Japan that existed in my head, and which was very important to me, was a country that no longer existed in reality, if it ever had. I also became aware that as the years passed this place was just fading away in my head, too. (43)

In the interview, Ishiguro also reveals the reason why he became a writer. “I had a Japan inside my head, which I needed to transcribe as accurately as possible” (43). When he was twenty years old, in 1974, he traveled to the USA and Canada and hitchhiked around the West Coast for several months. He attempted to establish himself as a musician by sending out demo tapes. According to Susannah Hunnewell, during his travels, Ishiguro encountered people who asked him a question: “What do you think is the meaning of life?” (37). “The meaning of life” seems to be the fundamental question that he has been trying to figure out in his entire career as a novelist. That same year, he attended University of Kent in Canterbury, where he studied American literature and earned his Bachelor of Arts degree in English and Philosophy with honors in 1978. He occasionally worked with the homeless in London and met his future Glaswegian wife, Lorna Anne MacDougall, a social worker, at a charity in Notting Hill when he worked as a residential resettlement worker. In 1979, Ishiguro enrolled in a well-known creative writing program at the University of East Anglia in Norwich, Norfolk, and studied with Malcolm Bradbury and Angela Carter both who are acclaimed British writers. He graduated from the course completing a Master of Arts degree in 1980. After he got the Master degree, he became a British citizen in 1982 to become a professional ‘British’ novelist.

In an interview conducted by Allan Vorda in 1990, Ishiguro says that “I think if there is something I really struggle with as a writer, [...] it is this whole question about how to make a particular setting actually take off into the realm of metaphors so that people don’t think it is just about *Japan or Britain*” (16, emphasis added). *A Pale View of Hills*, his first book, is a story of a middle-aged Japanese woman, Etsuko, who lives in England by herself reminiscing about her past life during a visit from her second daughter, Niki. Etsuko thinks back to the days when she was in Japan with her first husband, a Japanese man named Jiro. It was shortly after the dropping of the atomic bomb in Nagasaki. Etsuko also looks back on the time when her first daughter, Keiko, committed suicide sometime after moving to England.

Ishiguro’s second novel, *An Artist of the Floating World*, is set entirely in post-World War II Japan, and is narrated by an old Japanese painter, Masuji Ono, who had been a supporter of militarism with his propagandistic artwork in the 1930s. He was once an honored painter and respected by a lot of his pupils, however, the attitudes towards him and his paintings suddenly turned cold after the end of the war. Masuji faces the rapidly changing post-war environment, looks back on his life, and struggles with accepting responsibility for his past actions.

“Japanese protagonists,” “Nagasaki,” “the atomic bomb,” “Ukiyo-e,” - with all these Japanese-like themes, many of the critics tried to find some kind of connections between Ishiguro and Japan after his first and second novels. Some critics, Brian W.

Shaffer, for instance, even attempted to find the bond with Ishiguro and Japan mentioning that the relationship between Sachiko and Frank from *A Pale View of Hills* is associable with the story of *Madame Butterfly* (21). However, then Ishiguro released his third book, *The Remains of the Day* that cemented his international reputation and success, and he swept away all the critics' questions about his Japaneseness. "Greatness," "dignity," and "Englishness," are the words of praise that Booker Prize winner Salman Rushdie, a British-Indian novelist and essayist, used in a review of the book (qtd. in Wai-chew Sim 7). *The Remains of the Day* is narrated by Stevens, a loyal and perfect English butler, who looks back at his life and regrets sacrificing his personal relationship with Miss Kenton, a former colleague, to serve his master, Lord Darlington, over a period of many years. Stevens has his own faith in Lord Darlington, a great gentleman, however, the more he recalls his memory, the more he becomes suspicious of the actual truth of Lord Darlington's greatness. Ishiguro's background of having been born in Nagasaki, Japan, intrigued many reviewers and made them wonder how he could possibly complete the "great" "English" book.

Wai-chew Sim points out that because of his three novels, people considered Ishiguro an expert in Japanese and English cultures, despite the fact that Ishiguro was still investigating common assumptions or misconceptions about them (9). In an interview with Karen Grigsby Bates in 2005, Ishiguro tells his thoughts on his nationality:

[...] I consider myself British I suppose, because, you know, I've grown up and I've been shaped by Britain. I've been educated entirely in Britain. But, on the other hand, when I was growing up, I grew up in this home with Japanese parents, speaking Japanese. Perhaps most crucially- yes- in this home where my parents didn't have the attitude of immigrants but of visitors- temporary visitors- the idea was that we'd always go back within the next two years. And so, I think perhaps, I did grow up observing the English around me at a slight distance, and many things that my friends thought were absolute right and wrongs, that they'd been taught by their parents, I realize that they were just tribal customs, because that's how my parents regarded them. [...] There were all these things to do with good manners and protocol that were very important. And, of course, these things were very different within our house. So, I was always taught to respect the English manners and mores, but they were very much what the natives did. And something like the English class system was something that I felt I was on the outside of, whereas all my friends grew up very, very concerned about class. Because their parents were, whereas my own parents couldn't even interpret the class signals. [...] It was like a cold civil war going on in the country between the classes, and I was kind of on the outside of it.

(200)

As cited above, Ishiguro is not just a British of Japanese parentage. Even though he depicted 'Japan' in his first two novels, the 'Japan' was something he had pictured in his head with recalling his memories of when he had been in Japan. His 'Japan' was his memory and his imagination. It is misguided to see him as a specialist of Japanese culture. In an interview with Allan Vorda and Kim Herzinger, Ishiguro mentions the new literary movement in the UK:

[...] there was a whole generation of younger British writers who often had racial backgrounds that were not the typical white Anglo-Saxon. Even some of the straight English writers were also using settings or themes that tended to be international or historical. So there definitely was this atmosphere where people were looking for this young, exotic [...] writer with an international flavor. (69)

He took advantage of his Japanese origin to be a success as a novelist in the UK. The British paid great attention to Ishiguro because of his foreign name and his novels that are set in foreign places. Furthermore the 'great' 'Britishness' in his third novel is his imagination as well. In the same interview, he revealed the context of *The Remains of the Day*. “[...] I’ve tried to create a mythical England. Sometimes it looks like or has the tone of a very English book, but actually I’m using that as a kind of shock tactic of this relatively young person with a Japanese name and a Japanese face who produces this extra English novel [...]. *It’s more English than English*” (73 emphasis in the original). Even though he has been living entirely in Britain and thinks of himself as British, there is this distance that he feels he does not completely blend into the British community. He examined the British society at a distance as a “temporary visitor” and created his imagined, mystic English country in *The Remains of the Day*.

He created his own worlds based on his memories and imagination. He has experienced living in two different countries, but that is the very reason why he could complete his imagined worlds. He aims to write his novels not only for the readers in Japan or Britain, but also for the readers all over the world. Unlike Ishiguro’s first and second novels, *Never Let Me Go* does not possess any Japanese aspect, however, I believe that Kathy’s idyllic childhood memory is something connected to Ishiguro’s childhood memories of Japan. In the story, the clones share the idea of “possibles,” which means the models of the clones. “[...] each of us was copied at some point from a normal person [...] ‘possibles’- the people who might have been the models for you and your friends” (137). Why the clones’ parents are called “possibles,” not models nor originals? This is because they imagine their possible future life if they would have been

born as a normal human being. Mark Currie states that “the idea of the ‘possible’ for the students is a living vision of the future” (99). Kathy thinks her “possible” would be a prostitute because she suffers from sexual desires. Her best friend Ruth dreams of working in a nice open-plan office and Kathy, Ruth, Tommy, and two of their seniors, Chrissie and Rodney went to a day trip to find her “possible.” My theory is that the idea of “possibles” is related to the possible life that Ishiguro might have lived if he had stayed entirely in Japan. Just like Kathy, Ruth and other clones, Ishiguro has imagined his possible life living in Japan as a normal Japanese person. In fact, Ishiguro told Maya Jaggi in the *Guardian* in 1995 that he had very strong emotional relationships with Japan, and he has always been aware that there was this other life he might have had, a whole person he was supposed to become (116). He had an image of Japan that was based on his childhood memories. He has published novels on the theme of memories, and there is something nostalgic about them. It can be concluded that the time he spent in Japan until five years old is significant for him to be a successful novelist.



## **Chapter 2: Hailsham: Protected Childhood and Its Loss**

Kathy, Ruth, and Tommy spend their childhood at a supposedly idyllic English boarding school. The place is called “Hailsham.” Ishiguro tells in an interview that Hailsham is a metaphor for ‘childhood.’ This chapter explores Ishiguro’s intention of describing Hailsham as a peaceful and special place. Ishiguro has the idea that all the children must be deceived and raised in a carefully protected bubble-like environment, so that they do not know any bitterness of life and spend a happy childhood. Hailsham is closed few years after Kathy graduates, and the closure of Hailsham symbolizes a loss of innocence and a loss of her childhood.

Hailsham is an exceptional school for cloned human children. There are other facilities to grow cloned humans, and they are called “homes” (260). However, in those “homes,” clones have a terrible life. Miss Emily tells Kathy that “you’d not sleep for days if you saw what still goes on in some of those places” (260). Her comment, as well as other home-raised clones’ comments imply those “homes” breed clones just like raising livestock. One time Kathy becomes a carer for a donor who is from a “home” in Dorset, and she asks him about the place he had grown up, but his reaction reminds of her how Hailsham is a special place:

[...] his face beneath the blotches went into a completely new kind of grimace. And I realized then how desperately he didn’t want to be reminded. Instead, he wanted to hear about Hailsham. (5)

Then, Kathy thinks “how lucky we’d been – Tommy, Ruth, me, all the rest of us” (6) to have a happy childhood in Hailsham.

Hailsham was founded with the aim of improving the clone rearing environment. The word “hail” has a meaning to describe someone as being very healthy and prosperous, therefore, it seems a proper school name for clones. However, the word “sham” is added and, accordingly, it gives the readers an impression that the school is something hypocritical and deceptive.

Kathy often mentions that Hailsham students are privileged. For example, at the beginning of the novel, she narrates that people think she is a good carer because she is from Hailsham, and she has an advantage:

I’m a Hailsham student – which is enough by itself sometimes to get people’s backs up. Kathy H., they say, she gets to pick and choose, and she always chooses her own kind: people from Hailsham, or one of the other privileged estates. No wonder she has a great record. (3-4)

In this scene, Kathy tells how other clones are jealous of people from Hailsham. Even though carers usually cannot choose a donor to take care of, she becomes a carer for her best friends, Ruth and Tommy, as she had wanted, and other people think she obtained the satisfactory results, because she is a privileged Hailsham student.

In addition, rumors about “deferral” is proof that Hailsham students are unusual. Deferrals are “some special arrangement” for only “Hailsham students” to “defer their donations” if two people are “truly in love” (173). The rumor is later denied by Miss Emily; however, clones believe that the deferral is only for the special Hailsham students. The quotation below is from the scene when Chrissie and Rodney talk about the rumor they heard:

We heard something else, something about *Hailsham students*. What they were saying was that some *Hailsham students* in the past, in special circumstances, had managed to get a deferral. That this was something you could do if you were a *Hailsham student*. You could ask for your donations to be put back by three, even four years. (150 emphasis added)

Chrissie and Rodney are a pair of lovers from “homes,” and in the story, from Kathy’s narration, the readers can only imagine what kind of childhood they have. Even so, it is obvious that they are jealous of people from Hailsham, because they think Hailsham students are privileged.

Unlike other clones in “homes” that are raised in deplorable conditions all over the UK, Hailsham students receive a good education from teachers called “guardians.” The “guardians” encourage the students’ artwork such as paintings, poems, and sculptures. On the other hand, clones in “homes” are just raised physically to be valuable donors and they do not have any opportunity to receive education. In addition, Hailsham students learn how to be better humans, not to be better donors, thus, they spend their childhood peacefully.

If the story was narrated from a clone who grows up in a “home,” the narrative would be completely different. What does Hailsham symbolize? Kazuo Ishiguro talks about Hailsham in an interview with Karen Grigsby Bates in 2005:

I think most childhoods are like that. Most childhoods should be like that. Certainly, when my daughter was younger, I tried to keep her in *a bubble*, sealed off from the realities of the world that actually awaited her. Even though, physically, we took her everywhere. It struck me how quickly even total strangers would enter into this conspiracy with myself and my wife to keep her in this *bubble*. Everybody wanted to censor out the sadness of the world. They deliberately wanted this little child to

be deceived about how nice a place the world was. (199 emphasis added)

Ishiguro dedicates *Never Let Me Go* to his wife and daughter. He writes “To Lorna and Naomi” at the beginning of the novel. It is obvious that he gets this idea of an ideal childhood through the experience of raising his daughter.

What is more, Ishiguro’s childhood memories might greatly affect his idea that all children must be deceived and carefully protected in the “bubble.” As mentioned in Chapter One, Ishiguro has experienced moving from Japan to the UK at the age of five. One can easily imagine how hard and uneasy for a five-year old little child to move to a completely different new place. His parents must have done everything they could to relieve his stress of his new environment. They might even have lied to him to let him spend a peaceful innocent childhood. Ishiguro tells “[...] in order to have a proper childhood, an element of deception must be used” (218) in an interview with Cynthia F. Wong and Grace Crummett in 2006. In the interview, Ishiguro also reveals his thought about clones in Hailsham and their childhood:

If they had known they would die in the way they do, would they have embraced this arts education? They might say, “What’s the point? Why are we making all this effort?” [...] “Would we make any effort to be decent human beings?” [...] To make this childhood work, you have to *deceive* them into believing it’s all worthwhile. [...] As parents, we put an enormous amount of energy into protecting our children, getting them optimistic and confident, and getting them to think hard not just about their schoolwork but about the emotional labyrinth of getting along with their peers and their elders. Maybe you can only do that effectively by slightly *lying* to the child. (218 emphasis added)

Therefore, the special school for clones, Hailsham, is a metaphor for childhood that is based on “sham” (deception and lie). All the Hailsham students are carefully protected in the bubble-like innocent environment from the outside, real world, and deceived by the guardians so that they can spend a peaceful childhood until the time they face the truth that they must die young to donate their vital organs. The process the Hailsham students realize the reality is similar to the one we experience. We spend our childhood simply and innocently without knowing any difficulties about life, but as we grow up, a life becomes more and more complicated, because we gradually learn the dark side of life. Growing up is like taking a step forward from a shelter, and Ishiguro describes the shelter as Hailsham.

Even though the Hailsham students are secluded in an isolated facility from the rest of the world, they have a moment to sense that something horrible awaits them

outside Hailsham. “The woods” is a good example. The students are very afraid of “the woods” because “there were all kinds of horrible stories about the woods” (50).

The woods were at the top of the hill that rose behind Hailsham House. All we could see really was a dark fringe of trees, but I certainly wasn't the only one of my age to feel their presence day and night. When it got bad, it was like they cast a shadow over the whole of Hailsham; all you had to do was turn your head or move towards a window and there they'd be, looming in the distance. Safest was the front of the main house, because you couldn't see them from any of the windows. Even so, you never really got away from them. [...] The woods played on our imaginations the most after dark, in our dorms as we were trying to fall asleep. You almost thought then you could hear the wind rustling the branches, and talking about it seemed to only make things worse. (49-50)

“The woods” are, as it were, a boundary between Hailsham, the peaceful and innocent childhood, and outside, the real merciless world, where donation awaits the clone children. The fact the Hailsham students are afraid of “the woods” actually means that they have a fear of becoming adults.

There are so many things in a real life that people understand when they grow up, however, sometimes they are better off not knowing them. Every so often we will be happier if we remain ignorant. The process that Kathy and others graduate from Hailsham and become a carer in the world out there makes us assimilate ourselves to the reality of growing older. Ishiguro's intention of describing Hailsham as a peaceful and special place is to suggest his thoughts about ideal childhood. He thinks all the children must be raised in an innocent place like Hailsham so that they can have a happy memory of their childhood. We constantly feel nostalgia as we read the novel because Hailsham is a symbol of innocent childhood.

### Chapter 3: Comparison with Other Dystopian Stories

In this chapter, I aim to explore Ishiguro's purpose of using the topic: human cloning. Comparing *Never Let Me Go* with other dystopian novels and movies makes it possible to examine his intention to deal with clones as just a setting in the novel. I investigate the way Ishiguro describes the clone technology and the dystopian society in *Never Let Me Go*, and reveal the true theme that he wants to picture in the novel. The novel confronts its readers with questions about the meaning of life.

*Never Let Me Go* belongs to the genre of a dystopian science novel. In an alternative Britain and in an alternative 1990s, tragically, cloned human beings are created with the sole purpose of donating their vital organs. They are recognized as "shadowy objects in test tubes" (256) and people do their best not to think about the existence of clones and convince themselves they are less than fully humans. Cloning is a common subject in dystopian novels: a notable example is Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), an anti-utopian world in which a totalitarian government controls society by the use of science and technology, such as reproductive technology, sleep-learning, psychological manipulation, and classical conditioning. Also, Lois Lowry's *The Giver* (1993), a representative work of dystopian writing for children and young adults, deals with human cloning. In the story of *The Giver*, a main character, Jonas, lives in an idyllic community where war, conflict, imbalance, unfairness, unemployment, and divorce do not exist at all. Everyone is the same with no choice of their partners and jobs.

Dystopia is "an imagined place or state in which everything is unpleasant or bad, typically a totalitarian or environmentally degraded one<sup>2</sup>." Dystopia is diametrically opposite to utopia. In a dystopian society, life is extremely unpleasant, and unfairness or immorality prevail. A lot of critics compare Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* with other dystopian novels and movies. For example, Mark Fisher notes that "Pre-existing shortages provide the pretext for deliberately depriving the subjugated class: of time, their organs, their lives" (27), mentioning *In Time*, written by Andrew Niccol, *Never Let Me Go*, and the most sensational dystopian novel in recent years, *The Hunger Games*, written by Suzanne Collins. Fisher states that in these three recent dystopian worlds, "class and precariousness are forced into the foreground" (27).

Wai-chew Sim makes a comparison between *Never Let Me Go* and a thrilling Hollywood movie, *The Island*, directed by Michael Bay "to appreciate the nature of the stylistic innovations introduced by Ishiguro, and also the way he uses them to highlight certain key thematic concerns" (78-79). *The Island* is very similar to the story of *Never Let Me Go*: in the near future, there is a huge business for wealthy individuals to make

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<sup>2</sup> Oxford Dictionary of English Second Edition Revised, Oxford University Press, 2005.

their clones for the purpose of harvesting their body parts in case they get disease or in an accident. In the story, *The Island*, the main character is a man named Lincoln Six Echo, who is born and raised in an isolated facility. The facility is the only place left in the world where human beings are protected against the polluted environment except the place called the Island, a paradisiacal place. Everyone in the facility dreams to win a lottery, the prize of which is to move to the Island, and one day, Lincoln's best friend, Jordan Two Delta wins the lottery and he blesses her good fortune. However, Lincoln fortuitously ascertains the frightening truth behind the award: the dwellers are all clones, and people who win the lottery and move out to the Island will actually have an operation to remove their replacement organs and parts. Wai-chew Sim emphasizes the different actions done by two human clones in two similar stories, Lincoln and Kathy, after they realize the fact that they are born to donate their organs. He points out that the main theme of *The Island* is escaping and resistance of human clones against authority, but in *Never Let Me Go*, clones never try to rebel against the social system that exploits them (79). Lincoln tries to escape from the facility with Jordan and rebels against the outside authority of "the real" human's world. He kills his 'original' to protect himself, fights against government and succeeds in releasing all the clones from the closed facility to the outside. On the other hand, Kathy, Ruth, and Tommy from *Never Let Me Go* never try to escape, and they think donating their organs is their natural duty. Ishiguro does not describe *Never Let Me Go* as a story of human clones against the real humans. It is more likely a story of clones accepting their destiny and trying to fulfill their lives in a limited time.

Even though *Never Let Me Go* is about human clones, the novel does not possess any element of science fiction. John M. Harrison notes that "there is no science here" (26) pointing out the novel's lack of scientific background description. Wai-chew Sim also states that "cloning technology is kept off-stage [...]. Science is arguably pushed to the background in this novel" (83). By comparing the novel with the classical dystopian science fiction, *Brave New World*, the novel's non-scientific feature is all the more striking. Huxley's *Brave New World*, opens its pages with detailed information about "Central London Hatchery and Conditioning Centre," which makes "the World State's motto, Community, Identity, Stability" (21) possible. Unlike Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*, it thoroughly explains about the dystopian society and its use of the cloning technology. It seems human clones are just an ostensible theme in *Never Let Me Go* compared to *Brave New World*.

As mentioned previously, human clones in *Never Let Me Go* accept their fate, and Ishiguro does not give us any specific aspect of science technology in the novel. Thus, it may cause a disconnect among the readers who regard the novel as SF story and expect the clones to strive against their destiny. However, there is a possibility that Ishiguro

created a new type of dystopian society in the novel. In the story, Kathy and other human clones have a happy childhood in Hailsham, and the innocent childhood memories help them to face the donation without doubting the donation system and rebelling against the society. Nevertheless, it may be because the 'real' humans in the society deliberately raise the clones in that way. In other words, the human clones in Hailsham are raised not to be rebellious against the society and educated to think their destiny (donation) is just a natural duty to carry out. Then, it could be a true dystopia, where the state completely controls the clones and their mind as well.

According to the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), dystopian society "is an illusion of a perfect utopian world." For example, in *Brave New World*, the people in the society have easy and pleasant lives. The worries of life such as aging, social classes, conception control, both physical and mental pains do not bother people because they are encouraged to take Soma, a tranquillizer, to indulge in quick and easy pleasure. What makes the world dystopia is the fact that nobody in fact has any freedom because of the strict control by the totalitarian state. In case of *Never Let Me Go*, it is a merciless world for clones to end their brief lives by donating their organs, however, seeing the story from a different perspective makes the society a seemingly perfect place. For the 'real humans' (non-clones), there is no worry about the shortage of organs for transplantation. The medical technology is very advanced, and the progressive cloning technology releases people from the fear of organ failure unto death. At the end of the story, Miss Emily tells Kathy and Tommy the circumstances in the outside world:

How can you ask a world that has come to regard cancer as curable, how can you ask such a world to put away that cure, to go back to the dark days? There was no going back. However uncomfortable people were about your existence, their overwhelming concern was that their own children, their spouses, their parents, their friends, did not die from cancer, motor neurone disease, heart disease. (257-258)

From a reader's perspective, for Kathy and other cloned humans, this world seems to be a ruthless dystopia, where the state rears and controls them for the sole purpose of organ transplant. However, for people outside Hailsham, it is apparently an idealized society, where fatal diseases are no longer incurable thanks to the cloning technology. They do not need to be anxious about losing their loved family and friends because of lack of organ transplants.

Another characteristic of a dystopian society defined by NCTE is that "Citizens have a fear of the outside world." In *Never Let Me Go*, the 'real' humans are afraid of clones, because they regard clones as outsiders who do not belong to their society. The feature is well explained by a scene when Madame meets Kathy and other students at

Hailsham. Madame is “a tall, narrow woman with short hair,” (32) and she works hard to manage Hailsham with Miss Emily. Madame visits Hailsham several times a year to select students’ best art work. Later the truth comes out: Madame chooses the children’s art works because she puts them on exhibit at Gallery to prove to people outside that the cloned students have “souls” (255). Miss Emily and Madame think artwork reveal people’s souls. The Hailsham students think of her as “snooty” (32), but Ruth thinks she is scared of the clone children. So, Kathy, Ruth and some of their friends decide to carry out a plan to test Ruth’s theory. The plan is that they “swarm out” (34) all around Madame to see if she is scared of them. Madame’s reaction far exceeds their expectations:

[...] she just froze and waited for us to pass by. She didn’t shriek, or even let out a gasp. [...] I glanced quickly at her face – as did the others, I’m sure. And I can still see it now, the shudder she seemed to be suppressing, the real dread that one of us would accidentally brush against her. And though we just kept on walking, we all felt it; it was like we’d walked from the sun light into chilly shade. Ruth had been right: Madame *was* afraid of us. (35 emphasis in the original)

It is this scene that reveals the feature of a dystopian society that people from the ‘real’ human community have a fear for the clones. Even though Madame is an earnest activist to claim cloned humans’ right to receive a good educational environment and childhood, she cannot help feeling afraid of them. Her co-manager, Miss Emily is also scared of her cloned students. She talks to Kathy as follows:

Is she (Madame) 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 all from my study window and I’d feel such revulsion... (264 emphasis in the original)

A lot of critics point out the novel’s lack of scientific information, and it is frustrating for the readers that the cloned humans do not run away from the ruthless reality that awaits them. There is a possibility that the human clones in Hailsham are brainwashed into believing that giving their vital organs and dying are just normal things for them, so that the clones do not resist the society. However, Ishiguro’s true intention of using the topic, human cloning, is not describing rebellion against society. What Ishiguro truly tries to paint in words is the meaning of life. By setting the characters as cloned humans, Ishiguro lets the readers think of the futility of clones’ lives and in fact, we unconsciously consider the futility of our own. The human clones



in the novel spend an ordinary human life, thus, it is like a mirror of our own lives. The novel really works for us to consider how we can fulfill our lives just like Kathy, Ruth and Tommy with limited time.

#### Chapter 4: Kathy's Narration

*Never Let Me Go* is written in the first person like many other Ishiguro's novels. In this chapter, I will explore Kathy's unreliable narration to examine the fact that her recollection of memories is uncertain. Kathy always narrates her tragic fate in a positive way, and she tends to consider her destiny optimistically. She cherishes her childhood memories and feels nostalgic as she recalls them. The way she recollect her childhood memories reveals the importance of having innocent childhood.

It is a cliché that first-person narrative of memories is mostly unreliable. A first-person narrator could lie about his/her stories to hide a fact, to hold back his/her true feelings with regret, and to conceal a mistake with shame. Another feature of the first-person narrative is that readers never thoroughly grasp the situation due to the lack of the context. Readers can only understand the story through a first-person narrator's voice. Moreover, when a first-person storyteller recalls his/her memories, doubts about the story increase because there is a gap between narrated time and the time of the narration. According to Mark Currie, "Memory failure is a familiar source of unreliability in the first-person narrative voice, and Kathy's constant references to previous difficulties of recollection can be thought of as a subspecies of this kind of unreliability" (95). John Mullan, also states that "There have been many novels that have made the uncertainties of memory part of the texture of a first-person narration, but none where memory has quite the significance that it does for Ishiguro's narrator" (110). The story of *Never Let Me Go* is narrated only through Kathy's voice that is based on her vague recollection of memories. Here, this is one of the interesting features of memories: 'uncertainty.'

Memories are conflicting timewise. Kathy's reminiscences of her memories are often quite unreliable. John Mullan refers to Kathy's narration and expresses that "memory is uncertain, disputable, haggled over" (109). Kathy tells us:

Tommy and I discussed the tokens controversy a few years ago, and we couldn't agree when it had happened. I said we'd been ten at the time; he thought it was later, but in the end came round to agreeing with me. *I'm pretty sure I got it right: we were in Junior 4 - a while after that incident with Madame, but still three years before our talk by the pond*" (38 emphasis added).

As quoted above, Kathy does not recall her memory in chronological order, and the tense of the events is confusing. Besides, the recollection shows a possibility that Kathy tells a wrong story since Tommy at first disagreed with her. Another good example of Kathy's unreliable story telling is the following: "When Ruth and I discussed it while I was caring for her down in Dover, she claimed it had been just a matter of two or three

weeks - but *that was almost certainly wrong*” (49 emphasis added). In this situation, Kathy denies Ruth’s opinion, and she is sure that her memory is correct. However, if Ruth told the story of *Never Let Me Go*, it would be a completely different story as Kathy told.

Interestingly, Kathy admits that she is also suspicious about the accuracy of her own narration. Kathy tells us, for instance, “This was all a long time ago so I might have some of it wrong [...]” (13). As mentioned above, Kathy is an unreliable narrator, thus readers must be wary of her narration and read the context only. Our understanding is pretty much limited, and we can know only the things that Kathy provides. We have to guess what Kathy does not know. The readers have no clue to find answers to questions such as “How this clone system was established?” “Who create cloned humans and how?,” and “Why they do not run away and hide?.” There is a possibility that there might be hundreds of thousands cloned humans actually rebel against the system behind the story, however, Kathy never mentions the resistance of clones. That is why we never know what really happens in the story’s society.

Another feature of Kathy’s first-person narrative is that her audience is only other clones, and she does not talk about people living outside. Kathy discusses “carers,” who take care of donors. “Carers” are also cloned humans and eventually become donors. The following are examples of the fact that Kathy’s imagined listeners are only other clones:

I know carers, working now, who are just as good and don’t get half the credit. If *you*’re one of them, I can understand how *you* might get resentful - about my bedsit, my car, [...] (3). I don’t know if *you* had ‘collections’ *where you were* (38). I don’t know how it was *where you were*, but at Hailsham we had to have some form of medical almost every week (13 emphases added).

As emphasized above, she tells the story to her imagined listener, *you*, who are just like herself. John Mullan states that Kathy assumes her audiences are human clones, who are reared for donation, and the fact suggests that the clones have a limited connection with the real humans outside (107). Speaking of the non-clones (the real humans), the Hailsham students actually have an opportunity to contact with people from outside only when “a Sale” is held once every month. “The Sales” are important to clone students at Hailsham, because that is where they get hold of items from outside such as clothes, toys, and music cassettes. A big white van comes to bring the items from outside the world, and the Hailsham students talk to men unloading the van:

[...] the two men in overalls carrying the big cardboard boxes, [...] ‘A lot of goodies,

sweetheart,' was the usual reply. Then if you kept asking: 'But is it a *bumper crop*?' they'd sooner or later smile and say: 'Oh, I'd say so, sweetheart. A real bumper crop,' bringing a thrilled cheer. (41-42 emphasis in the original)

It is this scene, the readers realize cynical connotation that the little Hailsham children cannot understand. The delivery men joke and laugh with the clone students and call them "sweetheart." From the innocent perspective of clone children, "sweetheart" means just as same as 'darling' and 'dear.' Also, the children are curious if the boxes are full of items from outside and very excited to know they are literally "bumper crop." However, from the perspective of the men, they see the clones as "sweet" "heart," which means people outside, like the two men, see the clones as 'organs,' and it is a relief for them if there is no shortage of clones, just like "bumper crop." The two men are ordinary people on the outside, thus, they know that the cruel fate awaits the children. Kathy is a very good storyteller who makes the readers (her imagined listeners) perceive the real situations a little earlier than the cloned students notice.

Kathy lives in the late 1990s in England, but the time Kathy exists is when the cloning technology is much more advanced than the time we live. Therefore, the novel possesses a sense of double structure: the past and the future. Mark Currie named it "a kind of timelessness" (93). He states that "There is, on one hand, a sense of the future, which inheres in the novel's interest in cloning; and on the other hand a sense of the past, in the form of a kind of public school memoir, or a recollection of a childhood apparently isolated from the forces of history" (93). Kathy tells us her innocent childhood memories, and consequently we feel nostalgic as we trace her recollections. At the same time, we think it is a futuristic novel which describing cloned humans. Her childhood is just like the one the ordinary childhood that the readers might have. She spends her school days with her friends and experiences a lot of things with two of her best friends, Ruth and Tommy. They sometimes argue, lie, and become jealous of each other. The three children overcome many troubles together and share common secrets. Kathy has romantic feelings for Tommy but he has a relationship with Ruth. They go through a love triangle. Wojciech Drag notes that *Never Let Me Go* follows a tradition of boarding school books, and it emphasizes on "friendship, romance, fascination with teachers and an ongoing competition for popularity through individual achievement" (166-167). Many of us experience similar things as we grow up, and that is why we as readers feel like we recall our own memories when we read Kathy's recollection.

As aforementioned, there is a similarity between Kathy's childhood and ours, and it makes us feel nostalgic. However, some of Kathy's expressions sound a little odd to us. For instance, the Hailsham students have a medical checkup every week. Why do they have to check their condition so often? The reason is because they need to be

healthy to donate their organs. This every week medical checkup creates side effect where the clones are abnormally sensitive about their health condition. One time when Tommy gashed his elbow, he is very worried and asks Kathy for help to keep his arm straight. “We should never take chances with our health” (84). His confession is a proof that the guardians often advise their students to be careful about their physical condition. In addition, the guardians at Hailsham frequently tell their students about the terrible effects of smoking to make them anti-smokers; “[...] the guardians were really strict about smoking. I’m sure they’d have preferred it if we never found out smoking even existed” (67). Miss Lucy, one of the guardians, is asked a question by one of her students if she had herself ever had a cigarette and answered:

[...] to be honest, I did smoke for a little while. [...] It’s not good that I smoked. It wasn’t good for me so I stopped it. But what you must understand is that for you, all of you, it’s much, much, worse to smoke than it ever was for me. [...] You’re students. You’re... *special*. So keeping yourselves well, keeping yourselves very healthy inside, that’s much more important for each of you than it is for me. (68 emphasis in the original)

Miss Lucy tells her students that they are quite different from her. Scenes like this allow the readers to fully comprehend the sad fact that the cloned students need to be “healthy inside” to be a useful donor in the future. The readers reflect their own childhood memories into Kathy because she spends her school days that are so much similar to us, however, some of these unnatural routines that Kathy has creates a realization that the clones are not quite like us. To cite another instance, when Kathy tells about sex that the clone students have, the readers might feel strange because their attitude toward sex is ‘too open.’ Eventually, it reveals that all the cloned humans including Kathy are infertile. Miss Emily, one of the guardians gives a lot of sex lectures and tells her students that:

[...] the people out there were different from us students: they could have babies from sex. That was why it was so important to them, this question of who did it with whom. And even though, as we knew, it was completely impossible for any of us to have babies, out there, we had to behave like them. We had to respect the rules and treat sex as something pretty special. (82)

Miss Emily also advises that “If you can’t find someone with whom you truly wish to share this experience, then *don’t!*” (96 emphasis in the original). The Hailsham students endlessly and openly discuss the topic of sex:

Hannah had the theory that it was their duty to make us have sex because otherwise we wouldn't be good donors later on. According to her, things like your kidneys and pancreas didn't work properly unless you kept having sex. Someone else said what we had to remember was that the guardians were 'normals.' That's why they were so odd about it; for them, sex was for when you wanted babies, and even though they knew, intellectually, that *we* couldn't have babies, they still felt uneasy about us doing it because deep down they couldn't quite believe we wouldn't end up with babies. (94-95 emphasis in the original).

The clone students have the freedom of sex, and they do not need to consider any sexual matters, for example marriage, birth control, and adultery. Such free love is one of the typical features of dystopian novels like *Brave New World*. Ishiguro follows the dystopian tradition about the concept of sexual freedom.

These odd differences, too many medical checkups, sensitive response to their injury and health, and sterility effectively work to make the readers slowly realize that people like Kathy are different from people outside even though the students have the similar childhood, and gradually the readers understand the horrible fact that the cloned children are reared for the sole purpose of donating their vital organs.

So far, the chapter explores the characteristics of Kathy's narration, and finally, what is the most remarkable things about Kathy's narrative is that she is optimistic despite her tragic fate, yet, there is no clue to show if her optimism is true or just a brave face. At the beginning of the novel, Kathy tells us:

I won't be a carer any more come the end of the year, and though I've got a lot out of it, I have to admit I'll welcome the chance to rest – to stop and think and remember. I'm sure it's at least partly to do with that, to do with preparing for the change of pace, that I've been getting this urge to order all these old memories. (37)

She tells us what she wants to do after she carries out her duty as a carer. She hopes to spend her time to organize her old memories when she becomes a donor. She has been a carer for over eleven years, and it is sure that she has seen her fellow human clones suffering with pain, getting weaker and weaker and dying. She has been experiencing many of their painful deaths. How could she be so joyful to be a "donor?" Is she actually scared of starting donation but pretending being happy to mask her true emotion? From her unreliable narration, there is no chance to see her real feelings. It could be thought that she is trained not to be scared being a "donor," or another possibility is that she cannot put up with the hard job as a "carer" anymore because she lost her loved ones and wants to finish her life. Mark Currie notes that:

For Kathy, to stop being a ‘carer’ means to start her ‘donations’, or in a less euphemistic language, to die a premature death. The very persistence of this euphemistic language supports the supposition that the truth of what happens for Kathy at the end of the year is not being honestly apprehended, and that the horror of realization is averted in cheerful optimism. (100)

The “cheerful optimism” also appears in Kathy’s anticipation of a life as a “donor.” Kathy says “I wouldn’t mind at all if that’s where I ended up” (17), mentioning about Ruth’s “recovery centre,” where clones lie in bed after their “donations.” Kathy looks at the bright side of things, for example, “the recovery rooms are small, but they’re well-designed and comfortable,” “the centre is so clean,” and has “big glass sliding panels” which make it possible to “see a big lot of sky” and “get all the fresh air” (17-18). She is very grateful for the good luck of Ruth staying in the nicely equipped centre with fine views from the window, however, she apparently does not mention anything negative about being a donor. She tells us “by the end of the year, I won’t be driving around like this any more” and thinks she can have “a quieter life” (281) when she becomes a “donor.” She never gives the readers a detailed information about donations. She avoids expressing her cruel fate precisely, and instead, she uses euphemistic expressions to describe her future. At the very end of the story, she tells us “I [...] then turned back to the car, to drive off to wherever it was I was supposed to be” (282). In this scene, what she says is that she is going to be a “donor” but she uses a euphemistic language and make it sound less tragic. The euphemism is one of Kathy’s distinguishing features of narration, and she does not consider her plight as despair. John Mullan notes another example of Kathy’s language; “She talks proudly but modestly of her skills in ‘caring’, like anyone talking of a job she has begun to master” (108). In addition, Kathy explains:

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.’ (3 emphasis in the original)

Kathy thinks being a good “carer” and “donor” is her mission to accomplish. She is proud of herself that she is fantastic at what she does, and she says she is ready to be a “donor.” She does not bewail her misfortune to be born as a cloned human to donate her organs, because she has been taught she is “special” (68). She has been told that they are

different from people outside of Hailsham, so she regards “donation” as a natural duty. Although the readers feel it is a very sorrowful tale, Kathy is quite positive about her tragic situation and accepts her destiny. It arises a gap between Kathy and the readers, and her positive way of thinking makes them feel more pity for her.



## Chapter 5: The Importance of Childhood Memories

In this final chapter, I examine three cassette tapes that Kathy owns and explore the important role of happy childhood memories in a full life. In the novel, Kathy talks about the only three ‘cassette tapes’ she ever had. All the ‘cassette tapes’ are just mass-produced ‘copies,’ however, they are truly important for Kathy for some specific reasons. Those ‘mass-copied’ cassettes are the metaphor for donors, such as Kathy and others who are massively ‘copied.’ By mentioning how Kathy cherishes those ‘copied tapes,’ Ishiguro tells ‘the importance of the memories.’ Even though a mass-produced product itself has no value, if a special memory is attached to the item, then it becomes indispensable. Thus one can easily assume that Ishiguro tells the importance of precious memories by describing Kathy’s three cassette tapes.

The novel’s title, *Never Let Me Go*, actually refers to the name of a song. One day, Kathy finds a cassette tape at the “Sale.” The tape is “*Songs After Dark*” (66) by Judy Bridgewater, and the song, “*Never Let Me Go*,” is one of the songs in the album. (Judy Bridgewater and the song are fictions that Ishiguro creates.) Kathy supposes the tape is originally an LP and recorded in 1956. Kathy has her favorite part of the lyrics; “Baby, baby, never let me go...” (70). What she imagines when she listens to the refrain is that:

[...] a woman who’d been told she couldn’t have babies, who’d really, really wanted them all her life. Then there’s a sort of miracle and she has a baby, and she holds this baby very close to her and walks around singing: ‘Baby, never let me go...’ partly because she’s so happy, but also because she’s so afraid something will happen, that the baby will get ill or be taken away from her. (70)

She listens to the song over and over again, whenever she has a chance. Even though it is a love song, little Kathy interprets the song as ‘a mother and her baby’ story. She is eleven years old around that time, and it can be said that it is just normal for her to have these kind of misinterpretations about a love song. In fact she admits that she “realized this couldn’t be right, that this interpretation didn’t fit with the rest of the lyrics” (70). One can assume that it is natural for eleven year old kids to confuse a word “baby” as an infant, not a lover.

However, what she imagines about the song raises a question: why does she picture in her head a woman “who’d been told she couldn’t have babies” (266)? This is because Kathy already senses around that time that none of the clone students can have babies. Kathy interprets the song only with her knowledge. The little Kathy knows that she is infertile and associate her with her imaginary woman in the song.

Her vision of the song relates the “bubble” that I mention in Chapter Two. As I investigate in Chapter Two, Ishiguro thinks all the children must be deceived and their

environment must be like a “bubble” where it is protected from the harmful facts that await them. The way Hailsham students learn those truths is matter-of-fact, part of their general education, as normal as learning a subject like math or English. Whenever they learn something, for example, donations and their infertility, they think they already know. There is no surprise nor shock for them. The “guardians” hint to the students those facts indirectly. One of the “guardians” Miss Lucy thinks the clone students “have been told and not told.” (79) Thus Miss Lucy is frustrated by the way Hailsham avoids letting the students face the fact and prepare for the donations. One day, she follows her heart and tells the students something they are not supposed to know at that stage:

None of you will go to America, none of you will be film stars. And none of you will be working in supermarkets as I heard some of you planning the other day. Your lives are set out for you. You’ll become adults, then before you’re old, before you’re even middle-aged, you’ll start to donate your vital organs. That’s what each of you was created to do. You’re not like the actors you watch on your videos, you’re not even like me. You were brought into this world for a purpose, and your futures, all of them, have been decided. [...] You’ll be leaving Hailsham before long, and it’s not so far off, the day you’ll be preparing for your first donations. [...] If you’re to have decent lives, you have to know who you are and what lies ahead of you, every one of you. (80)

Miss Lucy tells the students the reality, because she believes it is better for them to know what awaits them in the future after they graduate from Hailsham. Her educational policy does not match with the Hailsham teaching method, so she ends up leaving the school. Presumably, Ishiguro describes Miss Lucy as a stranger who breaks into the carefully protected “bubble” and makes the children face the harsh reality. Also the result of Miss Lucy’s dismissal reflects Ishiguro’s view on childhood environment. Ishiguro thinks people like Miss Lucy who try to break into the innocent childhood territory and tell the children that they are deceived and world out there, there are so many harsh realities must be excluded. Ishiguro thinks that children need to spend their young age in a peaceful environment, and then their happy childhood memories work as a mental pabulum when they grow up and face life.

Kathy holds happy childhood memories of Hailsham, and therefore she can endure her loss of her beloved friends. In her peaceful childhood memories, Ruth and Tommy are there. By recalling her memories, Kathy always feels their existence near her. That is the very reason why having a happy childhood memories is significant. In contrast to Kathy, there is a dying donor who possesses no happy childhood memories appearing in the story. The donor repeatedly begs Kathy to tell him her happy memories

of Hailsham. Kathy tells us about him as follows:

What he wanted was not just to hear about Hailsham, but to *remember* Hailsham, just like it had been his own childhood. He knew he was close to completing and so that's what he was doing: getting me to describe things to him, so they'd really sink in, so that maybe during those sleepless nights, with the drugs and the pain and the exhaustion, the line would blur between what were my memories and what were his. (5 emphasis in the original)

The man grows up in another facility and does not have any happy memories about childhood, thus he wants to borrow peaceful Hailsham memories from Kathy and "remember" them as his own. Robert C Abrams points out that "If you do not have good memories on which to reflect as you die, you must invent or borrow them" (42). Incorporation is one of the interesting characteristics of memory.

Considering the song, "*Never Let Me Go*," a strange thing happens to Kathy one day. Kathy plays the song in her usual way when nobody is around. She sings and dances slowly and softly every time the lines come around "Oh baby, *baby*, never let me go..." (71 emphasis in the original). Kathy holds a pillow in her arms and likens the pillow to the baby. Then she realizes that Madame stares, sobbing, at her in the doorway. Soon Madame turns and leaves the room, but she leaves Kathy with feeling of awkwardness. Why does Madame cry at that moment when she sees Kathy dancing and holding a pillow that stands for a baby to the rhythm of the song? Is it because she thinks it was really tragic how Kathy cannot have babies? The truth is revealed by Madame herself when Kathy and Tommy visit her to get a "deferral." Kathy asks Madame about the strange incident, and why she sobbed when she saw Kathy at that moment. Madame replies as in the following:

I was weeping for an altogether different reason. When I watched you dancing that day, I saw something else. I saw a new world coming rapidly. More scientific, efficient, yes. More cures for the old sicknesses. Very good. But a harsh, cruel world. And I saw a little girl, her eyes tightly closed, holding to her breast the old kind world, one that she knew in her heart could not remain, and she was holding it and pleading, never to let her go. (266-267)

It is this scene that the readers feel nostalgia for the old childhood memories. The surface meaning of what Madame says might be taken as a warning on too advanced science technology, however, by investigating the meaning of "the old kind world" that "she knew in her heart could not remain," we can see Ishiguro's message that everyone

must have recollections of their childhood and never let them go. Immersing yourself in nostalgic recollection is something really important as you grow up and pause, take a moment, and think about the situation that you are in. Childhood memories work to compare yourself with who you used to be, and that is why having happy childhood memories is essential.

Another one of three cassette tapes that Kathy cherishes is a gift from Ruth. Kathy loses the tape of *Never Let Me Go* a couple of months after the strange incident with Madame, and she is really disappointed. Then a fortnight later Ruth gives Kathy the tape as a replacement to cheer her up. It is called “*Twenty Classic Dance Tunes*” (75). The tape is orchestra music for ballroom dancing, and it is far different from the one Kathy loses; however, Kathy greatly appreciates Ruth’s kindness. Ruth shows her feelings toward Kathy through giving her the cassette tape. Even though Ruth knows little of music, she senses her best friend’s disappointment of losing her favorite tape and tries to make her feel better with the substitute tape. Kathy recalls her memory with Ruth and tells us about the tape:

[...] I felt the disappointment ebbing away and being replaced by a real happiness. [...] I squeezed one of her hands in both mine when I thanked her. She said: ‘I found it at the last Sale. I just thought it’s the sort of thing you’d like.’ And I said that, yes, it was exactly the sort of thing. I still have it now. I don’t play it much because the music has nothing to do with anything. It’s an object, like a brooch or a ring, and especially now Ruth has gone, it’s become one of my most precious possessions. (75)

As Kathy mentions in the citation above, the tape itself is not really special, and it is just a mass-copied merchandise. However, Kathy values the tape that Ruth gives her because she treasures the ‘memory’ of Ruth that is attached to the tape. She finds a value in the mass-produced cassette tape because it reminds her of a happy and precious ‘memory’ of the childhood she spent with Ruth.

The third cassette tape that Kathy owns is something related to Tommy. Kathy and Tommy find the cassette tape when they explore around “Norfolk.” Kathy and other Hailsham students believe that “Norfolk” is where the lost property is kept. They think that “Norfolk” is England’s lost corner where all the lost property found in the country ends up. The Hailsham students have the idea from Miss Emily’s geography class. One day Miss Emily teaches the students the different counties of England. She explains that “Norfolk” is stuck out on the east and on the hump jutting into the sea, therefore it is like a ‘lost corner’ (65). Since Hailsham has a lost corner to keep the students’ lost property, students make the kind of joke.

For the reason of ‘the lost corner of England’ theory, Kathy and Tommy decide to go searching for Kathy’s lost tape of “*Never Let Me Go*.” They explore around Norfolk, looking for Kathy’s tape half-jokingly and half for fun. They look in second-hand stores and spend a really good time together. Kathy recalls her memory of the Norfolk trip and tells the readers:

I had to really hold myself back from giggling stupidly, or jumping up and down on the pavement like a little kid. [...] That moment when we decided to go searching for my lost tape, it was like suddenly every cloud had blown away, and we had nothing but fun and laughter before us. (169)

Kathy really enjoys spending time with Tommy in Norfolk. For Kathy, the purpose of finding her lost tape is not important. She is joyful because she spends her time with Tommy, her best and beloved friend. Kathy says “I think Judy Bridgewater had more or less slipped from our minds. We were just enjoying looking through all those things together” (169).

At last Kathy finds the cassette, Judy Bridgewater’s *Songs After Dark* in one of the secondhand stores. However, she is not excited about it and even tries to pretend never to have seen it, because she wishes this fun trip with Tommy would last longer. Certainly, Kathy explains “I was still feeling a pang of regret that we’d found it so quickly” (171). It is not sure if the cassette tape Kathy and Tommy find in Norfolk is the one that Kathy lost in Hailsham, however Kathy cherishes the tape very much, because it reminds her of how amazing the time she spent with Tommy was. The following is Kathy’s recollection of the tape:

I really appreciated having the tape – and that song – back again. Even then, it was mainly a nostalgia thing, and today, if I happen to get the tape out and look at it, it brings back memories of that afternoon in Norfolk every bit as much as it does our Hailsham days. (171)

The happy memory is attached to the tape, even though the tape itself is just one of the mass-copied products. When Tommy asks Kathy if it is the actual one she lost, Kathy answers: “For all I know, it might be. [...] But I have to tell you, Tommy, there might be thousands of these knocking about” (170).

In my interpretation, what the three cassette tapes I mention imply is the significance of memories. All the three cassette tapes are massively copied from original music. They are just mass produced tapes, however they all remind Kathy of her innocent happy childhood memories. The first cassette tape is the one Kathy likes to

listen to whenever she has a chance and enjoys immersing herself in her fantasy. One of the songs on the tape, "*Never Let Me Go*," is her favorite tune, and it reminds her of her pure childhood in Hailsham. The second tape is the one Ruth gives Kathy as a gift. Ruth tries to find Kathy's lost tape, but she cannot find it, so she gets a replacement tape to make Kathy feel better. The tape itself is not like the music of the original tape, however Kathy is full of gratitude to Ruth and she cherishes the tape as a keepsake of Ruth. The tape reminds Kathy of sweet memories of Ruth. The third tape is the one Kathy and Tommy find in Norfolk, and it brings Kathy the pleasant memory of him.

What I interpret is that all the three mass-copied cassette tapes are the metaphor for Kathy, Ruth, Tommy, and other mass-copied clones. By adding the values of memories to the three cassette tapes, Ishiguro suggests that fond memories make immaterial things special and unique. Therefore the readers can receive the message of the significance of happy memories from the novel. Matthew Beedham points out an interesting fact that the covers of almost all the other editions of *Never Let Me Go*, which are sold throughout the world feature a young woman, however the cover of the Japanese version of the novel is an image of a cassette tape the same size as the book (142-143). The Japanese version of the cover indeed shows the importance of the three cassette tapes Kathy owns and actually the significance of the memories attached to those tapes.

The cassette tapes that are mass-produced have an interesting analogy to the clones that are duplicated by reproductive technology. However irreplaceable precious memories are attached to the tapes, and therefore those tapes become the one and only.

## Conclusion

Overall this thesis explored the importance of having innocent and happy childhood memories. In Chapter One, I considered Kazuo Ishiguro's personal history. He was born and raised in Nagasaki, Japan and moved to the UK at the age of five. The chapter revealed how his childhood in Japan and the UK helped to shape his identity. Chapter Two explored "Hailsham" as a metaphor for an ideal childhood environment. The Chapter exposed Ishiguro's message that all children must be raised in an idyllic, happy, innocent, and protected environment. It also revealed that Ishiguro described Hailsham as a bubble-like environment where children are isolated from the realities outside. In Chapter Three, I compared *Never Let Me Go* with other dystopian stories. Human clones in *Never Let Me Go* do not fight against their destiny like other traditional dystopian novels. Instead they accept their fate, even though their lives are short and donation awaits them, by having a happy childhood; they fulfill their lives with fond memories. Chapter Four explored Kathy's unreliable narration. Kathy recollects vague memories of her childhood. Even though she experiences her beloved friends' deaths and donation awaits her in the near future, she tends to be optimistic about her situation. One cannot deny the possibility that her narration is not true. However, by considering how she cherishes her innocent childhood memories, it reveals the importance of having a happy childhood. The final Chapter focused on the only three cassette tapes Kathy ever has. The first tape is Kathy's favorite, and she listens to the song over and over. It brings back Kathy's innocent childhood memories which she uses to immerse herself in her fantasy. The second one is Ruth's gift for Kathy. Even though Kathy does not like any of the songs, she cherishes the tape, because it reminds her of happy childhood memories with Ruth. The last one is the one Kathy finds with Tommy when they spend time together. It also reminds her of the joyful memories that she makes with Tommy. All the three cassette tapes themselves are mass-copied products and do not possess any value. However, by adding the precious memories, Kathy finds value in the three of them.

Kathy faces donations, and she eventually confronts premature death, however, she recollects her precious childhood memories and accepts her destiny. She embraces her fate without resistance against society, because she has a satisfactory childhood, and she feels nostalgic for her happy childhood days. Outside the story people do not face donations, however, they confront struggles and hardships in life. Recollecting their happy childhood memories allows them to escape these realities and immerse themselves in nostalgia for a short time. Even though Kathy loses her beloved friends, Ruth and Tommy, she can feel their existence in her memories. Kathy asserts at the end of the story: "I'll have Hailsham with me, safely in my head, and that'll be something no one can take away" (281). She is supposed to donate her vital organs, and she loses

her body parts in the near future, however, she believes her precious childhood memories of Hailsham and her friends will never be taken away, because they are her own possessions.

Kazuo Ishiguro symbolizes Hailsham as a carefully protected, bubble-like, innocent childhood environment. Kathy and via her perspective, other clone students who grow up in Hailsham share the happy memories. We must use deception to protect the children, so that they can have an innocent childhood. Creating the memories of a happy and innocent childhood gives people the power to face reality when they grow up.



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