

Language and Betrayal: Posthuman Ethics in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*

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Netty Mattar,

"Language and Betrayal: Posthuman Ethics in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*"

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Abstract: Netty Mattar discusses in her article "Language and Betrayal: Posthuman Ethics in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*" the complexities of ethical compassion in this biotechnological age. Mattar highlights how genetic technology creates new forms of life that dissolve the line between 'human' and 'technology.' In spite of this, contemporary ethical discussions do not take into account changing conceptions of human subjectivity and instead reinstate older assumptions about what 'human' is. Mattar argues that speculative fiction (SF), as a self-conscious play on signs and signification, can draw attention to how ethical responses are determined by the language we use. Mattar reads Kazuo Ishiguro's SF novel *Never Let Me Go* as a critique of liberal humanist ethical discourse, which eliminates difference as it promises inclusion. She argues that Ishiguro's uncanny narrative presents a posthuman ethics that forces the reader to confront their own dependence on exclusionary understandings of 'human'.

Netty MATTAR

Language and Betrayal: Posthuman Ethics in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*

'[T]o imagine a language is to imagine a form of life'
Ludwig Wittgenstein (1958, 19. I)

'[T]here would be no decision, in the strong sense of the word, in ethics, in politics, no decision, and thus no responsibility, without the experience of some undecidability' Jacques Derrida
("Hospitality, Justice and Responsibility" 66)

While the world contemplates how to deal with a rapidly population aging population, medical science continues to work towards prolonging life and preventing death, what is referred to as 'engineered negligible senescence' (de Grey "Scientist Ponders Eternal Youth"). New breakthroughs in regenerative therapies promise to dramatically increase life expectancy (Lucke et al), with advocates of life extension technologies arguing that the desire to live longer is pervasive and 'normal.' What is built into these technologies is the belief that indefinite life extension is both beneficial and desirable for humankind. More crucially, they register the scientific rationalization of the religious: engineered life extension replaces the notion of spiritual life after death, while concealing its spiritual links. This example demonstrates how technology is 'morally charged' (Verbeek, *Moralizing Technology* 21). Technologies, especially new biotechnologies, expand the possibilities for how we should live, however, they lessen human autonomy, removing ambiguity and difference from our responses to matters of life and death. For example, genetic testing for hereditary forms of cancer transforms congenital irregularities into preventable forms of suffering, and therefore transform healthy individuals into patients. Technologies mediate and influence actions, shaping the conditions of our experiences. Our deepening dependence on these technologies means that human experience has become increasingly standardized and that the distinction between human and technology has blurred significantly (see for example Verbeek, *Moralizing Technology*) Science and technology can thus be understood as a discourse that materializes particular contingent values, transforming the way we relate to the natural world. This leads us to ask a number of difficult questions concerning how we should act.

In this paper I address the question of 'ethics' in this biotech age, looking at how a liberal paradigm of ethical action is critiqued in Kazuo Ishiguro's novel *Never Let Me Go*. In order to do this, we must first understand the current ethical milieu and the particular notions of 'ethics' to which the text responds. The word 'ethics' derives from the Greek word *ethike*, which was used by the ancient Greeks to refer to the 'science of morals' ("Ethic"). During this time, Socrates established rational methods for exploring morality, laying the foundations for ethical philosophy, as we understand it today. Later, Plato and Aristotle would introduce and develop the ethical concept of the 'good life.' This is the belief that a life based on virtue and wisdom, and guided by reason, would lead to justness towards others and happiness (Gensler and Spurgin xlviii-xlix). Although rooted in Greek philosophy, ethics as it is widely practiced today seems to be somewhat different in orientation. Ethical discussions today seem to mainly revolve around the central question 'how should one act?' with approaches that attend to the responsibilities of the human subject (the deontological approach), as well as the objective assessment of the consequences of one's actions (this is the consequentialist approach). Peter-Paul Verbeek points out that these predominant approaches to ethics in the western world differ greatly from the Greek conceptions (Verbeek, "Cultivating Humanity"). The 'good life' is very much concerned with the individual interacting with society and thus to the interconnectedness of the human with the world around him. In contrast, contemporary approaches derive from a western humanist tradition, which places the individual subject at the center, the source of moral decisions and practices. In this conception, the humanist subject is a discrete being, acting upon the world of objects and upon others from a distance (Verbeek, "Cultivating Humanity" 247). Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), who is a key influence on ethical thought, and on the western philosophical tradition as a whole, conceived of a morality that 'ha[s its] seat and origin completely a priori in reason' and whose autonomous subject is completely free from the influence of the external world (Kant 21). The predominance of the deontological and consequentialist approaches suggests that such humanist values (such as the separation of subject and object, subjective autonomy, and objective reason) guide ethical action and discourse today.

These approaches, however, are undermined by the fact that, today, the question of 'how to act' cannot be answered exclusively by this human(ist) subject. Technologies actively mediate actions,

thus mitigating the responsibility of the human agent. Moreover, recent developments in biotechnology radically transform our understanding of 'human,' presenting us with many fascinating new forms of life. The Human Genome Project, for instance, has mapped the genetic constitution of the human being, making genetic modification theoretically possible, and therefore making it also possible to engineer the shape and future of the 'human.' This kind of genetic manipulation further dissolves the supposed line separating 'human' and 'technology,' thoroughly destabilizing the humanist conception of the human subject.

It is ironic, then, that the epistemologies we consider to be true in bioethics conform to the humanist notions of the discrete and autonomous individual (see Care Wolfe 55, for example). Instead of addressing these ontological assumptions, which are inherently hierarchical, ethicists are concerned instead with establishing rules and codes of conduct as the basis of how to act, in order to determine, for instance, whether an individual has the 'right' to various treatments or protections (see Dworkin 22; Beauchamp and Childress 13, for example). Carl Elliott criticizes this approach as being 'an almost purely technical enterprise' prompted by an 'unthinking pragmatism' that uncritically reinstalls humanist assumptions about what a 'human' or 'person' is (xxii). What is needed, then, is a consideration of how our ethical responses are determined by our ontological and epistemological assumptions, assumptions that make up a philosophical paradigm, a *discourse*, that, 'open[s] up lines of thought... and foreclose[s] others' (Wolfe 60). In other words, we must acknowledge how our moral questions and responses are always already entangled in *language*. I argue that speculative fiction (SF) can draw our attention to how ethical responses are determined by the language we use. In other words, it is a genre that is exceptionally attuned to how language (what we say and write, as well as cultural gestures) brings into being certain worlds and realities, while shutting out others.

Fiction has long been regarded as a valuable supplement to ethical discussions because of its ability to re-contextualize abstract ethical issues by relating them to specific situations. For example, writers might imagine how technological change affects the individual psyche or human relationships, returning ethics to the personal and interpersonal domains. The typical narrative (by this I mean realist or naturalist fiction) is thus seen as a rich source of moral and ethical insight, which readers can glean from the causal structures of the text and the way characters respond to dilemmas. Implicit in this approach is the merging of representation with the real, the collapsing of the distance between sign and signified (see Nussbaum, for example). However, these readings do not address the very important issue of how the language of fiction, as with any ethical discourse, might manipulate the reader. Language, as a system of signification, can encourage moral consensus among members of the same moral community. Writers can tap into established codes (such as emotional framing that evokes fear or pathos), thereby condemning or praising specific behaviors. The reader is thus manipulated through language, inducted into a moral culture that calibrates and cultivates particular moral-emotional responses. Joshua Landy further argues that such fiction 'convinces us only of what we already believed before we began to read it' (66). The 'pleasure' we derive from ethical readings comes from us intuitively adopting a certain position or 'role' in a game of 'make-believe,' participating in a 'fantasy of moral clarity' (74). Landy reiterates the idea that our moral responses to fiction are always already entangled with language and discursive constructions, and power relations inherent in linguistic practices, which tell us *how* to respond.

Speculative fiction is an evocative form of cultural expression that brings into focus the relationships between technology and human values, offering unique ethical perspectives.¹ Firstly, as a genre overtly concerned with the challenges that technological progress presents to humanity, SF imagines the possible consequences of new technologies. SF does this through the introduction of what Darko Suvin calls *nova*, fictional innovations that diverge from 'reality.' These *nova* are often plausible projections of present trends or invented impossibilities, rationalized into the world of the text, and often a combination of both (63-84). These divergences estrange the reader from reality, and by working through the discontinuities between fictional world and reality, the reader gains fresh insights about the world. What is critical to my discussion is the idea that SF is a self-conscious play on signs and signification, and it can draw our attention to how ethical responses are determined by the language we use. SF employs recognizable signs, prompting conventional meanings, and then because of its openness to alterity (to the alien, to the other) it simultaneously disrupts norms and

¹ The term 'speculative fiction' is a term that arose in the 1960s to articulate a broadening aesthetic domain of science fiction. I use the term more or less interchangeably with 'science fiction.'

introduces novel meanings or values, while foregrounding its own construction. SF thus effectively problematizes epistemological and ontological 'truths,' revealing how these 'truths' and the ethical actions that derive from them are constituted in a language that precedes us.

The Clone: interrupting 'human'

Kazuo Ishiguro uses the figure of the clone to challenge the normative conceptions of 'human' that undergird contemporary ethical discussions. Jean Baudrillard has argued that the gene is 'the prosthesis par excellence' because it allows for the *'indefinite extension of th[e] body by the body itself'* making it possible for organs to be replaced by their own 'double,' their own clone (98, emphasis in original). The unique individual becomes, theoretically, replaceable, displaced by a series of endlessly reproducible copies of itself. In addition to this, the categories of gender, class, race, sexuality and age, believed to inhere in the individual, may now be externally manipulated. Any assumptions of a self-governing, 'natural' self are giving way to an understanding that, at least in theoretical terms, the human subject can be shaped by or reconstituted by the union with technologies. This dismantles humanist assumptions, and signals how technology is radically changing our semiotic categories.

In responding to this disruption, various ethical discourses have appropriated the clone figure as a means of re-inscribing normative definitions of 'human.' Critics of cloning, for example, appeal to the need to protect agency and individuality (see Dunn; Fukuyama 7, for example) notions so central to Enlightenment humanism. Arguments in defense of cloning often appeal to human freedom and the right to make these reproductive choices (see Stock 10, for example), thus championing liberal humanist principles. In these discussions the clone is a discursive tool used to assert specific ideals about the 'human' while simultaneously avoiding the problems related to defining 'human.'

Ishiguro offers a representation of the clone that exceeds these normative frames. I will argue that the clone figure in *Never Let Me Go* is constructed as an embodiment of difference that resists efforts to control difference through oppositional categories, thoroughly destabilizing our assumptions about the 'human' and thus human relations. Crucially, Ishiguro foregrounds the constructedness of the clone subjectivity and in doing so reveals the fiction of the 'human' against which the clone is often negatively measured. Ishiguro thereby initiates a restructuring of our ethical frames of reference and opens up the possibilities for thinking about ethical responsibility and action.

***Never Let Me Go*: Language, the disciplining of 'other' bodies, and narratives of betrayal**

Never Let Me Go (2005) is part of a tradition of dystopian SF that explores the impact of genetic science and bioengineering on society. Theodore Sturgeon's "When You Care, When You Love," for example, explores how cloning can bring those lost back to life. In Ursula K. Le Guin's "Nine Lives," the clone appears as a strange 'other' and is used to explore the impact of duplication on Western humanist conceptions of the unique self. Unlike these earlier texts, Kazuo Ishiguro's tale is told from the perspective of the clone. Ishiguro grants the clone psychological and emotional depth and focuses on the interactions between them. In this way, the clones appear at first no different from 'real' humans. However, as I will show, the clones' irreducible difference removes them from 'normal' humanity and distinguishes them as 'others.' The text deals with how certain persistent assumptions about what constitutes 'human' can facilitate the oppression of those who, as a result of advanced technological processes, fall outside of these discrete boundaries. Ishiguro uses the speculative form to imagine an alternative contemporary reality, England in the 'late 1990s', in which human cloning is a reality, envisioning how this might materialize within the specific social reality of a Western, liberal society.

Critics have read *Never Let Me Go* as a novel that adds to continuing ethical debates around genetic engineering by providing insight into biotechnological labor and warning us of the consequences of the instrumentalization of human life (see Arias 380, Johnston 33, for example). Others have focused on how Ishiguro problematizes the very notion of 'human life.' For Rachel Carroll the clones are nominally heterosexual beings that are not given the same privileges as other heterosexuals, thus revealing the inherent contradictions of heteronormative discourse and the contingency of human identity. I am similarly interested in the contingency of 'human,' but my focus is on how Ishiguro calls attention to the way ethical discourse itself produces human identity, assimilating difference, and then eradicating it. I am particularly interested in how the language of humanist ethics reveals the ways that we continue to be tied to structures of violence we wish to renounce. I examine how liberal rights-based discourse rests upon systems of signification that perpetuate exclusionary notions, while claiming inclusion, and which ultimately undermines ethical responsibility. The clone represents an alternative, posthuman ontology and a means of demonstrating

how liberal ethical discourses and structures tend to co-opt the subject back into old, oppressive binaries, and thus are revealed as an inadequate framework for dealing with difference.

Almost immediately, Ishiguro makes us conscious of the way language manipulates us and shapes our attitudes. The reader's alignment with Kathy, the narrator and point of focalization, is unsettled by his narrative misdirection, which encourages the retroactive reinterpretation of meaning. This play with the conventions of narration is the key means by which Ishiguro disrupts meaning, and ensnares the reader, whose sense of control over the narrative is unraveled by the novel's analeptic structure. This narrative evasiveness is a strategy that Ishiguro often uses, in *An Artist of the Floating World*, (1986) and *The Remains of the Day* (1989) for instance, to demonstrate the act of self-deception (see Walkowitz 1052, for example). In this novel, I offer, this strategy is used to deceive the reader in order to disturb the categories of 'human' and 'inhuman,' and to bring into awareness the reader's own ethnocentrism.

The narrator of the novel is Kathy H., a 'carer' in her eleventh year (3), who reminisces about her childhood and her passage into young adulthood. Ishiguro uses the first-person narrative, a technique often employed to demonstrate growth from a naïve self of the past to the narrating self of the present (Cohn 143). This process of maturation is anticipated by the reader, and it seems to be supported by the three-part structure that takes us through the stages of childhood, adolescence and young adulthood. Much of Kathy's nostalgic reflection centers upon her time at Hailsham, an educational institution where she spent her childhood. Hailsham, with its idyllic pavilion, vigilant 'guardians' and playground gossip, seems, at the outset, to derive from familiar British adolescent fictions where the school setting is the backdrop for adolescent coming of age. Ishiguro draws on this sign system to prompt readers' investment in the characters. This is strengthened through the reader's identification with Kathy's seemingly typical experiences of young love and anxiety. Such identification is reinforced by the fact that Kathy frequently invites us to think upon 'how it was where [we] were' (13).

However, this comforting recognition and identification is progressively unsettled by revelations that inject these earlier, apparently innocuous, descriptions with a darker strangeness. For instance, we soon perceive what seems like a disproportionate emphasis on the students' 'creating' art (16) and the disquieting fact that poor artistic performance is grounds for bullying and group exclusion (20). In addition to this, there is excessive emphasis on the students' physical health, with 'some form of medical almost every week' (13) and frequent reminders that they are 'special' and so 'keeping [them]selves very healthy inside' is 'much more important' for them than it would be ordinarily (68, emphasis in original). What is eventually made explicit, towards the end of the first part of the novel, is the discomfiting reality of the students' lives: Kathy and her peers are human clones who have been 'reared' (255) to 'supply medical science' (256), and that 'each of [them] was created' to 'donate [their] vital organs' (80) so that larger society could advance from the 'dark days' (257) of death by 'cancer, motor neurone disease, heart disease' (258). We learn that Kathy and her friends are the 'lucky' (6) few who were 'educated and cultured' in Hailsham's 'wonderful surroundings' and 'kept away from the horrors' in which other clones are reared (256). Although they have been given 'better lives than [they] would have had otherwise' (260), their lives are overshadowed by the fact of their eventual 'completion', a euphemistic reference to premature death. Thus, what Ishiguro has taken care to obscure, at first, is Kathy's irreducible, ontological *difference*, which interrupts our identification with Kathy, and takes its place as the novel's central concern.

The character of Kathy functions as split sign, simultaneously a 'self' that we may identify with, and an 'other' from whom we are alienated. Ishiguro's play with narrative conventions, through the mode of SF, brings into focus how identity is determined by language. The shifting nature of Kathy's identity demonstrates that identity is an uncertain and provisional consequence of difference, which alters in varying contexts. In other words, identity—specifically, what is 'human'—is an effect of discourse and the power relations that are inherent in discourse. I argue that *Never Let Me Go* materializes the connections between discourse, its institutions, and notions of identity. Specifically, Ishiguro conceptualizes how liberal rights-based ethical discourse constructs its ethical subject as an object. The subject in turn internalizes the qualities of this objectification, and adapts herself in accordance with the limitations imposed upon her.

The sham of human 'rights'

Hailsham is one of several institutions that were established 'after the war' by a 'small but very vocal' liberal movement that reached the height of its influence in the 'late seventies' (256). This movement endeavored to 'challeng[e] the entire way the donations programme was being run' and to prove that 'if students were reared in humane, cultivated environments' they would 'grow to be as sensitive and

intelligent as any ordinary human being' (256). Ishiguro situates this movement in the ascendancy of the discourse of human rights after the Second World War, when charters such as the Nuremberg Code (1947) and the Declaration of Helsinki (1964) laid the grounds for ethical medical practice involving human beings in western societies (see Bertholf, 2001, for example). Human rights are universal norms, rooted in Enlightenment principles, that help to safeguard the 'inalienable rights of all members of the human family' and the inherent 'dignity and worth of the human person' ("Universal Declaration of Human Rights," 1948).

Hailsham represents an institutionalization of this ethical discourse. In Hailsham, the 'commonly held' perception that cloned humans are merely '[s]hadowy objects in test tubes' (255-256) is challenged. The students are seen as 'properly human' (258) and their basic dignity and worth recognized and nourished. The students enjoy some of the same freedoms as 'normal' humans. They are educated, for example, 'encourage[d]', given 'lessons... books' and engaged in 'discussions' (254), and, after leaving Hailsham, are free to travel around the country. In these respects, the students' human worth is preserved, up until their eventual 'completion'. Before the project disintegrated in the wake of the Morningdale scandal, during which society was faced with the possibility that genetically 'superior' clones would 'take their place in society' (259, emphasis in original), Hailsham stood as a 'shining beacon' (253) of how society might move towards this 'more humane' treatment of the cloned humans (253).

However, the idea at the center of guardian Miss Emily's art program, the belief that art will 'reveal [the clones'] souls' or rather, as Miss Emily clarifies, 'prove [they] had souls at all' (255, emphasis in original) betrays an essentialist way of thinking that is deeply exclusionary and at odds with the ostensible intents of the program. The students are encouraged to create '[p]aintings, drawings, pottery... 'sculptures' made from whatever was the craze of the day – bashed up cans... or bottle tops' (16), the best of which are selected by Madame, an unapproachable 'French or Belgian' woman who visits Hailsham a few times a year, to be placed in what the students call her 'Gallery' (32). This collection of art is then exhibited to 'cabinet ministers, bishops, [and] all sorts of famous people' in order to raise awareness that the clones are 'fully human' and to gather funding for their cause (256). The very premise that Art is a signifier for the Soul alerts us to a prior differentiation of appearance from reality, a dualism that implicitly privileges an unseen and essential 'truth', the soul, over its external and material manifestations. Hailsham is thus allied to what Derrida calls a 'metaphysics of presence', which, according to Derrida, returns 'strategically' to 'an origin' perceived to be 'simple, intact, normal, pure, standard, self-identical' (*Monolingualism* 236). The art program betrays a binary way of thinking that installs 'orders of subordination in the various dualisms that it encounters' (Derrida, *Margins* 195), privileging 'nature', 'man' and 'spirit' over 'culture', 'women' and the 'material.' And this way of thinking has, throughout history, led to the marginalization or domination of those in the latter category.

The notion of the transcendental 'soul,' as that which will distinguish human beings from other subhuman entities, is evidence of the unconscious belief in a great 'chain of being' that orders the universe. In this strict, religious conception, which originates in Plato and Aristotle, human beings are distinguished from animals and other beings beneath them by the presence of the soul, and so have authority over them. In the Christian variation of this belief, the liberation of the soul from the flesh is the means by which humans may transcend, moving up the hierarchy and closer to God the perfect immortal being, and attain salvation. In this context, human cloning for the purpose of organ transplants may be seen as a technological means of attaining immortality and transcendence on earth, and so perhaps reveals technology's religious underpinnings (for more on the religious, especially Christian, roots of modern science and the notion of salvation through technology, please see Noble, 2013). The fact that Miss Emily's ethical action hinges on proving that clones indeed have 'souls' indicates that it functions from a Christian morality that has, antecedently, excluded the clone from the realm of humanity. The instinctual nature of this belief is evident in the guardians' involuntary 'fear' towards their students. Miss Emily later discloses to Kathy that she would 'feel such *revulsion*' when she looked upon the clones and that she consciously 'fought those feelings' so that she could do 'what was right' (264, my emphasis). The intense disgust that is felt suggests that the clone is not merely perceived as lacking but fundamentally profane. And because it is represented as an involuntary reaction it represents a moral response that calls upon normativity. In a 'cold moment' of realization, Kathy understands that, in spite of her education, she is looked upon as a 'spider' (35), as a beast in human form. It is no wonder then that close friend Tommy's art, an expression of his identity, consists of drawings of animals with 'metallic features' (185). These drawings show that 'at some level [Tommy] always *knew*' (270, emphasis in original) that they are looked upon as subhuman beings.

Ishiguro suggests that there is a discord between the ideals of human rights and the unconscious processes of exclusion and debasement of the other that underlies it. In the text, the instinctive revulsion towards the clones coincides with systematic processes of Othering, or dehumanization, that aims to recover the existential order that the cloned human has unsettled. It is this active process of dehumanization—the creation and maintenance of the subhuman category—that I will focus on in the next section.

The discourse of Hailsham and the creation of clone subjectivity

The clone's 'subhuman' status, its *difference*, is not inscribed on the body; when Kathy and her friends travel around the country they blend in imperceptibly with 'normal' people (160-163). The novel highlights that their difference is created in the discursive space of Hailsham. I argue that the practices that guide social relations in Hailsham are in fact acts of dehumanization, even while purporting to safeguard the students' human rights. The name 'Hailsham' is significant because the component 'hail' brings to mind Louis Althusser's theory (1971) of how the subject is 'hailed' and constituted within language and ideology. Althusser describes a process of interpellation, whereby the individual is 'hailed' by the forces of authority and recognizes him or herself as a subject ("Interpellation"). The name 'Hailsham' thus calls attention to how the semiotic order of Hailsham, including the material practices that shape everyday life, 'hails' the students as the beastly inhuman.

Hailsham stands on the outskirts of society, hidden in a 'smooth hollow with fields rising on all sides.' There are few visitors to Hailsham, apart from 'gardeners or workmen' and sometimes '[d]ays could... go by without [them] seeing a vehicle' come to the compound (34). This physical seclusion establishes the limits of community and belonging, and it differentiates the cloned human from the rest of society, keeping them on the outside. In this borderland the order of civilization is maintained and the uncertain nature of clone identity contained. The various methods of body control establish the terms for understanding 'inside' and 'outside,' thus strengthening social boundaries and hierarchies. Students are free to walk around Hailsham but '[q]uiet' places, that cannot be clearly viewed from the house, are off limits (22, 25), which brings to mind Foucault's idea of the panopticon as a mechanism of political power and surveillance that 'assures the automatic functioning of power' by making the deviant subject feel like he or she is constantly being watched (Foucault 220).

In Hailsham, the clone body is further disciplined through frequent medical tests and injunctions to 'kee[p] [them]selves very healthy inside.' The students are repeatedly told that this is 'much more important for each of [the clones] than it is for [normal humans]' (68). That the clone body is marked as especially vulnerable to contamination inscribes a hierarchy of bodies and selves. This hierarchy is underscored by the biological incursion that ensures that the clones are 'not... able to have babies' (82), which suggests that the clone body, as a carrier of an aberrant genetic code, must be medically controlled to prevent spread of this disorder. This active process of Othering is also evident in the manner that the students' education imposes order on their erotic processes. The clones are given lessons about sex when they are 13 years old, during which they are shown 'how it [is] done,' with Miss Emily demonstrating the 'various contortions' with a life-size skeleton and a pointer (82). These lessons come with a specific warning to be 'careful *who* [they] had sex with' because for those 'in the outside world' sex was 'something pretty special' and the clones had to 'respect the rules' when they are 'out there' (82, emphasis in original). This moral differentiation is emphasized by the fact that the guardians seem clearly 'confused,' telling the students to 'respect [their] physical needs' but yet making it 'impossible for any of [them] to actually do much,' and giving them the 'distinct impression [they would] be in trouble' if caught in the act (93). This confusion highlights the fundamental hypocrisy that excludes the clone from social and moral norms of humanity, while attending to them *as if* they were part of it.

Perhaps most revealing is the fact that Ishiguro implicates the discourse of human rights in the political economy of capitalism. Hailsham's art program is entangled in a system of exchange that guarantees the clones' ultimate objectification. Kathy tells us that the students' self-worth, 'how much [they] were liked and respected,' had to do with 'how good [they] were at creating' art (16). For every piece of art they create, the guardians give them Exchange Tokens, the amount depending on judged merit. The students are then free to use these tokens during the Exchanges, 'big exhibition-cum-sale[s]' taking place four times a year, to buy other students' art works and build up a 'collection of personal possessions' (16). The fact that their 'souls' are exchanged for tokens, suggest that the students are reduced to commodities, their worth diminished to an exchange value. The students are encouraged to be 'dependent on each other to produce the stuff that might become [their] private treasures' (16), which establishes an ethos of utilitarian individualism, and reproduces society's attitude towards the clones and their uncompromising consumption of cloned body parts. Ishiguro

symbolically materializes the way in which the liberal discourse of human rights is affiliated with property rights, which, historically, included the right to own slaves, a fact underlined by Miss Emily's own 'big Nigerian' servant (251). Ishiguro thus highlights that the ethical principles of liberalism hinge upon an ethos of exclusion and the creation and objectification of an Other, which ensures a 'good' life for the unique liberal self. The violence of such a value system is indicated by striking allusions to two of the most brutal examples of systematic dehumanization: a classroom discussion of World War II poetry prompts jokes about getting electrocuted on the fences surrounding Hailsham, an unnerving and deliberate allusion to the electric fences of Nazi concentration camps (77); and later, a moment of identification, between Kathy and the Nigerian servant, is so compelling that Kathy fails to notice that he is assisting Miss Emily, whom she had been anxiously seeking out (251), suggesting a common experience of slavery. These examples highlight that, despite Miss Emily's best intentions, the clone program at Hailsham is akin to the rationalized genocide of the Jewish and African holocausts.

Hailed by the inconstant symbolic system of Hailsham, a splitting of consciousness can be seen to occur in the clone. The clone is educated and civilized and, recognizing herself as fully 'human', finds it difficult to believe that anyone could think they 'didn't have souls' (255). Yet at the same time, Kathy and her friends seem to have internalized the qualities of their objectification. Kathy describes that there was a 'running joke' among the students that revolved around 'unzipping' various body parts at inopportune moments, for instance, 'unzip[ping] a bit of [one]self, a kidney or something' and 'dump[ing] it on someone's plate' in order to put someone off their food (86). This combination of the absurd and the brutal heightens the horror of the clones' eventual end, allowing, as Freud (1905) has theorized, the release of suppressed thoughts, and so 'acknowledg[ment]' of the reality that is in front of them (86). It also reveals a kind of internalized racism, where the cloned human participates in the attitudes and social structures that sustain the oppressive power of the privileged humans. Humor can function as a 'cultural signifier' (Duara 165), revealing the relationship between different social groups. Jokes can serve to construct difference, or 'otherness,' thereby maintaining the moral boundaries of that group by defining what is acceptable behavior and what is not (see Vucetic, 2004, for example). Such jokes therefore reify social relations and preserve a certain hierarchical order. What is interesting is that these gags about 'unzipping' organs began as a way of deriding Tommy, who has been ostracized by the other students on account of his substandard art (85-86), a way of maintaining his relative inferiority and out-group status. Yet the fact that the in-group eventually adopts the same kinds of jokes to refer to themselves suggests that the students recognize themselves as the 'other.'

The slippage between the opposing domains of 'self' and 'other', 'inside' and 'outside,' can also be observed in students' disturbing back-fence talk. One of the ways the clones can be observed to conserve the order and coherence of their identity as Hailsham students is in relation to the antithetical chaos outside. Although the guardians insist they are 'nonsense' (50), the students continually resurrect rumors about the lawlessness that lies beyond the strict order of Hailsham. The students use these 'horrible stories' (50) of murder and death to control group behavior and threaten those who would transgress these boundaries (68). For example, when one student asks a 'rude question' about whether Miss Lucy, who had been lecturing them about not smoking, had ever herself had a cigarette, the others 'made [her] life utter misery' by holding her face to the dorm window forcing her to look at the terrifying unknown outside (68). Yet, the students identify themselves with the disorder they attempt to keep out, with rumors about plotting to kidnap and harm their guardians (49) disturbing the established demarcations of identity.

These examples convey the split nature of clone consciousness as she is subject to the conflicting discourse of liberal rights in Hailsham, which seemingly acknowledges their humanity but also excludes them from human morality. This highlights that the subject is constituted through language and discourse, which is contingent upon certain relations of power. By bringing this to our attention, Ishiguro urges us to look beyond bioethics as a question of practicalities, and to question instead the underlying framework of values that are embedded and hidden in ethical systems of signification. Ishiguro suggests that a rights-based approach is inadequate because it does not disrupt the contingent and exclusionary nature of what is considered 'human,' which has and continues to enable oppression and genocide. The guardians' practice of exchanging the students' art for tokens reduces their rights-based ethics to consumerist acts that merely serve to make the brutality more palatable without actually changing anything. Regardless of their 'train[ing]... the encourage[ment]... lessons... books and discussions' the clones were going to 'just going to give donations anyway, then die' (254). In this liberal framework, difference is only to be tolerated.

What is ethics then, if not about rights?

Many readers have expressed discomfort and frustration at the fact that Kathy and her friends seem to 'passive[ly] accep[t]... their sacrificial destinies' (Hardie). Kathy seems fully aware of her dismal fate, and yet accepts, as her friends do, that being a donor is 'what [they]'re *supposed* to be doing' (223, emphasis in original). Despite the opportunities she has to escape, Kathy remains within the confines of what society has prescribed for her only going as far as asking for a 'deferral' (228). This has been criticized as simply 'not a true depiction of human nature' (Traveler). This, according to one, causes the reader to 'disinvest from the characters' and from the book (yellowtractor). The horror of the clones' unexpected powerlessness is brought about by Ishiguro's subversion of the genre. In *Never Let Me Go* the literary form of the bildungsroman, with the expectations of the growth to self-awareness and individuation, is disrupted by the fact that Kathy does not seem to mature in the manner we expect her too. The bildungsroman is a narrative form that conforms to humanist notions of continuous maturation and progress from earlier ignorance to later knowledge. As mentioned earlier, Ishiguro sets up expectations of progressive development and then unsettles them. Kathy does not seem to gain self-awareness, which breaks the accepted order, interrupting the reader's identification with Kathy. Ishiguro elicits feelings of uncertainty and discomfort in the reader—an experience of the uncanny.

The idea of the uncanny comes from the German word *unheimlich*, which literally means 'unhomely.' Freud theorizes that the uncanny experience occurs when something familiar is made frighteningly strange through the return of what has been repressed, the revelation of something that should have remained hidden or secret (Freud, *The Uncanny* 147). I will suggest that uncanniness here is brought about by the slippage between self and other. The reader identifies with Kathy and is intimately connected to her on one hand but is also acutely disconnected from her and alienated by her irreducible difference on the other. The narrative expresses a posthumanist subjectivity that diverges from expected humanist notions. Posthumanism is characterized by the deconstruction of the humanist subject, with its capacity for rationality, autonomy and mastery (see Hayles 1999, Braidotti 2013, for example). For Rosi Braidotti, the humanist subject is implicitly linked to the white European male subject, whose values and ideology fueled the imperial subordination and eradication of non-European others (13-16). For Braidotti, it is crucial to first understand this 'restricted notion of what counts as the human' before considering the posthuman at all (16). At the same time, she acknowledges the impossibility of completely disconnecting from humanism (30) and that rather than reinstating a binary opposition between humanism and anti-humanism, posthumanism 'look[s] more affirmatively towards new alternatives' (37). Ishiguro's narrative presents such an alternative. Despite the fact that Kathy passes for a 'normal' human, the narrative maintains difference and avoids the humanist tendency to control or assimilate, and, eventually, eliminate difference. Our uncanny experience of reading is one of simultaneous entanglement and discontinuity.

The uncanny discomfort that results is produced, deliberately, in order to encourage the reader to confront the limits of his or her sympathetic imagination (slipping into another's shoes so to speak, in order to understand another) and to apprehend his or her own dependence on exclusionary models of personhood. Because Kathy's 'passive acceptance' interrupts our identification with her, the reader becomes aware of what Nicholas Royle (2003) describes as a 'sense of ourselves as double, split, at odds with ourselves'—precisely the experience of the uncanny (6). This rupturing exposes our own reliance on reified notions of the 'human' (as a self-determining individual), and our innate tendency to judge an other as 'lacking' in this distinctive 'humanness,' thus deconstructing the readers own privileging of humanist values. Ishiguro leaves us with an unnerving suggestion that, even with sympathy and compassion for another, our capacity to reject and act cruelly towards others remains. In traditional horror fictions, the uncanny is an aesthetic device used for its 'radical potential to uncover those things that the dominant culture prefers to keep hidden' (Creed 98). In this novel, the use of the uncanny also turns the horror upon us, the reader. We are given a frightening picture of ourselves as complicit in the de-humanization and 'disinvestment' of others.

Ishiguro's narrative, in neither denying or completely collapsing the distinction between 'human' and other, exemplifies an ethical position that acknowledges that a posthuman ethics cannot be found outside of humanism. Ishiguro suggests that we must first understand that any ethical response is itself constituted by our innate, indeed *human*, tendency to privilege certain understandings of 'human.' What needs to be emphasized is not our kinship with others, but our very human tendency to control, silence, and ultimately (and violently) eradicate difference. It is only when we understand the difficulties of maintaining compassion in spite of difference that we can truly recognize our distinct responsibilities for resisting injustice.

Never Let Me Go is a text that does not look into the future or ask questions that pertain only to the future, but is one that, as Ishiguro notes, asks 'ancient questions' about death, mortality and

teleology, questions that relate to whether we have an 'obligation to fulfil the reasons [we] have been made' (Mullan). These are the questions that, the novel suggests, ethical responsibility must begin with. In the novel the clone is a tool for destabilizing the discourse of rights-based ethics and the specific understanding of 'human' that supports it so that we may reassess what 'ethics' is. Through the literary figure of the clone, Ishiguro encourages the reader's dismantling and re-evaluation of what it means to be human. And because the clone's ambivalence determines how we respond (whether we perpetuate intolerance, or choose to maintain compassion), it is the novel's key ethical moment.

Note: This paper is culled from my dissertation, *The Prosthetic Self: Technology and Human Experience in Contemporary Speculative Fiction*.

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