

Abstract

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The thesis presents four perceptions of Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* (2006) using (and synthesizing) the critical approaches of Postcolonialism, Reader-Response Criticism, Psychoanalytic Criticism, and Structuralism. *Never Let Me Go* is read respectively as a (dis)continuation of the author's previous themes, a science-fictional dystopia, a comedy, and a metaphor for human condition. The main aim is to discuss aspects of each reading and to determine whether the meaning of the novel changes with different perceptions, or whether the meaning is independent of the critic's methods and perspectives.

Points of Perception:

Possible Readings of Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*

Final Thesis

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Keywords: Teaching of English and Physical Education

Year of Issue: 2009

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The thesis presents four perceptions of Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* (2006) using (and synthesizing) the critical approaches of New Criticism, Reader-Response Criticism, Psychoanalytic Criticism, Structuralism and Deconstruction. The novel is read respectively as a (dis)continuation of the author's previous themes, a science-fictional dystopia, a comedy, and a metaphor for human condition. The main aim is to discuss aspects of each reading and to determine whether the meaning of the novel changes with different perceptions, or whether the meaning is independent of the critic's methods and perspectives.

Resumé

Tato práce nabízí čtyři pohledy na román *Never Let Me Go* (2006) od Kazua Ishigura s využitím (a propojením) literárně-kritických přístupů nové kritiky, recepční estetiky, psychoanalýzy, strukturalismu a dekonstrukce. Román je postupně uchopen jako: (ne)pokračování autorových předešlých témat, sci-fi dystopie, komedie a metafora lidského žití. Rozebráním románu z různých perspektiv se pokusíme zjistit, zda změna úhlu pohledu dá vzniknout novým významům, či zda je celkový smysl románu nezávislý na způsobech čtení.

Keywords

literary criticism, contemporary novel, psychoanalysis, reader-response, limits of perception

Declaration

I hereby declare that I have written this work on my own with the use of the works cited.

Prague
April 7th 2009

Josef Vinduska

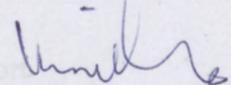


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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor Petr Chalupský for the patience and support.

1 Introduction

Like a strange prehistoric artifact in the hands of an archaeologist is a novel in the hands of a literary critic. He or she approaches it from different points of view, using different strategies and methods to discover its meaning. The four chapters in the Practical part of

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Chapter 3.1, 'The Themes in the Novels of Kazuo Ishiguro' approaches *Never Let Me Go* from the perspective of Ishiguro's previous novels. It summarizes the development of the author's themes and narrative strategies in each novel in order to determine whether similar themes and areas of concern can be found in *Never Let Me Go*. The underlying assumption is that the reader familiar with Ishiguro's other novels will perceive *Never Let Me Go* differently from other readers, mainly with respect to the novel's science-fiction dimension.

The science-fiction dimension of the novel is discussed in Chapter 3.2, 'A dystopian vision: exploring a fictional landscape.' Since *Never Let Me Go* is largely elliptical as regards the mechanisms inherent to the world its characters inhabit, the aim of this chapter is to construct this world from pieces of information available in the text. The construction is then assessed in terms of its plausibility.

1 Introduction

Like a strange prehistoric artefact in the hands of an archaeologist is a novel in the hands of a literary critic. He examines it from different points of view, using different strategies and methods to discover its meaning. The four chapters in the Practical part of this study represent four different points of perception, four different ways of reading Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* (2005). The main aim of this thesis is to determine, whether the individual points of departure generate radically different meanings or whether there is some focal point in which the readings converge and uncover one single overarching theme. If the former were the case, then, within our simile, the archaeologist would with each method interpret the artefact as respectively a hatchet, a pipe, a musical instrument, or anything imaginable; if the latter were true, the archaeologist would via different routes always come to the conclusion that the artefact cannot be anything else but for example an ancient toy.

The Theoretical part can be taken as a mapping of the archaeological site and the listing of tools and methods used. It introduces critical approaches which form the methodological background of the essays in the Practical part: New Criticism, Reader-Response Criticism, Structuralism, Deconstruction and Psychoanalytic Criticism.

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The science-fiction dimension of the novel is discussed in Chapter 3.1, 'A dystopian vision: exploring a fictional landscape.' Since *Never Let Me Go* is fairly elliptical as regards the mechanisms inherent to the world its characters inhabit, the aim of this chapter is to construct this world from pieces of information available in the text. The construction is then assessed in terms of its plausibility.

Chapter 3.3, 'Touching the barriers: the comical in *Never Let Me Go*' is an attempt to read the novel as a comedy. The sense of the comical as a distinct kind of emotional upheaval is treated as a reader's experience that signifies. The aim of the chapter is to discover what signification it is and how the experience is achieved using the premises of Freud's *The Joke and Its Relation to the Unconscious*.

Chapter 3.4, 'A tale of no escape: metaphors and oppositions in *Never Let Me Go*,' analyses symbols and metaphors, assesses their role in the narrative and relates their meaning to the overall meaning of the novel. In addition, the chapter focuses on the implications of reading *Never Let Me Go* as a metaphor for human condition.

2.1.1 New Criticism

New Criticism came into prominence in the 1940s, but its roots can be found in the early 1900s in the works of I.A. Richards and T.S. Eliot. The noveness of this approach lies in its conscious disregard of both the author and the reader. 'A poem (used as a synonym in New Criticism for any literary work) [...] can be analyzed to discover its true or correct meaning independent of its author's intention or of the emotional state, values, or beliefs of either its author or reader.' A poem becomes a separate entity, an autotelic artefact; studying the author's biography or intentions in order to arrive at the meaning of a text is an error which became known as the Intentional Fallacy.

New Criticism has been very influential due to its method of close reading. Many critics of different schools make use of this method; it is traditionally taught in literature classes of universities all over the world. Bessler's outline of seven steps in literary interpretation suitably illustrates the methodology of New Criticism:

- 1) Examine the text's diction. Consider the denotation, connotations, and etymological roots of all the words in the text.
- 2) Examine all allusions found within the text by tracing their roots to the primary text or source, if possible.
- 3) Analyze all images, symbols and figures of speech within the text. Note the relationships, if any, among the elements, both within the same category (between images for example) and among various elements (between an image and a symbol, for example).

2 Theoretical Part

2.1 Critical Approaches

The following text is a survey of main 20th century critical approaches relevant to our discussion of *Never Let Me Go*.

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- 3) Analyze all images, symbols and figures of speech within the text. Note the relationships, if any, among the elements, both within the same category (between images for example) and among various elements (between an image and a symbol, for example).

- 4) Examine and analyze the various structural patterns that may appear within the text, including the technical aspects of prosody. Note how the poet manipulates metrical devices, grammatical constructions, tonal patterns, and syntactic patterns of words, phrases, or sentences. Determine how these various patterns interrelate with each other and with all elements discussed in steps 1 to 3.
- 5) Consider such elements as tone, theme, point of view, and any other element – dialogue, foreshadowing, narration, parody, setting, and so forth – that directly relates to the text’s dramatic situation.
- 6) Look for interrelationships of all elements, noting where tensions, ambiguities, or paradoxes arise.
- 7) After carefully examining all of the above, state the poem’s chief, overarching tension and explain how the poem achieves its dominant effect by resolving all such tensions.⁴

Please note that the text’s interpretation corresponds to finding a chief overarching tension and showing how the text achieves its resolution. In this way the meaning of a text is inseparable from its form and cannot be equal to its paraphrase.⁵

New Critical methods have been originally devised to interpret poetry in its narrower sense, which is, in effect, the method’s main weakness as regards our purposes: Applying it rigorously to a literary work of such length as a novel would be both laborious and ridiculous. Nevertheless, close reading applied to selected passages in the text can be used to support or disprove our assertions about the text as a whole.

In this work, the New Critical methods have been utilized in almost all chapters. Chapter 3.4 studies the interrelation of symbols, symbolic settings, narration and uses this interrelation to find the over-arching meaning of the novel. A grammatical construction is analysed as a symbol of death. In Chapter 3.1 connotations of words in one passage are used to identify the tone and related with one of the novel’s main themes. Allusions to other literary works are also made where it seems appropriate or illuminating, however, the number of the allusions is deliberately limited due to spatial restrictions of this work. The works that were alluded to include previous Ishiguro’s novels, the films *The Magnificent Seven*, *Seven Samurai*, and *Life is Beautiful*, Hasek’s *Good Soldier Schweik*, and *Hansel and Gretel*.

2.1.2 Reader-Response Criticism

¹ Charles E Bressler. Literary Criticism: An Introduction to Theory and Practice.- 3rd edition.Pearson Education, Inc. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey 2003, p. 41

² Ibid., p. 39

³ See 'The Intentional Fallacy' in The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry. W.K. Wimsatt, Jr., and Monroe C. Beardsley. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1954. Course materials. Ed. Nina Schwartz. SMU, Texas. 13 Dec. 2008 <<http://faculty.smu.edu/nschwartz/seminar/Fallacy.htm>>

⁴ Charles E Bressler. Literary Criticism: An Introduction to Theory and Practice.- 3rd edition.Pearson Education, Inc. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey 2003, p. 47

⁵ Ibid., p. 45

A text can almost always tell us more than the author intends. It is always more or less independent of the author. In addition, it can tell different things to different readers. The study of reader's responses to a text can therefore provide us with fascinating insights about literature, reading and people.

Stanley Fish, "a leading exponent of American reader-response criticism," provides a scathing re-examination to disputes over different interpretations of texts. His book is the surveying of the critical history of a work in order to find disputes that rested upon a base of agreement of which the disputants were unaware.⁵ In his example he shows an instance of inescapable dispute over the meaning of a single word in Milton's *Paradise Lost* to argue that these disputes "are not meant to be solved, but to be experienced (they signify), and that consequently any procedure that attempts to determine which of a number of readings is correct will necessarily fail." Such understanding is characteristic of reader-response analysis, in which:

The reader's activities are in the nature of attention, where they are regarded not as finding or selecting, but as *doing* meaning. The meaning they have is a consequence of their not being empty; for they include the making and revising of assumptions, the reaching and regretting of judgements, the coming to and abandoning of conclusions, the giving and withdrawing of approval, the specifying of causes, the asking of questions, the supplying of answers, the solving of puzzles.

In 'The reading process: a phenomenological approach' Wolfgang Iser maintains that reading is not linear. The reader's mind contains not only a memory of what has been read, but also an expectation of what is going to be read in the following text. Each sentence 'opens up a particular horizon, which is modified, if not completely changed, by succeeding sentences.'⁶ Moreover, Iser stresses the activity of the reader: "Whenever the

2.1.2 Reader-Response Criticism

The cornerstone of reader-response criticism is this: Meaning of a text is not created in the author's head, nor is it forever trapped and stabilized in the text itself. Rather, meaning emerges inside the reader's mind during the process of reading. Writing as the creation of meaning and reading has become one. The focus shifts entirely on the reader, which inspired a whole new approach in criticism and theory.

A text can almost always tell us more than the author intends. It is always more or less independent of the author. In addition, it can tell different things to different readers. The study of reader's responses to a text can therefore provide us with illuminating insights about literature, reading and people.

Stanley Fish, 'a leading exponent of American reader-response criticism'¹ provides a soothing reconciliation to disputes over different interpretations of texts. His method 'is the surveying of the critical history of a work in order to find disputes that rested upon a base of agreement of which the disputants were unaware.'² In his example he shows an instance of irresolvable dispute over the meaning of a single word in Milton's *Variorum* to argue that these disputes 'are not meant to be solved, but to be experienced (they signify), and that consequently any procedure that attempts to determine which of a number of readings is correct will necessarily fail.'³ Such understanding is characteristic of reader-response analysis, in which:

The reader's activities are at the centre of attention, where they are regarded not as leading to meaning, but as *having* meaning. The meaning they have is a consequence of their not being empty; for they include the making and revising of assumptions, the rendering and regretting of judgements, the coming to and abandoning of conclusions, the giving and withdrawing of approval, the specifying of causes, the asking of questions, the supplying of answers, the solving of puzzles.⁴

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flow [of a text] is interrupted and we are led off in unexpected directions, the opportunity is given to us to bring into play our own faculty for establishing connections – for filling in the gaps left by the text itself.⁶ For Iser, the unfulfilment of the reader's expectation is a marker of a truly literary (aesthetic) text: 'Strangely enough, we feel that any confirmative effect – such as we implicitly demand of expository texts, as we refer to the objects they are meant to present – is a defect in a literary text.'⁷

Writers of literary texts can rely on one of the fundamental qualities of human psyche: the ability and inclination to 'fit everything in a consistent pattern.'⁸ Humans always (if sometimes unconsciously) try to make sense of the things around them. The geometrical patterns of the stars in the night sky, the rhythm of a hubbub in a busy street – these are but a few examples of the faculty of "re-creation". This ability allows the reader to bridge the gaps left by the text, but what is more, the manner in which he does so reflects 'his own disposition, and in this respect the literary text acts as a kind of mirror.'⁹

The Reader-Response criticism serves as a basis and a source of inspiration for this thesis. It is build on the assumption that there can be a range of different readings, all of them correct. Moreover, *Never Let Me Go* is itself a study of the reader's response as Kathy, the first person narrator, "reads" her life and responds by "re-writing" it. The reader of the novel then responds to her narration, which creates a tension caused by the discrepancy between Kathy's and the reader's reading of her story.

In Chapter 3.3 instances of the comical are identified by the reader's response. The situations that the reader experiences as comical are then scrutinized to see what they reveal about the novel and, in consequence, the reader. Furthermore, Iser's theory of reading is applied in the discussion of *The Unconsoled* in Chapter 3.1 to see what provides for the mixed reviews that this novel received.

¹ David Lodge. Introductory note to 'Interpreting the *Variorum*'. *Modern Criticism and Theory*. Ed. David Lodge and Nigel Wood. Harlow: Pearson Education Limited 2008. p. 382

² Stanly Fish. 'Interpreting the *Variorum*'. *Modern Criticism and Theory*. Ed. David Lodge and Nigel Wood. Harlow: Pearson Education Limited 2008. p. 383

³ *Ibid.*, p. 385

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 391

⁵ Wolfgang Iser. 'The reading process: a phenomenological approach'. *Modern Criticism and Theory*. Ed. David Lodge and Nigel Wood. Harlow: Pearson Education Limited 2008. p. 298

⁶ *Ibid.* p. 299

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 297

⁸ *Ibid.* p. 301

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 300

2.1.3 Structuralism and Post-Structuralism

2.1.3.1 Structuralism

Structuralist theorists are concerned with the system that governs communication. If the communication takes on a form of a text, they are interested in ‘*how* [a particular] text means, not *what* it means.’¹ Their theories draw on Saussure’s study of language – structural linguistics, which first came with the idea that language (as a system of signs) can be broken down into basic elements of meaning, in the case of spoken language phonemes, which then according to a set of rules combine to form morphemes, words, clauses, etc. and ultimately communicate a meaning.

Similarly, according to Bressler, structuralists try to find elements of a higher order – basic building blocks of literary texts. For example Claude Lévi-Strauss studied countless myths to come up with the idea of basic structures that transcend cultures and time called mythemes. These are realized through oppositions such as hating or loving someone who does or does not love or hate you. The mythemes are never combined randomly, but always according to an unchanging set of rules.²

The structuralist approach can be further exemplified by the work of Vladimir Propp, a Russian formalist, whose method is sometimes called narratology. In *The Morphology of Folktale* (1928) he identifies thirty-one fixed functions or narratemes that will always occur in a given logical sequence in every Russian folktale. Among these functions are, for example, “accepting the call to adventure”, “recognizing the villain”, etc.³

For Bressler the most useful model of interpretation drawing on structuralist theories is that of dual oppositions:

[...] The primary signifying system is best found as a series of binary oppositions that the reader organizes, values, and then uses to interpret the text. Each binary operation can be pictured as a fraction, the top half (the numerator) being what is more valued than its related bottom half (the denominator). Accordingly, in the binary operation *light/dark*, the reader has learned to value light *over* dark, and in the binary operation *good/evil* the reader has similarly valued good *over* evil. How the reader maps out and

organizes the various binary operations and their interrelationships found within the text but already existing in the mind of the reader will determine for that particular reader the text's interpretation.⁴

The understanding of the notion of binary oppositions is a crucial prerequisite for understanding the following discussion of the post-structural – or deconstructionist – view of the world.

¹ Bressler, p. 87

² Ibid, p. 85

³ Ibid, p. 87

⁴ Ibid, pp. 88,89

2.1.3.2 Deconstruction

Deconstruction, sometimes used synonymously with post-structuralism as a school of criticism emerged in the 1960s and was inspired by the works of Jacques Derrida. In his essays Derrida argued that for structure to exist it has to have a centre which 'while governing the structure, escapes structurality.'¹ Such stable referential points, fixed origins, or as Derrida denotes them, transcendental signifieds had throughout history been '*eidos, arche, telos, energeia, ousia* (essence, existence, substance, subject), *aletheia*, transcendentality, consciousness, God, man, and so forth.'² Derrida denies the possibility of such centres, that is, the existence of signifieds capable of transcending structurality – the play of *différance*:

[...] In language there are only differences. [...] Language has neither ideas nor sounds that existed before the linguistic system. [...] In consequence every concept is inscribed in a chain or in a system within which it refers to the other, to other concepts, by means of the systematic play of differences. Such a play, *différance*, is thus no longer simply a concept of, but rather the possibility of conceptuality. [...] Since language, which Saussure says is a classification, has not fallen from the sky, its differences have been produced, are produced effects, but they are effects which do not find their

cause in a subject or a substance, in a thing in general, a being that is somewhere present, thereby eluding the play of difference.³

The set of binary oppositions which people use to interpret texts and in fact everything and which have been formed by and simultaneously formed language is thus shaken in its foundations. 'Language [then] bears within itself the necessity of its own critique.'⁴ and so Derrida suggests that we 'reconsider all the pairs of opposites on which philosophy is constructed and on which our discourse lives, not in order to see opposition erase itself, but to see what indicates that each of the terms must appear as the difference of the other.'⁵

Deconstructionist critique is by nature subversive and iconoclastic. Bressler fittingly describes how a deconstructor proceeds:

When beginning the interpretative process, deconstructors seek to override their own logocentric and inherited ways of viewing a text. Such revolutionary thinking decrees that they find the binary oppositions at work in the text itself. These binary oppositions, they believe, represent established and accepted ideologies that more frequently than not posit the existence of transcendental signifieds. These binary operations, then, restrict meaning, for they assume a fixed interpretation of reality. They assume, for instance, the existence of truth and falsehood, reason and insanity, good and bad. Realizing that these hierarchies presuppose a fixed and biased way of viewing the world, deconstructors search for the binary oppositions operating in the text and reverse them. By reviewing these hierarchies, deconstructors wish to challenge the fixed views assumed by such hierarchies and the values associated with such rigid beliefs.⁶

Deconstructors, then, are not interested what the text means or how it means, but more in how, according to them, the text can be misread. By succeeding the criticized text loses its original meaning.

The world that Derrida proposes, that is, a world with no beginning and no end, no truth or reason for being has been resented by many as a hopeless, meaningless, hostile, and sad universe that offers no consolation and in which "anything goes." In this sense, Derrida provided the philosophical background of postmodernism, but Derrida and many others acknowledged such state of affairs not with a sense of loss, but with what Derrida

denotes as 'Nitzchean affirmation, that is the joyous affirmation of the play of the world and of the innocence of becoming, the affirmation of a world of signs without fault, without truth, and without origin, which is offered to an active interpretation.'⁷⁸

The notion of binary oppositions is marginally used in Chapter 3.2 when discussing the significance of the clones not being able to reproduce, but plays major role towards the end of Chapter 3.4. The freedom/captivity binary opposition is examined to negotiate the characters' (in)capability of escaping their fates. The deconstruction renders the dramatic situation of the characters more plausible. If they did try to escape, they would be, so to speak, captured and imprisoned by the thought of fleeing. In contrast, the novel shows the protagonists as "free" from this urge to escape. This reversal of perception has deep impact on the interpretation of *Never Let Me Go*, as it uncovers the novel's darker aspects and, by way of extension, points to the darker aspects of human life in general.

¹ Jacques Derrida. 'Structure, sign and play in the discourse of the human sciences'. Modern Criticism and Theory. Ed. David Lodge and Nigel Wood. Harlow: Pearson Education Limited 2008. p. 212

² Jacques Derrida. 'Structure, sign and play in the discourse of the human sciences' p. 213

³ Jacques Derrida. Differance. . Course materials. Ed. Nina Schwartz. SMU, Texas. 13 Dec. 2008 <<http://faculty.smu.edu/nschwartz/seminar/Differance.htm>>

⁴ Jacques Derrida. 'Structure, sign and play in the discourse of the human sciences', p. 216

⁵ Jacques Derrida. Differance. . Course materials. Ed. Nina Schwartz. SMU, Texas. 13 Dec. 2008 <<http://faculty.smu.edu/nschwartz/seminar/Differance.htm>>

⁶ Charles E Bressler. Literary Criticism: An Introduction to Theory and Practice.- 3rd edition. Pearson Education, Inc. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey 2003, p. 111

⁷ Jacques Derrida. 'Structure, sign and play in the discourse of the human sciences', p. 223

2.1.4 Psychoanalytic Criticism

Sigmund Freud and psychoanalysis cast more influence on literature and literary criticism than any other person, theory, or method outside literary studies. Freud's uncovering of the unconscious as the site of 'mental processes of which the subject knows nothing'¹ permanently changed the way people perceive themselves. People generally acknowledge that there is more to people's motives, actions, and – for us most importantly – creations than meets the eye.

Human psyche, according to Freud, consists of the rational conscious and the irrational unconscious part. The unconscious is the site of disguised truths and desires that have been suppressed by the conscious as unacceptable.² The conscious and the unconscious then become 'involved in an internal battle Freud calls neurosis.'³

'The unresolved conflicts that give rise to any neurosis constitute the stuff of literature. A work of literature [...] is the external expression of the author's unconscious mind. Accordingly, the literary work must then be treated like a dream [...]'⁴ In *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) Freud described with an outstanding insight how dreams work. He posits that every dream is a wish-fulfilment.⁵ However, the wish can be identified only in the so called latent dream content, or dream-thought. The manifest dream content, that is, the sensory images which form the fabric of the dream, is derived from the latent content by way of distortion.⁶

The distortion is not random, but works according to certain rules and principles. The two main devices of dream-work are condensation and displacement. Condensation is a process, in which one object or single utterance symbolises many latent dream-thoughts. The element, in Freud's words, serves as a 'nodal [point] at which a great number of the dream-thoughts [meet] together.'⁷

Displacement is a device which 'strips the elements of the high psychic value of their intensity and, on the other hand, by means of over-determination, creates new significant values from elements of slight value.'⁸ It is a result of self-protective strategy – a psychic force Freud denotes 'endo-psychic defence.'⁹ The dream-content therefore does not resemble the actual dream-thought. 'The dream is, as it were, centred elsewhere; its content is arranged about elements which do not constitute the central point of the dream-thoughts.'¹⁰

The knowledge of dream-work proves particularly useful in literary criticism, as many seemingly irrelevant elements of the text yield surprisingly rich meanings and insights when analyzed as dream-elements. The words, symbols, or scenes in a literary text are the manifest content of the work; the critic is searching for the hidden, less obvious meaning, that is, the latent content of the text.

Psychoanalytic criticism and mainly Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* proved as the most influential powerful approach to *Never Let Me Go*. It is by no means a surprise, since Ishiguro's novels as well as Freud's theories investigate human psyche. Ishiguro's repressed narrators, including Kathy, provide the reader with many opportunities to identify countless instances of condensations and displacements, and so psychoanalysis is in some form present in every chapter of the Practical part.

¹ Sigmund Freud. 'The premises and technique of interpretation'. *Modern Criticism and Theory*. Ed. David Lodge and Nigel Wood. Harlow: Pearson Education Limited 2008. p. 56

² Bressler, Charles E.. *Literary Criticism: An Introduction to Theory and Practice*. - 3rd edition. Pearson Education, Inc. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey 2003., p. 121

³ *Ibid.*, p. 125

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 126

⁵ Sigmund Freud. *The Interpretation of Dreams*. in *Classics in the History of Psychology* [online] [cited 2008-11-10] Available on WWW: <<http://psychclassics.yorku.ca/Freud/Dreams/dreams.pdf>>. Chapter 3: 'Dream as a wish-fulfilment'.

⁶ *Ibid.*, Chapter 4: 'The distortion in dreams'.

⁷ *Ibid.*, Chapter 6: 'The dream-work'.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

3 Practical Part

3.1 *The Themes in the Novels of Kazuo Ishiguro*

In this chapter the themes of Ishiguro's previous novels will be discussed in order to see how *Never Let Me Go* (2005) fits into the framework of these themes. Is *Never Let Me Go* a reworking of the old themes or did it take Ishiguro in a completely new direction?

A Pale View of Hills (1982), Ishiguro's first novel, introduces many of the themes which recur in the novels that come later. Etsuko, the first person narrator, who is troubled by her daughter Keiko's recent suicide, looks back on her life in post-war Nagasaki. As the narrative goes on, the reader begins to suspect that Etsuko in fact feels responsible for her daughter's death and her story is an attempt to rectify and come to terms with her past. In effect, 'her story becomes an effort to reread and rewrite aspects of her own understanding of life.'¹ Etsuko's narrative therefore reveals as much as it conceals, mainly because the reader can never be sure if what Etsuko says is really what happened. Etsuko herself alerts the reader to the fact that her memory is not to be relied upon: 'Memory, I realize, can be an unreliable thing; often it is heavily coloured by the circumstances in which one remembers; and no doubt this applies to certain of the recollections I have gathered here.'² This seemingly genuine confession is nevertheless also a part of the narrator's self-deception. She distances herself from the possibility that the alterations of her history could be deliberate.

The most important uncertainty and truth alteration in the novel concerns Etsuko's relationship to Sachiko and her daughter Mariko. Mariko is a troubled child, affected by parental neglect as well as the atomic bombing. The reader is lead to believe, although not for sure, that as Etsuko speaks about Sachiko, she is really speaking about herself. Her own guilt and shame is projected onto someone else and she is therefore able to recount a story that would otherwise be impossible to tell. Thanks to this detour Etsuko is arguably able to attain the cathartic effect and consolation she so desperately seeks.

The themes of loss, guilt, parental responsibility, self-deception and self-protection are all present in this 'emotionally and psychologically explosive'³ debut novel. As Wong points out, *A Pale View of Hills* 'depicts eloquently a truthful version of how people must reconstruct their lives in order to move through the destructive forces present to them.'⁴

The same statement could be used to describe Ishiguro's following novel, *An Artist of the Floating World* (1986). Brian Shaffer supports this idea, when he writes:

[The novel] centres on an aging Japanese painter, Masuji Ono, who reminisces and agonizes over his career as an artist in Japan during the war years. Like Etsuko, he also has two daughters as well as unacknowledged regrets and unarticulated feelings of guilt about his earlier wartime activities. He too must alter his personal history in order to make it more palatable – for himself as well as for his readers.⁵

Despite this semblance there are a few differences in the novel. Ono's guilt is based on his contribution to the fascist Japanese empire, which basically meant producing politically charged paintings. During the course of the novel it becomes clear that he greatly over-estimates his share in the crimes of the fascist regime and that his guilt is therefore more or less ill-founded. His sense of guilt comes into conflict with his fear of insignificance. As Shaffer remarks:

Ono [...] works himself around, defensively, to the position that even if he was wrong, at least he was influential: that it is more important to have made one's mark than to have been a right-minded nonentity. In this sense, Ono's entire story – the novel itself is an attempt to establish his artistic significance, even if he was on the wrong side of the battle for Japan's soul. [...] Ono comes to care more about his professional standing than about the values this standing upholds.⁶

The themes of professionalism, exaggeration of self-importance, and dignity thus enter Ishiguro's work and recur in his later novels.

Another theme of *An Artist of the Floating World* attracts attention: the inability of a person to see beyond his or her horizons. Ono wanted to do what he thought was best and there was no way for him to see that he was wrong. This theme is highlighted by the novel's narrative strategy. Gregory Mason raises this issue in his interview with Ishiguro:

Q. [...]Ono, the narrator, addresses the reader directly with the book's opening sentence: "If on a sunny day you climb the steep path..." This strikes an almost intimate tone, as if he is talking to a friend or an acquaintance.[...]

A. The reader that I intended obviously isn't the "you" that Ono refers to. Ono in his narrative assumes that anybody reading it must live in the city and must be aware of its landmarks. [...] And whether the reader registers it or not, it cannot help but create the effect of actually eavesdropping on Ono being intimate with somebody in his own town. To a large extent, the reason for Ono's downfall was that he lacked a perspective to see beyond his own environment and to stand outside the actual values of his time. [...] So the book is largely about the inability of normal human beings to see beyond their immediate surroundings, and because of this, one is at the mercy of what this world immediately around one proclaims itself to be.⁷

The horizons are the limits to one's perception of the world. With Ishiguro's characters it always remains unclear whether these limits arise from the inability to see through the complexities of the outside world or the unwillingness of the characters to face their failures.

The same themes have been re-worked in *The Remains of the Day* (1989), but the focus changes slightly. While Ono's voice is tranquil, Stevens's voice is repressed. While Ono's reservations about his past are connected almost entirely with his professional career, Stevens's misgivings mostly concern his failed relationships with Miss Kenton and his own father, resulting in a sense of an irreparable loss. A significant part of Stevens's repression is prompted by this loss, or better, the fear of this loss. The rest of his repression is connected with his life-time of loyal, devoted service to Lord Darlington, a Nazi sympathizer. Stevens tries to retain a sense of dignity by emphasizing his loyalty and professional competence and thus evading the feelings of regret and guilt.

Ishiguro interprets Stevens's position as a metaphor to every human life:

We do our very best, we hope this contribution is going to be used for something we approve of. But often, we have very little control. Usually because most of us, we don't have remarkable insight, we don't really see

clearly the context in which we work and live. We try to do our little thing very well, we try to get a sense of being important and so on. And we offer it to somebody upstairs.⁸

For Ono and Stevens the ones “upstairs” have turned out to be the wrong people. Luckily for Stevens, in his self-deceptive world of blind duty there is no room for responsibility; neither for his master’s wrong-doings, and more importantly, nor even for his own interpersonal failures. In this sense, Stevens is Etsuko and Ono combined. His relationships remained failed like Etsuko’s, and his professional resources were misused like Ono’s.

As Barry Lewis suggests, it is possible ‘to think of Ishiguro’s first three novels as an informal trilogy.’⁹ ‘They are full of family resemblances, and Ishiguro once described them as “three attempts to write the same book”.’¹⁰ There seems to be a major break, however, with the publishing of *The Unconsoled* (1995).

Ishiguro’s fourth novel is completely different in terms of narrative style and technique. As Wong points out, ‘after the publication of *The Unconsoled*, Ishiguro said that “he was trying to leave behind” a particular way of conveying his character’s situation, “that relatively tranquil atmosphere on the surface with frustrations bubbling underneath”.’¹¹ Indeed, with *The Unconsoled* the reader is plunged right into the heart of Ryder’s bubbling emotional turmoil and experiences a dream-world realisation of his fears, regrets and hopes. Ishiguro expands on a device he first used in *A Pale View of Hills*, that is, the projection of the narrator’s own experience onto a different character – as Etsuko did with Sachiko: ‘I was using dream as a model,’ comments Ishiguro, ‘So this is a biography of a person, but instead of using memory and flashback, you have him wandering about in his dream world where he bumps into earlier, or later, versions of himself.’¹²

Despite the great shift in technique the themes remain the same. ‘Reviewers who stress *The Unconsoled*’s break with its author’s earlier fiction [...] often overlook those characteristics that the novel shares with the earlier works, [...] as Amit Chaudri writes, “[...] the themes of guilt and fear of humiliation persist, as do the means of negotiating them: excessive, insincere flattery, elisions, voluntary and involuntary amnesia”.’¹³ The theme of exaggeration of self-importance and professionalism is amplified into absurdly comical dimensions: Ryder, like almost everyone else, thinks he can save a whole city by giving a concert. The theme of parental responsibility and ‘child abuse and the various

emotional aftershocks'¹⁴ is also present. The theme of insurpassability of one's own horizons is taken to extreme as Ryder accepts the absurd dream logic without the slightest suspicion that something strange is going on, etc. It is as if Ryder's epic nightmarish journey is a fragmented dream-work reflection of Etsuko's, Ono's, Stevens's, Ishiguro's, the reader's "waking state" preoccupations and fears. It is as if these people are "the unconsoled" and Ryder their troubled unconsciousness.

The Unconsoled is the least realistic novel Ishiguro has written so far. In spite of this, it is also the most autobiographical one: not in the sense that it would provide facts about the author's life, but through Ryder's narrative we do learn about Ishiguro's dreamscape – his apprehensions, anxieties, regrets. It exceeds the scope of this work to elaborate on this more thoroughly, but we shall offer one example.

Ryder goes to a screening of *2001: A Space Odyssey* and describes a scene with Clint Eastwood and Yul Brynner doing the clapping hands test. Of course, neither of these actors star in this film, which, apart from other things, alerts the reader to the unreliability of the narrator. Dylan Otto Krider brings this up in an interview with Ishiguro:

DOK: [...] Actually, it might take some readers a while to catch on to what is exactly going on in this book, until the scene in the theatre when they were watching *2001*, and Clint Eastwood is in it...

KI: That was a mistake. I really think that was a bad mistake.

DOK: Really?

KI: Yeah, a lot of people have asked me [this] since. [...] Even my editor faxed me to say, "You know, I've checked up on this and Clint Eastwood wasn't in this movie..." [...] I often referred to the language of dream; when I see movies in my dreams, they are sort of versions of the real films, but they have different actors in them, so that's why I did it.¹⁵

There is a film, which does not have Clint Eastwood in it either, but it does have Yul Brynner doing the clapping thing: *The Magnificent Seven*. This film is in turn a remake of a famous Japanese film *Seven Samurai*. The episode in the novel can then be seen as a dream-work remake of Ishiguro's "waking state" preoccupations with his Japanese origin and his displacement to western culture and how that affects his writing. This is easy to understand, because, even though this might not be an issue for Ishiguro himself, countless interviewers have asked him about his Japaneseness, literary critics have speculated on

how Japanese his writing is, there simply has been so much of it that it is no wonder that the question haunts Ishiguro's sleep, enters his dreams and eventually his novel. There is another aspect of this "bad mistake." Yul Brynner resembles Ryder when he comes to a troubled village inhabited by ordinary people, who look up to him for protection. For them he is a saviour. Brynner's mission mirrors Ryder's position in the Central European town. The inhabitants of the town also expect him to save their community. In this scene we are faced either with the author's unconscious or with the author's crafty brilliance. Either is an exciting thing to witness.

In spite of this, *The Unconsoled* had received mixed reviews,¹⁶ the reservation being mostly that the novel is simply too long and too demanding to read. The objection is to some extent legitimate. A distinguishing quality of an aesthetic text, according to Wolfgang Iser, is that it takes the reader in unanticipated directions. The problem with *The Unconsoled* is that almost every direction is unanticipated; almost every reader's expectation is thwarted. Therefore, after about three hundred pages the reader adapts, and either learns to expect the unexpected or seizes to expect anything, which, in the end, amounts to the same thing, that is, the reading becomes boring. The reader starts out enchanted by the novelty of the new technique, but ends up worn out by the length and persistence of the seemingly endless nightmare. This is probably why in his following novels Ishiguro abandons the experimentation and returns to a realism that the readers are more comfortable with.

Ishiguro's fifth novel, *When We Were Orphans* (2000), 'marries the outward realism of *An Artist of the Floating World* or *The Remains of the Day* with the perpendicular dreamscapes of *The Unconsoled*.'¹⁷ It is a brand new cocktail made from familiar ingredients: Like Ono, Stevens and Ryder, Christopher Banks is an adept professional, a renowned detective, but with unresolved issues from his childhood. Like Ryder or Ono he greatly misjudges his power over the affairs of the world when he 'confuses his mission to rescue his parents with single-handedly averting the impending global catastrophe.'¹⁸ He also has his Miss Kenton – Sarah, a potential love of his life that he lets slip through his fingers. Like Etsuko (and Ishiguro), Banks is displaced from his home country refuge to England. Haunted by memories, responsibilities and obligations he experiences, his narrative undergoes a significant change: 'Banks begins as a variant of Etsuko, Ono and Stevens, a mariner of memory, trawling for clues in his consciousness to

help explain who he is. He ends up, however, more like Ryder, a fragmented subject driven by forces he can scarcely identify let alone control.¹⁹

As Brian Shaffer concludes,

all of Ishiguro's protagonists are haunted by something "unresolved somewhere deep down"; all of them use their self-narratives as a "kind of consolation or therapy." For each of Ishiguro's narrators the world and the self are not quite as they should be; and each of them responds to this disappointment by fabricating narratives that pretend circumstances are otherwise. Perhaps this, above all, is Kazuo Ishiguro's master theme.²⁰

In *Never Let Me Go* Ishiguro returns to the realism and narrative layout of his first three novels. Kathy looks back on her life and through her narrative tries to find a consolation. In effect, she is similar to the narrators of the first three novels – she reveals and conceals at the same time.

On the first page of the novel we meet Kathy, the successful self-content professional: 'Now I know my being a carer so long isn't necessarily because they think I'm fantastic at what I do. [...] So I'm not trying to boast. But then I do know for a fact they've been pleased with my work, and by and large, I have too. [...] Okay, maybe I *am* boasting now. But it means a lot to me, being able to do my work well.'²¹ Kathy is boasting a little, but her sense of self-importance and professional competence is not out of proportions as it is with Ono, Stevens, Ryder or Banks. She only "tries to do her little thing well." It is most likely just a coincidence, but a striking one, that "carer" is a "career" with the letter "e" missing. Nevertheless, the themes of self-importance and professionalism do not take a central position in *Never Let Me Go*.

Early in the novel we encounter Kathy at the end of her career as a carer, when she says: 'Driving around the country now, I still see things that remind me of Hailsham. I might pass the corner of a misty field, or see a part of a large house in the distance as I come down the side of a valley, even a particular arrangement of poplar trees up on a hillside, and I'll think: "Maybe that's it! I've found it! This actually is Hailsham!"'²² The drive in a car evokes Stevens's trip to see Miss Kenton. The reader who is familiar with *The Remains of the Day* immediately responds and from this point on searches Kathy's narrative for the same evasions and concealments that Stevens employs.

The passage also transpires an atmosphere of loss and nostalgia. Words like “still”, “remind”, “pass”, “misty field”, “distance”, “maybe”, “found”, they all create the feeling that something was lost that cannot be found again. For Kathy the thing she lost was her childhood and its innocence. In fact, her narrative is the only way she can find it. Therefore her story can be seen as a search for her lost childhood and the happiness of it.

Several passages reveal that Kathy’s memory and interpretations of her past are not necessarily hundred percent accurate. One of such moments was when she recounted Miss Lucy’s outburst that revealed a significant portion of straight-forward information about the nature of the students’ fate: ‘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.’²³ Then Kathy adds:

I think that was all she said. When I was discussing it with Ruth a few years ago at the centre in Dover, she claimed Miss Lucy had told us a lot more; that she’d explained how before donations we’d all spend some time first as carers, about the usual sequence of the donations, the recovery centres and so on – but I’m pretty sure she didn’t.²⁴

Kathy further undermines her claim to authenticity, when she says: ‘Some students thought she’d lost her marbles for a moment; others that she’d been asked to say what she had by Miss Emily and the other guardians; there were even some who’d actually been there and who thought Miss Lucy had been telling us off for being too rowdy on the veranda.’²⁵

Kathy’s flaws of memory do have a purpose. Ishiguro again explores the ways in which the plasticity of memory helps people to get on with their lives. Kathy’s reason for altering her past is different from Etsuko’s, Ono’s, or Stevens’s. She is not guilty of anything – her life is spoiled only by the awareness of what is soon to come. She is going to begin dying in about eight months; her memories are all she has. And so, on the journey into her past she is looking for consolation, not for truth. She highlights what is pleasant and downplays the things she would rather not know. Like the car on a winding road her memory evades aspects of her past that would spoil the experience of reuniting with her childhood and her friends – Tommy and Ruth. Or, to rephrase playfully, instead of concentrating on truth, she concentrates on (t)Ruth.

Even though, as far as the reader knows, there is no parent anywhere in the novel, parental responsibility is one of the themes it explores. It is perhaps most clearly

articulated in the passage where Tommy and Kathy talk with Miss Emily and ask her why Miss Lucy had to leave Hailsham, to which Miss Emily replies:

You see, we were able to give you something, something which even now no one will ever take from you, and we were able to do that principally by sheltering you. Hailsham would not have been Hailsham if we hadn't. Very well, sometimes that meant we kept things from you, lied to you. Yes, in many ways we *fooled* you. [...] But we sheltered you during those years, and we gave you your childhoods. Lucy was well-meaning enough. But if she'd had her way, your happiness at Hailsham would have been shattered.²⁶

Is it right for a parent, guardian, or a teacher to lie to their children in order to protect them, to “give them their childhoods?” For Ishiguro this is what a good parent *should* be doing:

In this novel, *Never Let Me Go*, the kids start off in a kind of boarding school, and they are literally sealed off from the rest of the world. But at some level, 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 desperately wanted this little child to be deceived about how nice a place the world was. Strangers passing in the street would turn themselves into little Disney cartoon characters and talk in funny voice. We all seem to instinctively feel this urge and the majority of us are lucky enough to have this protective bubble early on.²⁷

The same theme is central to the film *Life Is Beautiful*, co-written and directed by Roberto Benigni, in which a father and his son are imprisoned in a Nazi concentration camp. The father creates for his boy an illusion that everything they experience is a just big version of a hide-and-seek game; that the boy must collect a thousand points “to win a real tank” – which he does, eventually, when the allied forces free the camp the night after his father is shot. In this moving film the deception goes hand in hand with protection. The lying is not bad in itself, it is bad, because it is a symptom of “the sadness of the world.”

The theme that probably stands out most in *Never Let Me Go* is the inability of the main characters to see beyond their horizons. The acceptance of their fate is no less absolute than Ryder's acceptance of the absurd dream logic in *The Unconsoled*. They do not even for a moment consider rebellion and escape.

Another aspect of the horizons is that they served as a protective shield. In the novel this was always indicated by spatial metaphors: 'Maybe she could sense where my talk was leading, and didn't want us to *go that way*,'²⁸ or 'curious as we were to hear more, we wanted to get away from this *dodgy territory*,'²⁹ or 'Moirra was suggesting she and I *cross some line* together, and I wasn't prepared for that yet.'³⁰ The spatial expression of the otherwise mental barriers enhance the feeling of inescapability that is also fuelled by yet another device.

The narrative situation is similar to the one of *An Artist of the Floating World*. The reader intended by Kathy is an insider – a clone like her. It is as if she could not even imagine addressing someone outside her bubble. This is clear whenever she addresses her reader with words like 'I don't know if you had "collections" where you were'³¹ or 'I don't know how it was where you were, but at Hailsham...'³² The fact that she addresses a person from within her community emphasizes her isolation, demarcates her scope of interest, her horizons.

In many ways *Never Let Me Go* reworks themes that Ishiguro was interested in his previous novels. The themes of loss, professionalism, memory, self-deception, parental responsibility and the insurmountability of one's horizons are all present. The greatest shift in theme lies in the fact that Kathy, unlike the previous narrators, is almost entirely guilt-free. She played an honest and solid game with the cards she was dealt.

¹ Wong, Cynthia F. *Kazuo Ishiguro* (Writers and Their Work) - Second Edition The Baskerville Press Ltd, Salisbury 2005, p. 28

² Ishiguro, Kazuo. *A pale view of hills*. – London: Faber and Faber, 199, p. 156

³ Shaffer, Brian W. *Understanding Kazuo Ishiguro*. University of South Carolina Press 2008, p. 12

⁴ Wong, Cynthia F. *Kazuo Ishiguro* (Writers and Their Work) - Second Edition The Baskerville Press Ltd, Salisbury 2005, p. 37

⁵ Shaffer, Brian W. *Understanding Kazuo Ishiguro*. University of South Carolina Press 2008, p. 3

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 59

⁷ Shaffer, Brian W., Wong Cynthia F. *Conversations with Kazuo Ishiguro*. University Press of Mississippi 2008, p. 9

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 142

⁹ Lewis, Barry. *Kazuo Ishiguro* (Contemporary World Writers). Manchester University Press 2000. p. 133

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 133

Quotes Maya Jaggi's interview with Ishiguro, 'Dreams of Freedom', *Guardian*, 29 April 1995, 28.

¹¹ Wong, Cynthia F. Kazuo Ishiguro (Writers and Their Work) - Second Edition. The Baskerville Press Ltd, Salisbury 2005, p. 23. Quotes Maya Jaggi's interview 'Kazuo Ishiguro Talks to Maya Jaggi', *Wasafiri*, 22 (1995), 20-4

¹² Shaffer, Brian W., Wong Cynthia F. Conversations with Kazuo Ishiguro. University Press of Mississippi 2008, p. 114

¹³ Shaffer, Brian W. Understanding Kazuo Ishiguro. University of South Carolina Press 2008, p. 91
Quotes Amit Chaudhuri, 'Unlike Kafka,' *London Review of Books*, 8 June 1995, 30.

¹⁴ Shaffer, Brian W. Understanding Kazuo Ishiguro. University of South Carolina Press 2008, p. 92

¹⁵ Shaffer, Brian W., Wong Cynthia F. Conversations with Kazuo Ishiguro. University Press of Mississippi 2008, p. 127

¹⁶ Lewis, Barry. Kazuo Ishiguro (Contemporary World Writers). Manchester University Press 2000. p. 142 - 145

¹⁷ Lewis, Barry. Kazuo Ishiguro (Contemporary World Writers). Manchester University Press 2000. p. 147

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 148

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 147

²⁰ Shaffer, Brian W. Understanding Kazuo Ishiguro. University of South Carolina Press 2008, p. 122

²¹ *Never Let Me Go*, p. 3

²² NLMG, p. 6

²³ NLMG, p. 81

²⁴ NLMG, p. 82

²⁵ NLMG, p. 82

²⁶ NLMG, p. 268

²⁷ Shaffer, Brian W., Wong Cynthia F. Conversations with Kazuo Ishiguro. University Press of Mississippi 2008, p. 199

²⁸ NLMG, p. 18. Emphasis added.

²⁹ NLMG, p. 40. Emphasis added.

³⁰ NLMG, p. 55. Emphasis added.

³¹ NLMG, p. 38

³² NLMG, p. 96

3.2 *A Dystopian Vision: Exploring a Fictional Landscape*

When I watched you dancing that day, [...] 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.¹

In *Never Let Me Go* Ishiguro created a fictional landscape that Bates describes as ‘contemporary England with a disturbing twist.’² People are being cloned to donate organs. It is logical, then, that many readers read it as a kind of dystopia. In other words, it is perfectly possible to read *Never Let Me Go* as a warning against the reckless use of science and cloning. Judging from chance meetings with people who have read the novel and customer reviews on the internet it is one of the most widespread readings, despite the fact that Ishiguro himself is not in favour of such approach:

I’m probably less excited when people come and say, “Oh, this is a chilling warning about the way we’re going with cloning and biotechnology.” That’s fine. I’m perfectly open to people reading it that way, but if that’s all they’ve got out of it, then I feel that the inner heart of the book has been missed.³

For the people who look for science-fiction or dystopia in *Never Let Me Go* the whole story becomes a what-if game. What if people were cloned for organs? How would the donors feel? What would the society think of it? The narrative, then, becomes a succession of revelations through which Ishiguro slowly, stroke by stroke, paints his fictional landscape – an alternative world that is only too similar with our own.

This chapter is going to be an attempt to reconstruct this fictional world from the little pieces that are available in the novel. The approach will be similar to that of Barry Lewis, who in his treatment of *A Pale View of Hills* also searched for background details: ‘*A Pale View of Hills* is full of silences, omissions and apertures. It is as if the text adheres to the prescription of *haiku* poetry, where the shard is greater than the whole. What is left

out is as important as what is left in.’⁴ Then Lewis adds: ‘The most important silence in *A Pale View of Hills* is that surrounding the fate of Nagasaki at the end of the Second World War.’⁵ Lewis then continues with evidence from the text where the atomic bomb is mentioned or hinted and gives some more information from other texts and the history of Nagasaki in order to fill the gaps left by Ishiguro.

A Pale View of Hills can be read as a warning against atomic bombs in much the same way as *Never Let Me Go* may be read as a warning against cloning. The omissions and silences are there waiting to be filled, we do not really get to know every detail of how the “England with a twist” works, but there is a major difference: Nagasaki really exists, but Kathy’s England does not, so there is nowhere to go for the details except the novel itself. Let us, then, go through Kathy’s narrative to unveil the inherent mechanisms of her dystopian world.

Despite the mentions of carers and donors right from the start of the novel the first moment when the reader realizes there is something strange about what Kathy is recounting comes when Kathy says about her patient: ‘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.’⁶ It is the word “completing” that strikes us. From the context it is clear that it is just a euphemism for “death” and its use creates a feeling of something odd going on. The notion of completing also enhances the idea that the donors were, unlike us, brought into the world for a clearly defined utilitarian purpose. They do not die or pass away, they complete their mission. Such euphemisms like “completion” for death, “normals” for non-clones, “students” for clones are an integral part of the novel and add to the austere atmosphere of the dystopian other-world.

The donors are brought up at Hailsham, a facility that resembles a boarding school, but with a few oddities. There are no parents coming for visits on weekends, the isolation from the outside world is almost perfect. The children are encouraged to express themselves artistically: ‘A lot of the time, how you were regarded at Hailsham, how much you were liked and respected, had to do with how good you were at “creating”.’⁷ One of the few intruders from the outside world – Madame – comes regularly and collects the best work for her Gallery. The purpose of this remains unclear until the very end of the novel.

The character of Madame, however, has another disturbing quality to it: she seems to be afraid of the students. This quality is so baffling and, in consequence, intriguing that the students put her to a test: a couple of students pretend to accidentally swarm her and examine her reaction: ‘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. [...] Madame was afraid of us. But she was afraid of us in the same way someone might be afraid of spiders.’⁸

The students by that time have still been kept pretty much in dark about what fate actually awaits them, but they know more than the reader: ‘I can see we were just at that age when we knew a few things about ourselves – about who we were, how we were different from our guardians, from the people outside – but hadn’t yet understood what any of it meant.’⁹ Our knowledge about the nature of the students’ lives becomes almost complete with what Miss Lucy tells them:

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.¹⁰

Then Kathy expands on this:

I think that was all she said. When I was discussing it with Ruth a few years ago at the centre in Dover, she claimed Miss Lucy had told us a lot more; that she’d explained how before donations we’d all spend some time first as carers, about the usual sequence of the donations, the recovery centres and so on – but I’m pretty sure she didn’t.¹¹

Still, the last piece of information is withheld. The reader learns that the students were “created”, but is left unsure about what it means exactly until after a sixty or so pages later. There, in an offhand manner, Kathy says: ‘Since each of us was copied at some point from a normal person, there must be, for each of us, somewhere out there, a model getting on with his or her life.’¹² So they are clones. But who were they modelled from?

Some students thought you should be looking for a person twenty to thirty years older than yourself – the sort of age a normal parent would be. But others claimed this was sentimental.[...] They could have used babies, old

people, what difference would it have made? Others argued back that they'd use for models people at the peak of their health, and that's why they were likely to be "normal parent" age.¹³

But after their trip to see Ruth's "possible" Ruth herself blatantly puts things in perspective: 'We all know it. We're modelled from trash. Junkies, prostitutes, winos, tramps. Convicts, maybe, just so long as they aren't psychos.'¹⁴ We know almost all about where the students come from and where they are headed, but there are a few more details of the world they live in which carry special meaning and which provide additional insights into the novel's significance.

One of such details is Kathy's remark when trying to interpret Madame's behaviour after seeing Kathy dancing to the song "Never Let Me Go". 'By then, of course, we all knew something I hadn't known back then, which was that none of us could have babies.'¹⁵ That they cannot have babies is not just a simple fact. It is a fact that signifies. Would it be too cruel to let them have their own children and then kill them for donations? Would that make them a little too human for their purpose? Yes. By not allowing them to have children, they become dispensable. Nobody cares that they die, because their "carers" die soon after them, no children will need their care, because they are obscure, invisible and people from the outside can pretend they do not exist. This is what Kathy senses when she says:

So you're waiting, even if you don't quite know it, waiting for the moment when you realise that you really are different to them; that there are people out there like Madame, who don't hate you or wish you any harm, but who nevertheless shudder at the very thought of you – of how you were brought into this world and why – and dread the idea of your hand brushing against theirs. The first time you glimpse yourself through the eyes of a person like that, it's a cold moment. It's like walking past a mirror you've walked past every day of your life and suddenly it shows you something else, something troubling and strange.¹⁶

Unsettling questions gnaw at the core of this dystopian world. What is the value of human life? Where does the value come from? These questions are important, because the basic premise underlying such practice as is described in the book (cloning for organ donation) is that somehow the value of one human life is smaller than the value of other

human lives. Otherwise there would be no gain in it. Killing one person in favour of the other would make no sense.

The gain could be purely mathematical. By sacrificing one life and giving four organs we save four lives. Still, how do we determine who shall be sacrificed and who shall be saved? This leads us nowhere. When discussing this in classroom, some students put forth the idea that the very mode of coming into being makes the dividing line; that the clones have an intrinsically lower value than humans who come into this world the natural way. This would also answer the question why Madame recoils from them and shudders. She simply detests the idea of the clones' very existence, they are sub-human creatures. The mathematics is then simple: Sacrificing something detestable for a beloved person is logical and justifiable.

But Kathy, Tommy and Ruth are not disgusting freaks. The real reason why the system worked can be seen in the following passage, where towards the end of the novel Miss Emily explains about the donation programme:

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. So for a long time you were kept in the shadows, and people did their best not to think about you. And if they did, they tried to convince themselves you weren't really like us. That you were less than human, so it didn't matter.¹⁷

The novel then becomes a story of the clones coming out of the shadows. It is a journey of disappointment. The art from Madame's Gallery revealed their *souls*. Their very coming to see Madame about getting a deferral, because they are in love, proved that they were as human as any other person. It turned out that the society could not take it. Their coming out of obscurity, their showing that they are just as human as anyone else, destroyed the mathematics of it.

The explanation of the revulsion that everybody felt when faced with the clones may be built on similar grounds. It was the gut feeling of guilt and hypocrisy creeping up everybody's back, not some inexplicable "clonophobia." They knew very well that using such people as Tommy, Kathy or Ruth as organ reservoirs is utterly unjustifiable; they just did not want to be reminded, they could not bear such guilt. The burden got displaced, the

shame re-channelled, the revulsion transferred from the culprits to the very victims of the scheme, who could take no blame and who everyone is afraid of. Because of this revulsion Hailsham had to be closed, humane conditions were done with, but the cloning will go on, and everyone will pretend that nothing bad is really happening.

What does the novel show about the value of human life? It seems that human life is valued by the number and strength of bonds that a person is part of. It is easier to sacrifice clones, because they have no parents or children to mourn them. The students do enter friendships, however, if only among themselves, but that does not seem a tie that is strong enough to make their lives more valuable and stop the donations. Here we see a kinship/friendship binary opposition at work, where kinship is clearly preferred over friendship. Although friendship is a far more human attribute than kinship, its superior position is forever fossilised in the saying “blood is thicker than water.”

To make things more complicated, friendship with a person from the outside world probably would make the difference. We feel that something like that could not happen for strategic reasons. Ishiguro would simply have to write a different novel. For the same reason Hailsham was isolated from the outside world, and even after the students left Hailsham, their community continued to be pretty much isolated from other people. At least Kathy never speaks about anyone entering a relationship with somebody who is not a clone.

They had been discouraged to enter such relationships in one of Miss Emily's lectures as well:

[Miss Emily] began telling us how we had to be careful who we had sex with. Not just because of the diseases, but because, she said, “sex affects emotions in ways you'd never expect.” We had to be extremely careful about having sex in the outside world, especially with people who weren't students, because out there sex meant all sorts of things. Out there people were even fighting and killing each other over who had sex with whom. And the reason it meant so much – so much more than, say, dancing or table-tennis – was because the people out there were different from us students: they could have babies from sex.¹⁸

The main idea of this lecture was overtly to give information about how to behave in the outside world as far as sexual relationships are concerned, but at the heart of it was the

wish to prevent the clones from creating bonds that would make their lives too valuable for donations.

This is probably what the students, including Kathy and Tommy, sense when they create the rumour about deferrals.

“What they said,” Chrissie continued, “was that if you were a boy and a girl, and you were in love with each other, really, properly in love, and if you could show it, then the people who run Hailsham, they sorted it out for you. They sorted it out so you could have a few years together before you began your donations.”¹⁹

The notion of the deferral is prompted by the vague idea that their lives would make more sense, would be more valuable, if they created this really strong tie – love. Love, they thought, is the strong bond that, if they could show it, would keep away the donations and, at least for a while, would give them the power to confront their fate; for the short moment, they would not have to let each other go.

Dystopian novel is a kind of warning against how things could turn out in a bad way if people were not alert enough. To successfully achieve such an effect requires a certain degree of plausibility to the scenario that the novel is presenting. This we see as the greatest argument against reading *Never Let Me Go* as a dystopia. It can be read in this way, but it is not a very satisfactory reading.

The story was originally supposed to be framed into a nuclear catastrophe, not cloning. Ishiguro comments on this, when he says: ‘Around that time, in 2001, there was a lot of stuff about cloning, about stem cell research, about Dolly the sheep. [...] I thought, “If I forget about this nuclear power dooming the students, and if I try to go down this road, if I thought of these people as clones, what would it do to these people?”’²⁰ For *An Artist of the Floating World* Ishiguro invented a Japan which served his needs.²¹ Similarly, for *Never Let Me Go* he created a scientific reality that allowed the novel to be written the way it was, which is fine, but then a metaphorical reading offers itself instead of the dystopian one. The nuts and bolts of the cloning and transplanting procedures then become distracting silences that the reader has to more or less wilfully ignore in order to preserve the atmosphere and strength that the novel undoubtedly has.

In the real world scientists do have the technical ability to create clones, as the case of Dolly proved. There is also a large demand for organs – the length of the waiting lists is

enormous. Is this a good enough reason for the people to accept a cloning-for-donations policy? There is also a not very apparent detail: The clones would not just come out of nowhere, they would have to grow in the wombs of actual women. These women would be sort of like mothers – if genetically unrelated to their children. Who would go through with this? The junkies, prostitutes, winos, tramps, convicts – as Ruth put it? Probably yes, for a certain amount of money, but why bother with the cloning then? Would it not be easier to just buy regular children, which is what is allegedly really happening? Is not a victim of a motorcycle accident a far cheaper donor?

From a medical point of view it would make sense to have a clone of your own ready to donate organs, because then the body would accept the organs more easily. Therefore it is possible to imagine an insane millionaire creating his own clone just to be sure he gets an organ when he needs it. The way organs are donated in the novel suggests that this is not what Ishiguro had in mind. All in all, the cloning dimension works well from a strategic point of view; it serves well as a device. But taking it literally as a warning against cloning does not really work.

¹ NLMG, p. 272

² Shaffer, Brian W., Wong Cynthia F. Conversations with Kazuo Ishiguro. University Press of Mississippi 2008, p. 199

³ Ibid., p. 202

⁴ Lewis, Barry. Kazuo Ishiguro (Contemporary World Writers). Manchester University Press 2000, p. 36

⁵ Ibid., p. 37

⁶ NLMG, p. 5

⁷ NLMG, p. 16

⁸ NLMG, p. 35

⁹ NLMG, p. 36

¹⁰ NLMG, p. 81

¹¹ NLMG, p. 82

¹² NLMG, p. 139

¹³ NLMG, p. 139

¹⁴ NLMG, p. 166

¹⁵ NLMG, p. 73

¹⁶ NLMG, p. 36

¹⁷ NLMG, p. 263

¹⁸ NLMG, p. 83

¹⁹ NLMG, p. 153

²⁰ Shaffer, Brian W., Wong Cynthia F. Conversations with Kazuo Ishiguro. University Press of Mississippi 2008, p. 213

²¹ Ibid., p. 9

3.3 *Touching the Barriers: The Comical in Never Let Me Go*

In some scenes Ishiguro subtly tickles the dividing line between comedy and tragedy. On these occasions the absurdity of the characters' thoughts and actions is suddenly exposed and the reader can get a more profound insight into the meaning and significance of the novel. Furthermore, the recognition of comedy provides a soothing experience: The suspense and anxiety disappear for a moment and the reader experiences a brief intermission (inner mission) of understanding and relief accompanied with a sense of tackling 'the tangled mess before [him]'.¹ The mischievous grin is then replaced by a vague feeling of guilt (matters of life and death are no thing to joke about, are they?) and a little sigh, maybe even tears in weaker moments. These instances of the comical will be discussed in this chapter in order to see how they reflect deeper meanings within the novel and how they affect the reader and his reading experience.

At the beginning of the novel Kathy reminisces about her career as a carer and mentions a donor who desperately wanted to believe he was from Hailsham although it was not true. Kathy comments on this and says: 'This was when I first understood, really understood, just how lucky we'd been – Tommy, Ruth, me, all the rest of us.'² Of course, the absurdity of this statement is obvious only on the second reading. Kathy meant that Hailsham was a facility with far more humane ways of raising donors than the other facilities, but the reader does not really know that at this point in the novel. On first reading it could serve as a false ray of hope for better destinies of the protagonists mentioned, on the second, it foreshadows the journey that reader undergoes to learn the terrible truth about the nature of the protagonists' lives, which is what really creates the comical and ironic effect.

The irony of it has two aspects. The first, speaking about being lucky, when one was brought into the world for the sole purpose of organ donation followed by an early death is a grim joke in itself. The second, the idea of Kathy understanding, really understanding her fate raises questions that, if not comical in themselves, fuel the strength, absurdity, and irony of the statement as a whole.

Another instance of a joke – in this case the reader's private joke – that is also accessible only on second reading is when Ruth, Kathy and others watch the boys play

football. Tommy looks a little too eager to get picked into a team (as Kathy admits ‘there was something comical about Tommy at that moment’³) and so the boys tease him by deliberately leaving him as the last pick, which sends Tommy into a tantrum of screaming and shouting. A few moments before Ruth hints that the tease was pre-arranged when she says: ‘Look at him. He really doesn’t suspect a thing.’⁴ It is true. He does not. However, neither does Ruth, nor Kathy, nor anyone suspect that there is a joke being played on them at that very moment. A joke that was pre-arranged by their fate and their guardians; a joke that will last their life-time; a joke that will eventually send Tommy screaming and shouting again⁵, but then it will not be on a playground, no games, and all innocence of it will be lost.

According to Kathy, however, there is at least one person who could see through this joke and, surprisingly, it is Tommy:

I was thinking [...] about back then, at Hailsham, when you [Tommy] used to go bonkers like that, and we couldn’t understand it. We couldn’t understand how you could ever get like that. And I was just having this idea, just a thought really. I was thinking maybe the reason you used to get like that was because at some level you always *knew*.⁶

So Ruth was not right when she thought Tommy does not suspect anything. What he suspected was probably something much more far-reaching, something Kathy and Ruth had missed. That is why the reader can observe Kathy and Ruth observing Tommy on the North Playing Field and think: “Look at them. They really don’t suspect a thing.” At this point the reader, if he or she dares, can snigger just like the characters’ fate would, if it were a person, because there really *is* something comical about them at that moment.

When Kathy and her ‘classmates’ come into their teenage years, their sex education begins. Due to the lack of normal role-models and due to the overall isolation of Hailsham it is run in the form of lectures:

Miss Emily used to give a lot of the sex lectures herself, and I remember once, she brought in a life-size skeleton from the biology class to demonstrate how it was done. We watched in complete astonishment as she put the skeleton through various contortions, thrusting her pointer around without the slightest self-consciousness.⁷

The image of the lady teacher showing the soon-to-be-disembowelled group of teenagers how to have sex using a *skeleton* is almost farcical. The skeleton symbolizes the coming death of the on-lookers and also foreshadows the kind of sex that the students are going to be having: mechanical, meaningless, futile and also, as Cynthia Wong points out, ‘without any hopes of progeny.’⁸

Around this time, the students were also prematurely given new information about the donation programme, which triggered a new way of dealing with this subject: ‘We still didn’t discuss the donations and all that went with them; we still found the whole area awkward enough. But it became something we made jokes about, in much the same way we joked about sex.’⁹ Again, the children are joking, but the joke is really on them.

Another comical episode, which touches the essence of the characters’ existence is also started as a tease on Tommy:

Tommy had been told of a student who’d gone to sleep with a cut on his elbow just like his and woken up to find his whole upper arm and hand skeletally exposed, the skin flopping about next to him “like one of those long gloves in *My Fair Lady*.”¹⁰

Tommy then finds Kathy and asks her to tie his arm in order to keep it rigid while he is sleeping and comments in passing: ‘We should never take chances with our health.’¹¹

This certainly sounds like some learned line from Tommy’s guardians. The casualness of the statement stands in opposition to the exceptionality of Tommy’s situation, which creates the comical effect. He is supposed to stay healthy to be able to give healthy organs, not to live a longer and happier life. The statement sounds like one of the rules that every parent – and that makes it powerful – imposes on his or her child: wash your hands, brush your teeth, always look when you cross the street, etc. It is symbolic of what is a significant part of being human: passing what one has learned over to the next generation and thus contributing to the life-cycle. It is something so very natural that hardly anyone ever thinks about it, but here it is displaced, taken out of context. The sentence is only a small island of the natural in the artificial and non-human setting of Hailsham. It is comical, because the reader recognizes the normality and the displacement, the distinction it makes between Tommy and the ‘normals’, and sees the ridiculousness of Tommy’s remark, which shows the learned loyalty to his purpose; a loyalty so naïve the reader would not trust it if Tommy were the good soldier Schweik.

Kathy then tells how the joke was extended:

The reason I was talking about all this was because the idea of things “unzipping” carried over from Tommy’s elbow to become a running joke among us about the donations. The idea was that when the time came, you’d be able to unzip a bit of yourself, a kidney or something would slide out, and you’d hand it over.¹²

This is perhaps not funny in itself, but it is interesting to speculate on why such a joke came up among the students: The students were, if unconsciously, already anticipating the ‘sleepless nights, with the drugs and the pain and the exhaustion’¹³ that would accompany the future donations. The joke then served as a tool to melt the suppressed fear of pain and suffering.

Another instance of the comical is again of the Schweikian loyalty type: When Miss Lucy is worried about Tommy’s future and tells him that contrary to what she told him earlier his art *does* matter, Tommy replies: ‘But I’ll be all right, Miss, I’m really fit, I know how to look after myself. When it’s time for donations, I’ll be able to do it really well.’¹⁴ His wish to meet the requirements of his role is comical, but again, it would not be so were it not for the contrast between the normal and the absurd. Everyone wishes to fulfil his role well – that is normal, but no one wishes to donate organs and die well – that is absurd, and in consequence, funny.

Although Kathy suggests towards the end of the novel that Tommy at some level always knew (what it was he knew is the crucial question, but it is now too early to elaborate on that), he seems to be the one who is most loyal to his role. His loyalty is innocent and exaggerated and therefore ridiculous. When Ruth, Tommy and Kathy go on a trip to see the boat in the woods, Ruth reminisces about Chrissie, their former co-lodger at the Cottages:

“I’ll tell you something I heard about Chrissie. I heard she completed during her second donation.”

“I heard that as well,” said Tommy. “It must be right. I heard exactly the same. A shame. Only her second as well. Glad that didn’t happen to me.”¹⁵

In this passage the reader can hope that Tommy is lamenting about the shortening of Chrissie’s life and not about not being able to fulfil her task. Even so, he does not quite

seem to hit the target. Of course he is glad it did not happen to him. But what difference does it make?! Even more preposterous seems his behaviour after his screaming tantrum in the fields. After he calms down, he and Kathy walk together back to the car to get back to the recovery centre, when Kathy says:

“You stink of cow poo,” I said finally.

“Oh God, Kath. How do I explain this? We’ll have to sneak in round the back.”¹⁶

Sneak in round the back? After learning from Madame that their love, their art and everything else do not make any difference, that all hopes for more life, which they desire so much, are gone, Tommy, who is practically dead, wants to sneak in round the back! What penalties is he afraid of? What force drags him down to be so small! The smallness of his worry face to face with the atrocity of his fate is both comical and tragic and the reader can either choose to cry or to laugh, but cannot remain indifferent

However, it is not only Tommy who is manipulated. During the trip to Norfolk, Chrissie and Rodney want to visit their friend Martin, who used to live at the Cottages and is now a carer, but Kathy does not want to go:

Chrissie leaned over the table towards me and said quietly, like she was explaining to a child: “He’s being a carer. What else do you think he’d be doing here? He’s a proper carer now.”

There was a bit of shifting, and I said: “That’s what I mean. We can’t just go and visit him.”

Chrissie sighed. “Okay. We’re not supposed to visit carers. Absolutely strictly speaking. Certainly not encouraged.”

Rodney chuckled and added: “Definitely not encouraged. Naughty naughty to go and visit him.”

“Very naughty,” Chrissie said and made a tutting noise.¹⁷

Their delight in transgressing a marginal rule of which they are not even sure if it is really a rule or just a recommendation can be received by the reader with a condescending smile. They go and visit their friend – a true rebellion in the light of the fact that then they go and obediently give away their organs.

Even though Kathy thought of herself as a good carer, she did have some second thoughts:

When a donor completes like that, out of the blue, it doesn't make much difference what the nurses say to you afterwards, and neither does that letter saying how they're sure you did all you could and to keep up the good work. For a while at least, you're demoralised.¹⁸

Keep up the good work? That is a grim joke. Kathy is accompanying her fellows on their way to death and gets a thank-you letter from the bureaucratic anonymity. Maybe they even had an Employee of the Month contest? The banality of it is striking and positively comical.

When Kathy, Ruth, and Tommy leave Hailsham and begin living at the Cottages they meet Chrissie and Rodney. Kathy's description of Chrissie triggers a rather loose, but comical association:

Chrissie was a tall girl who was quite beautiful when she stood up to her full height, but she didn't seem to realise this and spent her time crouching to be the same as the rest of us. That's why she often looked more like the *Wicked Witch* than a movie star – an impression reinforced by her irritating way of jabbing you with a finger the second before she said something to you.¹⁹

The image it raises is that of Hansel and Gretel being locked up in the Wicked Witch's house waiting to be consumed. The image is prompted not only by the appearance of Wicked Witch, but also by the word finger, which Hansel was supposed to put out for the witch to determine whether he is fat enough to be eaten. Also, Hansel and Gretel as well as Kathy and Tommy are victims of the 'odd failures of guardianship' that Wong speaks about in her treatment of *Never Let Me Go*.²⁰

The question remains whether this allusion was deliberate or whether Ishiguro described Chrissie as Wicked Witch without this specific allusion in mind. In our view, even if this image was not used intentionally, it was the author's unconscious intention to employ it. In other words, the use was not completely arbitrary, but was motivated by the same or similar chain of associations that the reader used to recognize the allusion. In fact, the unintentional use is more favourable from theoretical point of view, because in that case the reader gets access into the author's unconscious via text in much the same way that a psychoanalyst gets access into the patient's unconscious via dream. In this sense the image of the Wicked Witch (manifest content) serves as a massive condensation: It stands

for childhood, cannibalism, exploitation, mistreated children, lost children, and more generally for fear and cruelty (latent content). As Ishiguro is not writing a fairy tale there is no happy end for Ruth, Tommy, and Kathy. Even if they had the will and the courage, they would not really know who to put in the oven.

Do the instances or passages that reader finds comical have something in common? In other words, is there a common origin or a common condition in these situations that help create the comical? According to Freud all jokes have in common that they give us a specific kind of pleasure. The pleasure arises from the fact that they lift some internal or external obstacle that would otherwise be unsurpassable.²¹ Furthermore, Freud distinguishes between jokes and the comical: 'The joke is made and the comical is found.'²² The following condition must be met for the comical to occur: The originator of the joke must be unaware of a barrier he or she faces while the on-looker who finds the situation funny must be aware of the obstacle.²³ Of course, most of the instances of the comical discussed above was naïve. The characters did not mean to make the reader laugh. Therefore, if we follow Freud's logic, there must be some external or internal barrier that we, the readers, can see and that the protagonists are unaware of; a barrier that fuels the dramatic irony.

The external barrier is of course their fate, their limited function in the world. Of this obstacle, however, they are more or less aware. And indeed, they deliberately joked about donations, which was their way of overcoming the obstacle and a way of achieving relief that it brought. The episode in which Kathy talks about the students speaking of unzipping and handing over organs is a clear example of bringing down barriers via a joke.

The internal obstacle that provides for the comical effect of the naïve unintended jokes is the inhibition that is imposed upon them through education, manipulation and self-deception. It is the misunderstanding of their position in the world, the failed recognition of the abnormality of their lives and the injustice that is being done to them that provide the fabric for the comedy. They say they have been lucky! They are worried about their health! They hope they will be really good donors! They think they are naughty! They sneak round the back! All of these things are funny because we know and they do not. So these jokes are all of the same type.

What the comical in the novel does is that it helps sensitise the reader to the barrier. Whenever the reader comes across a thing that seems funny to him, it is a signal that he or

she is overcoming an obstacle. To identify the nature and origins of this obstacle means to get deeper into the meaning and significance of the novel.

¹ Never Let Me Go, p. 195

² NLMG, p. 6

³ NLMG, p. 8

⁴ NLMG, p. 7

⁵ NLMG, p. 274

⁶ NLMG, p. 275

⁷ NLMG, p. 83

⁸ Cynthia F. Wong. Kazuo Ishiguro (Writers and Their Work) - Second Edition
The Baskerville Press Ltd, Salisbury 2005, p. 99

⁹ NLMG, p. 84

¹⁰ NLMG, p. 86

¹¹ NLMG, p. 86

¹² NLMG, p. 88

¹³ NLMG, p. 6

¹⁴ NLMG, p. 108

¹⁵ NLMG, p. 225

¹⁶ NLMG, p. 274

¹⁷ NLMG, p. 250

¹⁸ NLMG, p. 207

¹⁹ NLMG, p. 141 Emphasis added.

²⁰ Cynthia F. Wong. Kazuo Ishiguro (Writers and Their Work) - Second Edition
The Baskerville Press Ltd, Salisbury 2005, p. 81

²¹ Sigmund Freud. Vtip a jeho vzťah k nevedomi. Simplified for our purposes, p. 117

²² Ibid., p. 174

²³ Ibid., p. 175

3.4 *A Tale of No Escape: Metaphors and Oppositions in Never Let Me Go*

“Ruth, you know, I think sometimes, when you’re in a couple, you don’t see things as clearly as maybe someone can from the outside. Just sometimes.”¹

In this chapter several metaphors in the novel will be discussed to see how they reflect the possible readings of the novel as a whole. Special attention will be paid to the possibility of reading the entire novel as one complex metaphor. Furthermore, the implications of such reading will be analyzed.

When Kathy learns that Hailsham is going to close, she reminisces about a walk she went for during one of her trips:

Then after a while a van pulled up [...] and a man got out dressed as a clown. He opened the van and took out a bunch of helium balloons [...]. As I came closer, I could see the balloons had faces and shaped ears, and they looked like a little tribe, bobbing in the air above their owner, waiting for him.

Then the clown straightened, closed up his van and started walking, in the same direction I was walking [...]. So we just kept on walking, the clown and me, on and on along the deserted pavement still wet from the morning, and all the time the balloons were bumping and grinning down at me. Every so often, I could see the man’s fist, where all the balloon strings converged, and I could see he had them securely twisted together and in a tight grip.²

Kathy offers her own interpretation of why this episode was significant. For her, the balloons symbolised the students and the tight grip of the clown was Hailsham. Therefore, if Hailsham closed, the balloons would come loose and, in consequence, lost: ‘I thought about Hailsham closing, and how it was like someone coming along with a pair of shears

and snipping the balloon strings just where they entwined above the man's fist. Once that happened, there'd be no real sense in which the balloons belonged with each other anymore.'³

The image is very complex and serves as an intersection of meanings. The bunch of balloons together in one grip reflect Kathy's sense of belonging and togetherness with her childhood friends, who were 'still somehow linked by the place [they'd] come from.'⁴ At the same time, she is aware of the fragility of these ties – they are mere strings which can be cut any time by forces totally out of her control. These forces Kathy personifies as "someone coming along with a pair of shears" – the strings being no match for the strength of the ruthless metal tool.

The realisation that things and friends from the past can be forever lost and the sense of defencelessness against the outside forces make Kathy reconsider her situation and take responsibility for the things that *are* within the scope of her control. This mainly meant the decision to mend her damaged relationships with Ruth and Tommy. That is why Kathy became Ruth's and eventually Tommy's carer – it gave them the chance to reconcile and put things right before they "complete." In fact, the word "completing" is a good term for what Kathy is doing towards the end of her life. She is looking back, doing everything in her power to make sense of her history and to put things right; she does not want to leave her life unresolved, unfinished – incomplete.

The first thing she does is that she becomes Ruth's carer. In the beginning, Kathy has difficulties communicating with Ruth, so she is relieved when Ruth brings up the possibility of going on a trip to see a boat: 'This boat, it's just sitting there, stranded in the marshes. [...] Maybe they wanted to dump it, whoever owned it. Or maybe sometime, when everything was flooded, it just drifted and got itself beached.'⁵ The surreal image of the stranded boat served to Ruth as a pretext, so she could reunite with Kathy and Tommy, but much more meaning can be ascribed to it. The description of it is visually evocative:

In front of us there was open marshland as far as we could see. The pale sky looked vast and you could see it reflected every so often in the patches of water breaking up the land. Not so long ago, the woods must have extended further, because you could see here and there ghostly dead trunks poking out of the soil, most of them broken off only a few feet up.

And beyond the dead trunks, maybe sixty yards away, was the boat, sitting beached in the marshes under the weak sun.⁶

For Tommy, this is how he imagines the closed Hailsham. For Ruth it evokes a dream she had about Hailsham:

I was in Room 14 [...] and I was looking out of the window and everything outside was flooded. Just like a giant lake. And I could see rubbish floating by under my window, empty drink cartons, everything. But here wasn't any sense of panic or anything like that. It was nice and tranquil, just like it is here. I knew I wasn't in any danger, that it was only like that because it had closed down.⁷

The dead trunks, empty carton boxes, misplaced old boat, closed Hailsham, all these things have served their purpose, they are of no use anymore and remind Kathy, Tommy and Ruth that they too will soon fulfil their purpose and pass away. Like the boat, the three of them drifted through life and got themselves beached there in the woods. And yet, the tranquility of the scene suggests that they accept their fates without any significant emotional upheaval and instead enjoy what they have right there, right then, that is, their reunification. In this one sweeping moment they revisit their past in Hailsham, see how it bonds them together in the present, and at the same time glimpse the future that awaits them.

On their way back from the trip Ruth, like Kathy, feels the need to atone, to mend what she has broken in the past. For her, the greatest wrong-doing she did was that she kept Kathy and Tommy apart: 'I realised you'd look back one day and realise and blame me for it.[...] There's no reason you should ever forgive me for that, but I want to ask you now because...'⁸ The abrupt stop in Ruth's speech is full of meaning. What she wanted to say was that they will all soon be dead and there is not much time left to put things right, but she did not. Instead, the discontinuation and the three full stops spoke for themselves: they symbolised the termination – the death that is so near – and the fear to address the coming end directly.

Then Ruth goes on to make her point: 'What I want is for you to put things right. Put right what I messed up for you. [...] You and Tommy, you've got to try and get a deferral. If it's you two, there's got to be a chance. A real chance.'⁹ This change in Ruth's attitude is one of the reasons why Ishiguro describes the novel as a 'cheerful tale'¹⁰. Even

though people make mistakes, they are good at heart. '[Ruth's] instincts in the end are to do the decent thing.'¹¹

One of the most touching and prominent metaphors in the novel is the idea of a "lost corner." It begins as a cute childhood naivete: As Miss Emily gives her lecture on geography, she speaks about Norfolk:

"You see, because it's stuck out here on the east, on this hump jutting into the sea, it's not on the way to anywhere. People going north and south" – she moved the pointer up and down – "they bypass it altogether. For that reason, it's a peaceful corner of England, rather nice. But it's also something of lost corner."

A *lost corner*. That's what she called it, and that was what started it. Because at Hailsham, we had our own "Lost Corner" up on the third floor, where the lost property was kept; if you lost or found anything, that's where you went. Someone – I can't remember who it was – claimed after the lesson that what Miss Emily had said that Norfolk was England's "lost corner," where all the lost property found in the country ended up.¹²

Then Kathy remembers that they used to believe this in literal way, only later it became a joke. Years after that, during the Norfolk trip to find Ruth's possible, Tommy and Kathy look for Kathy's long lost tape – the one with the song 'Never Let Me Go' on it – and find it. It was an almost magical coincidence: 'That day Tommy and I found another copy of that lost tape of mine in a town on the Norfolk coast, we didn't just think it pretty funny; we both felt some deep down tug, some old wish to believe again in something that was once close to our hearts.'¹³ For them, it renewed the possibility of believing that nothing can ever be completely lost. They rediscovered the idea which was once a great source of comfort to them; the idea that 'when we lost something precious [...] we didn't have to be completely heartbroken. [...] we could always go and find it somewhere in Norfolk.'¹⁴ That is why, when Kathy eventually loses the last precious thing in her life – Tommy – she goes to Norfolk, and indeed, does find Tommy, at least metaphorically, and is able to bid Tommy, her life, and her memories the last farewell.

Although Kathy never directly speaks about wanting to escape, there are several instances in the novel which suggest that Kathy is at least unconsciously haunted by the thought of defying her fate. Back at Hailsham she seemed drawn to areas that enabled her

to challenge the physical boundaries which limited her freedom: 'The little footpath that went all round the house was a real favourite of mine.[...] I suppose part of the reason I liked it so much was because I was never sure if it was out of bounds.'¹⁵

When she took the path she could peep into all the classrooms and in one of those rooms she saw Miss Emily. 'I assumed she was rehearsing a lesson or maybe one of her assembly talks, and I was about to hurry past before she spotted me, but just then she turned and looked straight at me. I froze, thinking I was for it, but then noticed she was carrying on as before, except now she was mouthing her address at me.'¹⁶ When Kathy took the path she wanted to find out what lay beyond her horizons – outside the captive and protective boundaries of Hailsham. The image of Miss Emily gazing at her and speaking is like a childhood echo of Kathy's and Tommy's conversation with Miss Emily at Madame's house years later, when they too went out of bounds to see if they can get a deferral. Then Kathy would learn everything, but not yet – this time Kathy just saw Miss Emily speak and did not hear anything – the window served as a protective shield, so Kathy remained 'sealed off from the realities of the world that actually awaited her.'¹⁷ She did not yet learn the unspeakable (and so far unspoken) truth about the nature of her existence. In her memory she just broke the rules like any other child, thought she would get into trouble, but got away with it.

There was another place that was out of bounds in Hailsham – the path through the rhubarb patch, which led to a pond. Kathy speaks about the path in connection with Ruth, particularly in connection with Ruth's reluctance to remember the path. The circumstances were that Ruth identified herself more and more with the older students at the Cottages and wanted to leave Hailsham behind, so the only time she spoke openly about their past was when Kathy and Ruth were alone. But this time Ruth denied remembering the path even in private conversation with Kathy: 'I'd referred, just in passing, to the fact that at Hailsham, the short-cut down to the pond through the rhubarb patch was out of bounds. When she put on her puzzled look, I abandoned whatever point I'd been trying to make and said: "Ruth there is no way you have forgotten. So don't give me that."¹⁸ To which Ruth replies: 'What's the rhubarb patch got to do with any of this? Just get on with what you were saying.'¹⁹ This scene serves as a kind of trigger which starts Kathy reminiscing about her gradual estrangement from Ruth and Tommy at the Cottages; how she let Tommy down; and twelve pages later she comes back to recount the same occasion over again and says:

‘And that was when she [Ruth] said: “What does it matter anyway? What’s the rhubarb patch got to do with anything?”’²⁰

Ruth’s question is not only rhetorical; it is a real question that requires an answer: First, it is a memory from childhood which Ruth refuses to share with Kathy. This is the final straw that led Kathy to the decision to leave the Cottages and begin her carer training. Second, Ruth’s exaggerated reaction could mean she was uncomfortable with the notion of things being out of bounds, because it reminded her too much of the bounds which were set out for her. Moreover, the path through the rhubarb patch and Ruth’s reaction to it form a framework in which Kathy’s tale of estrangement and failure to stand behind Tommy is only a digression. The memory of the rhubarb patch is thus enhanced and the failure subdued, pushed into the background – out of bounds, if possible.

Whatever happens in the novel, there is always an ever-pervading sense of limits. This is fuelled by the fact that the characters often encounter physical obstacles – separate reifications of the intangible barrier that hovers over them. One of such symbols is the recurring barbed wire. Kathy mentions it for the first time in an offhand manner when she describes how the students at Hailsham watched videos:

We’d evolved this system where we called for particular favourite scenes to be played again – like, for instance, the moment the American jumps over the barbed wire on his bike in *The Great Escape*. There’d be a chant of: “Rewind! Rewind!” until someone got the remote and we’d see the portion again, sometimes three, four times.²¹

The reason this scene was so popular with the students is that it gave vent to their suppressed (unconscious) wish to escape. Or, rather, it is Kathy’s wish to escape as it is Kathy who of all their favourite scenes retained this particular one in her memory and retrieved it as a marginal detail of an episode she was recounting.

When Kathy, Tommy and Ruth, who was already very weak because of the donations, went on a trip to see a stranded boat in the woods it was the first time after a while they were together again. Kathy tells of another encounter with an obstacle: ‘Then we came to a barbed wire fence, which was tilted and rusted, the wire itself yanked all over the place. When Ruth saw it, she came to an abrupt halt. [...] “You didn’t say we had to get past barbed wire!”’²² Kathy reassured her: ‘It’s not going to be difficult. [...] We can go under it. We just have to hold it for each other.’²³ Then, with the help of each other,

they manage to go through the fence, including Ruth. 'It wasn't so difficult for her in the end: it was more a confidence thing, and with us there for support, she seemed to lose her fear of the fence. On the other side, she actually made a go of helping me hold up the wire for Tommy.'²⁴ They managed to cross the fence with the help of each other and see the boat. In their small but significant way they at least symbolically transgressed their fate.

After Kathy and Tommy learn from Miss Emily the complete truth about their existence they drive at night back to Tommy's recovery centre. Tommy had to get out of the car due to sickness, or so Kathy thought. While she was waiting in the car, she heard a scream. 'When I tried to go towards the screams, I was stopped by an impenetrable thicket. Then I found an opening, and stepping through a ditch, came up to a fence. I managed to climb over it and I landed in the soft mud.'²⁵ What Kathy saw there was 'Tommy's figure, raging, shouting, flinging his fists and kicking out.'²⁶ They crossed a fence again, but this time they only found anguish, strengthened by the darkness of the night and the gusts of wind. In the end, however, they find comfort in each other: 'It seemed like we were holding onto each other because that was the only way to stop us being swept away into the night.'²⁷

At the end of the novel Kathy has lost everybody, and so she goes to Norfolk – because, after all, that is where all lost things can be found – and finds herself

standing before acres of ploughed earth. There was a fence keeping me from stepping into the field, with two lines of barbed wire [...]. All along the fence, especially along the lower line of wire, all sorts of rubbish had caught and tangled. [...] I half-closed my eyes and imagined this was the spot where everything I'd ever lost since my childhood had washed up, and I was now standing here in front of it, and if I waited long enough, a tiny figure would appear on the horizon across the field, and gradually get larger until I'd see it was Tommy, and he'd wave, maybe even call.²⁸

Here Kathy is faced with a fence and a barbed wire again, but this time she does not think about crossing it. Instead, in this moment, when nothing except death is coming, she sees that the precious moments of her life – her memories – will all be there, though tangled, until the very end, including the most beautiful one: her memory of Tommy. She is sad, but not shattered and accepts the fate that is awaiting her: 'Though the tears rolled down

my face, I wasn't sobbing or out of control. I just waited a bit, then turned back to the car, to drive off to wherever it was I was supposed to be.'²⁹

The metaphors entwine and interlace to form the fabric of the novel's fictional world. They draw on the similarities between the physical and the mental landscape of the characters. A physical barrier echoes a mental one; Norfolk (a place) reflects a mental process (memory), things mirror thoughts. What these metaphors achieve is that they resonate with the overall meaning of the novel and therefore add to its strength and integrity.

Some of the metaphors are symptoms of Kathy's defence mechanisms. Kathy's memories are shaped not only by what "actually happened," but also by her wishes, and, as she genuinely tries to adhere to the truth, her wishes have been suppressed and the only way of expressing them is through seemingly marginal metaphorical devices. If we analyse Kathy's memories in the same way a dream is analysed, it is possible to see the metaphors as results of condensation and displacement. Kathy's most obvious suppressed wish is the wish to escape. The successful overcoming of fences or taking paths which are out of bounds are manifestations (and wish-fulfillments) of this latent thought. What Kathy does not express directly in her narrative is displaced and expressed through small details that she mentions as if "in passing." From this point of view Ishiguro successfully continues his exploration of human memory. He capitalizes on techniques he perhaps over-used in *The Unconsoled* and combines them sensitively with the subtlety of his first three novels.

One of the most powerful ways of approaching *Never Let Me Go* is to read it as 'a metaphor for the human condition.'³⁰ The similarity is almost perfect: the characters in the novel are human beings who are going to die. That is a description which includes every living person, and so, relating to what the characters experience is a natural thing to do. Kathy, Tommy, and Ruth worry about doing the right thing; they have childhoods that will never return; they have things they lost, but have been able to console themselves with what they have left. In that they are similar to every human being. As Ishiguro remarks:

The book really stresses the positive side of human nature. Humans are capable of caring deeply for one another, even though they make mistakes, because they are prey to human emotions such as jealousy, possessiveness, or anger. [...] It was a kind of a celebration, which could be seen in this bleak backdrop.³¹

So this is what might be called “the author’s reading.” The book is a story of atonement, where the characters reconcile and come to terms with their fate.

However, the way the characters have been able to cope with their situation is not the end of the story. In their world, there *is* injustice being done to them. The hypocrisy of the world does not disappear just because they have had reasonably happy lives. The reason they have become good, caring people is because they have been deceived and manipulated. Is their humanity merely a side-effect of an inhuman system? In other words, is all their caring, loving – being human – only a coping strategy, an escape from an otherwise ruthless world? If this were true, it would mean that the guiding principle of human world is that of deception and manipulation, not humanity.

From this point of view, the metaphorical reading of *Never Let Me Go* is especially unsettling. The students in the novel grow up, get educated, then give away their organs one by one and die. They learn to accept their fate. People in real world grow up, get educated, then work and die. They too accept this scheme. The disturbing effect is achieved by the collision of two perspectives: The reader sees the characters’ situation from the outside and is therefore able to see that their inability to escape there is not “real,” that they do not escape only because they have been deceived and manipulated, not because they would not be capable of doing it. The characters’ thinking has been fenced with barbed wire.

In a metaphorical reading, the reader inevitably relates the characters’ situation to his own. The perspective then changes: the reader loses the privileged position of an outsider and sees his situation from the inside. That is the moment when he realizes that the similarity between him and the characters is far greater than he originally acknowledged. The reader too does not perceive his situation in the world as unjust; his fate does not seem cruel. Is he being deceived? There is no reason to become too paranoid, it merely suggests that people in general are as blind as the characters in the novel, only it is less obvious. There is something comical and sad in it. After all, it was *a clown* holding the balloons in a tight grip; and it is a clown, a joker, who is pulling the strings of the world and who will not let us go.

This is perhaps one of the strongest impacts of the novel. It sensitizes the reader to the possibility that there might something amiss in the world that just escapes his attention. The ease with which the clones accepted their exploitation is to be taken as a serious

warning: it is surprisingly easy to misinterpret the surrounding world. The biases people amass since their childhood and inherit from their ancestors enable them to make sense of things and, at the same time, inevitably lead to misinterpretation. For Ishiguro, this is one of the major areas of concern, as he is ‘interested in the way words hide meaning.’³² The words become a hideout, a refuge and means of escaping truth. Moreover, if we understand “truth” in Derridean conception, that is, truth as a play of signs, chaos, nonsense, then making sense of things is a means of evading nonsense, evading truth – not searching for it.

One of the questions the reader asks when reading *Never Let Me Go* is why the clones do not attempt to escape. It seems odd that they should accept their captivity. The reason the reader perceives the characters’ behaviour as odd is because it is in conflict with the way he is used to interpret texts. The notion of freedom is usually valued over captivity and the way the characters behave in the novel flouts this dual opposition. In order to move from captivity to freedom Kathy would have to rebel and escape. This seems a rather banal and self-evident statement to make, but only at first sight. Two more binary oppositions have to be taken into consideration: rebellion vs. conformity and confrontation vs. escape. The combination of these two opposites proves that rebellion and escape are in fact antonyms and that Kathy can hardly do both at the same time. Of course, this is only a semantic play capitalizing on the dual meaning of the word “escape:” “escape” in the sense of evading confrontation and “escape” in the sense of fleeing captivity. In Kathy’s situation, the escape in the former sense is a directional opposite of the latter, which leads us to the answer to the original question: The clones in the novel do not wish to escape, because, in a sense, *they have already escaped*. By conforming, that is, not escaping, they have escaped confrontation.

Kathy, Tommy, and Ruth play with the cards they were dealt, like all people do. From this point of view, *Never Let Me Go* becomes a metaphor of friendship, love, and vitality of human spirit on one hand, and the limits of free will, interpretation, and humanity on the other. Good and evil are two sides of the same coin, so it does not matter how many times it is flipped. *Never Let Me Go* can always be read as a celebration of humanity and, at the same time, as its fiercest critique.

¹ NLMG, p. 199

² NLMG, p. 212

³ NLMG, p. 213

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- ⁴ NLMG, p. 212
- ⁵ NLMG, p. 216
- ⁶ NLMG, p. 224
- ⁷ NLMG, p. 225
- ⁸ NLMG, p. 232
- ⁹ NLMG, p. 232,233
- ¹⁰ Shaffer, Brian W., Wong Cynthia F. Conversations with Kazuo Ishiguro. University Press of Mississippi 2008, p. 220
- ¹¹ Ibid, p. 219
- ¹² NLMG, p. 65
- ¹³ NLMG, p. 66
- ¹⁴ NLMG, p. 66
- ¹⁵ NLMG, p. 44
- ¹⁶ NLMG, p. 45
- ¹⁷ Shaffer, Brian W., Wong Cynthia F. Conversations with Kazuo Ishiguro. University Press of Mississippi 2008, p. 199
- ¹⁸ NLMG, p. 189
- ¹⁹ NLMG, p. 190
- ²⁰ NLMG, p. 202
- ²¹ NLMG, p. 99
- ²² NLMG, p. 222
- ²³ NLMG, p. 222
- ²⁴ NLMG, p. 223
- ²⁵ NLMG, p. 273
- ²⁶ NLMG, p. 274
- ²⁷ NLMG, p. 274
- ²⁸ NLMG, p. 287
- ²⁹ NLMG, p. 288
- ³⁰ Shaffer, Brian W., Wong Cynthia F. Conversations with Kazuo Ishiguro. University Press of Mississippi 2008, p. 215
- ³¹ Ibid., p. 220
- ³² Ibid., p. 71

4 Conclusion

Four different approaches, or points of perception, were selected to survey *Never Let Me Go*. In Chapter 3.1 its themes were compared with the themes of Kazuo Ishiguro's previous novels. In Chapter 3.2 the novel was read as a dystopian vision of a world with distorted ethics of cloning. Chapter 3.3 is a discussion of the role of the comical in the novel and the experience of the comical in the reader. In Chapter 3.4 symbols and metaphors were scrutinized and reading *Never Let Me Go* as a metaphor for human condition was offered.

The main aim of this thesis was to establish whether each reading generates a radically different meaning or whether there is a focal point in which the readings converge and uncover one single overarching theme. The literary analysis showed that the answer to this question could not be positively determined. On one hand, the analysis of themes, fictional landscape, comedy, and metaphors did point in one direction. The four readings converged in one focal point: they disclosed the fact that human understanding of the world is limited by protective barriers composed of deception and self-deception. On the other hand, the dystopian reading, if applied rigorously, can lead the reader to the banal conclusion that cloning is bad, which is more or less unrelated to the other readings; therefore this reading *is* radically different. What is more, a single perception, that is, *Never Let Me Go* as a metaphor for human condition, produced two contradictory interpretations.

The themes of loss, professionalism, memory, self-deception, parental responsibility and the insurmountability of one's horizons are present in Ishiguro's previous novels as well as in *Never Let Me Go*. The difference is mainly that some themes are highlighted and others downplayed. For example, the insurmountability of one's horizons is addressed with striking prominence. In contrast, the theme of guilt as a source of narrative repression is almost completely absent from the novel; it is transposed from the narrator to the world she lives in as is demonstrated in Chapter 3.2. Overall, being familiar with the author's previous work proved worthwhile as it helped disclose some aspects of *Never Let Me Go* that would otherwise remain unnoticed. At the same time, however, this approach inevitably leads to a certain degree of bias that perhaps prevents

the critic from finding fresh new directions and may result in stereotypical reading. This is a danger that is impossible to avoid, but must be acknowledged.

Chapter 3.2 showed that to read the novel as a cloning science-fiction is suspenseful and entertaining, but the lack of complexity and plausibility of the science-fictional setting is a major setback, which allows such reading only with strong reservations.

The discussion of the comical in Chapter 3.3 yielded surprisingly fruitful results. In accordance with Freud's theory of jokes, the instances of the comical were identified as devices that sensitise the reader to a barrier that the comedy helps to overcome. The origins and nature of these barriers are then examined in Chapter 3.4, where these barriers are shown as projected into the symbols of Kathy's narrative.

Lastly, *Never Let Me Go* was treated as a metaphor for human condition. This reading provided an interesting contradiction. For Ishiguro, the novel is a "cheerful tale" stressing "the positive side of human nature." It is a reading supported by the analysis of metaphors in the first part of Chapter 3.4, which show the characters' will to put things right, the will to be good people. In contrast, the aspect of deception and self-deception, that is, the fact these are inherent components of human world lead to reading *Never Let Me Go* as a critique of human society. As Cynthia Wong remarked in an interview with Kazuo Ishiguro, 'Still, I have to re-think "cheerfulness" in the context of your remarks and my own reading, because the book offers a rather sobering view of life.'¹ This contradiction, however, in accordance to Fish's theory, signifies. *Never Let Me Go* is a sincere attempt to capture the essence of humanity. As human life *per se* is both happy and sad, the novel would not be, in Kundera's words, 'getting into the soul of things,'² if it did not provide the space and fabric for such contradiction.

¹ Shaffer, Brian W., Wong Cynthia F. Conversations with Kazuo Ishiguro. University Press of Mississippi 2008, p. 220

² Milan Kundera. The Curtain – An Essay in Seven Parts. Transl. Linda Asher. New York: Harper Perennial 2008, p. 57

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