

CHAPTER 9

*Clones and Other Sorrows*  
(Kazuo Ishiguro)

What if I were to tell you that I could take a scraping of skin from your finger and create another Ezra Lieberman?

*The Boys from Brazil* (1978)

Doug Kinney is about to get the one thing he needs more of – himself!”

*Multiplicity* (theatrical trailer, 1996)

A human was cloned. That human was you. Kind of takes the fun out of being alive, doesn't it?

*The 6th Day* (2000)

It made another me! How cool is that?

“Send in the Clones,” *The Simpsons* (2002)

Of the several dozen movies and television series featuring clones that I have watched over the years, one of the most accurate is the earliest – a star-studded film made in 1978 from Ira Levin's novel, *The Boys from Brazil*. In seven minutes of surprisingly effective exposition, a scientist explains to Ezra Lieberman, a Nazi hunter played by Sir Laurence Olivier, the procedures involved in “mononuclear reproduction” or “cloning.” Strikingly, the scientist also explains the necessity of reproducing the environment of the original if one hopes to duplicate its character, something missing from the overwhelming majority of films about clones. When Lieberman exclaims, “It's monstrous, doctor!” the scientist replies, “Why? Wouldn't you want to live in a world full of Mozarts and Picassos?” The exposition reaches a climax as Lieberman reiterates what they have learned about the cloned boy's background: “Not Mozart, not Picasso, not a genius who will enrich the world, but a lonely little boy with a domineering father . . . Adolf Hitler.”

The emphasis on environmental factors in the development of an individual is a step in the right direction, but the film still misses a fundamental truth about human cloning – that everything the clone encounters, from its epigenetic programming to the household and society

in which it is raised to the very air it breathes, would be different from those of the original. In an amusing essay occasioned by the cloning of Dolly the sheep, Stephen Jay Gould points out that identical twins “are far better clones than Dolly and her mother” because twins share the same mitochondrial genes, maternal proteins, womb, and historical time period (“Dolly’s Fashion” 46–47). If someday a human clone is created, it will be a unique individual with its own personality, not a carbon copy or automaton.

Few films even gesture toward environmental influences on the developing child. On the contrary, most present audiences with fully grown adults, the actor doubled before our eyes through the magic of a green screen. Newly minted copies of Arnold Schwarzenegger, Michael Keaton, and the cartoon figure Bart Simpson pop up whenever the action – or comedy – demands.<sup>1</sup> What should we expect, though? Science in popular cinema is usually little more than a transparent excuse for the action. We are so inured to scientific gobbledygook in films and television that it makes us wonder if anyone takes such nonsense seriously. Yet research shows that some people do.<sup>2</sup> The worry that movies about cloning will spread misconceptions about genetic engineering and stem cell research is a valid concern. Unsurprisingly, the most pervasive misconception about clones is the belief that cloning would produce a soulless version of the original, a grown-up automaton equipped with the same personality, desires, opinions, and even memories.<sup>3</sup> The persistence of memory is occasionally justified in movies (as it is in *The 6th Day*) by some form of technology for uploading a person’s consciousness intact, but more often, memories come in flashbacks, dreams, or feelings of déjà vu, episodes that call to mind Samuel Butler’s conviction back in the 1870s that unconscious memories were passed down from one generation to the next.<sup>4</sup>

In the first chapter of this book, I noted that studying such misrepresentations is a common approach used by social scientists to measure the effects of popular culture on public attitudes toward science. Using discourse analysis, surveys, focus groups, and semistructured interviews, social scientists have examined the impact of everything from films and television to online advertising and social media networks. This kind of research is regularly funded by the ethical, legal, and social implications (ELSI) program of the NIH and cited in policy reports. But the methods of social scientists are not a viable option for literary scholars, for they make little use of our particular set of skills. One does not need graduate training in literary studies to expose the distorted science that appears in the thrillers, superhero pics, and horror movies that make up the majority of the nearly

150 films and TV shows that involve cloning.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, the very idea of looking for factual distortions is problematic in literary criticism because the object under investigation – fiction – complicates any simple relationship between representation and reality.

I am beginning this chapter with films about cloning to highlight an interesting contrast. It turns out that many of the most prominent literary works involving clones view them more sympathetically than most movies. Whereas films usually “send in the clones” to provoke horror, dramatic action, or laughter, a number of prominent novels and short stories use the idea of human cloning to challenge readers to think about what makes us human.<sup>6</sup> The works I have in mind include titles that have come up repeatedly in this study – *Cloud Atlas*, the *MaddAddam* trilogy, *Never Let Me Go* – as well as other interesting texts, all published since the landmark 1975 Asilomar Conference on recombinant DNA: Octavia Butler’s *Xenogenesis* (1987–1989), Fay Weldon’s *The Cloning of Joanna May* (1989), Eva Hoffman’s *The Secret* (2002), Nancy Kress’s “Sex Education” (1996), Martha Nussbaum’s “Little C” (1998), Jenny Davidson’s *Heredity* (2003), Jodi Picoult’s *My Sister’s Keeper* (2004), and Paolo Bacigalupi’s *The Windup Girl* (2009). In most cases, the stories reflect real-life problems with an immediacy that reinforces a sense of realism rather than science fictionality.<sup>7</sup> As a result, the clones are easily read as analogues for marginalized groups in current society – racial or sexual minorities, women, people with disabilities, the poor, the homeless, the displaced and stateless. They excite empathy and political awareness. Sorrow, not terror, is a dominant emotion.

Of these texts, one stands out for the amount of critical attention it has attracted in the relatively brief time since its publication, Kazuo Ishiguro’s 2005 novel *Never Let Me Go*. A survey of the relevant bibliography yields more than seventy-five full-length articles in English (there are a dozen or so more in other languages) that discuss the novel, not to mention reviews, interviews, and feature pieces. As one would expect, much of this attention is due to the merit of the novel. But much also stems from the work’s bearing on four topics that have been central to this study: dystopia, posthumanism, temporality, and bioethics. I touch on these topics again in the four sections that follow. But I have additional reasons for devoting my final chapter to Ishiguro’s novel.

First, Ishiguro’s nightmare vision of clones created as sources for human organs can illuminate the principles often used to set organ donation priorities, enriching public discourse on this topic. Second, the novel’s self-conscious relation to nineteenth-century realism rounds off this study

by returning us to some of the questions we explored in Chapter 1. Like McEwan's *Saturday*, Ishiguro's novel invokes canonical nineteenth-century literature to deepen our understanding of the social implications of genetics. Highlighting the arc that leads from Darwin's theory of evolution to twenty-first-century genomics, both *Saturday* and *Never Let Me Go* explore the value of literature to guide us as we think about the urgent questions that arise in a scientific age.

### ***Bildung* in *Dystopia***

The science of cloning a human never appears in *Never Let Me Go*. Instead, the novel exploits a variant of the *Bildungsroman* – the boarding-school novel – to focus attention on the environment in which three friends, all clones, are raised. As the novel opens, our narrator, Kathy H., is talking to a patient, a fellow clone, who is recovering from surgery. Kathy is a “carer,” a companion who assists organ donors before and after their operations. The occupation is one that all clones pass through before beginning their own career as organ donors. She has been a carer for eleven years, an unusually long period, and feels proud of her skill at calming those under her charge. In January, she will begin the final stage of her life, giving up her organs for others. She is thirty-one years old but knows she has only a year or two of life ahead of her. Some donors do not make it past their second operation, and none are expected to survive their fourth. They call this final donation “completing,” as in fulfilling one's purpose on earth.

Kathy grew up as one of the privileged children raised at Hailsham, a boarding school dedicated to giving its students a full, humanistic education in a nurturing environment. They were watched over by a staff of teachers called “guardians,” told they were “special” (43), and sheltered from understanding what their future as organ donors entailed. At first, readers are sheltered too. In the early chapters, most readers do not even realize the children are clones unless they have been told ahead of time. The realization dawns slowly, as if we are groping toward some facet of adult knowledge, some recognition essential to mature acceptance of the world, just as are the children themselves. How does the novel pull off this feat?

By beautifully marshaling the elementary literary techniques that E. M. Forster years ago named “aspects of the novel.” The point of view is handled deftly by a speaking voice addressing an unidentified “you”; temporal shifts are managed with colloquial ease, sentence by sentence in the cadence of a conversation; the familiar genre of boarding-school novel

slides easily into its accustomed grooves as memoir and *Bildungsroman*, its melancholy tone a natural outgrowth of growing up, the small losses, childhood grievances, schoolyard cliques, and crushes on teachers developing into lifelong bonds among friends; and the main characters, our narrator Kathy, and her childhood companions, Ruth and Tommy, deepen into psychologically complex adults, rounded individuals possessing that half-glimpsed, mysterious realm we call “interiority” – all these deeply recognizable “aspects” of the novel are arranged with such skill that at first one hardly notices that the alternative England in the novel is a biodystopia in which cloned children are raised to have their organs harvested for strangers.

The word “clone” is virtually taboo in the novel. It appears only twice, both times to register the stigma associated with the term. The guardians at Hailsham always preferred the word “students” (261) as a way of glossing over the reality of what lay before their charges. Society as a whole does not want to be reminded of that reality either – hence, the near invisibility of science. Genetics only crops up once in the novel, in a conversation near the end of the book, when something called the “Morningdale scandal” (258) is mentioned. Kathy and her lover, Tommy, have tracked down the head guardian from Hailsham, Miss Emily, and are entreating her to explain some of the things they found puzzling about their upbringing. They have heard rumors that Hailsham students who are truly in love can obtain “deferrals” of their surgeries for a few years (258). Miss Emily, however, crushes those hopes, telling them that the rumor is false. Worse still, Hailsham has been shut down, and the situation of cloned children is even more deplorable than it was before. The end for Hailsham came when a scientist named Morningdale was discovered in a remote region of Scotland conducting illegal experiments involving genetically enhancing clones.<sup>8</sup> “What he wanted was to offer people the possibility of having children with enhanced characteristics. Superior intelligence, superior athleticism” (263–64). But his plan blew up, causing untold damage. Miss Emily explains: “It reminded people, reminded them of a fear they’d always had. It’s one thing to create students, such as yourselves, for the donation programme. But a generation of created children . . . demonstrably *superior* to the rest of us? Oh no. That frightened people” (264).

The outcry brought unwanted attention to something the public had been successfully repressing for decades – that their health system depended on heartless procedures that created an exploited underclass. Before the Morningdale scandal broke, “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" (263). The parallel with apologists for slavery in the nineteenth century is inescapable, as it is with doctors who performed medical atrocities in Nazi concentration camps and the Tuskegee syphilis study.

But you must try and see it historically. After the war, in the early fifties, when the great breakthroughs in science followed one after the other so rapidly, there wasn't time to take stock, to ask the sensible questions. Suddenly there were all these new possibilities laid before us, all these ways to cure so many previously incurable conditions . . . And for a long time, people preferred to believe these organs appeared from nowhere, or at most that they grew in a kind of vacuum. (262)

The brevity of this explanation is revealing – WW II, the early 1950s, a vaguely “long time,” and suddenly the characters are in the present, inhabiting a society dependent on unspeakable barbarities perpetrated on a class of “untouchables” for the sake of nearly miraculous cures for fully entitled members of society.<sup>9</sup> To grasp how completely Ishiguro's novel buries the science of cloning, contrast the preceding passage with Atwood's depiction of genetic engineering. Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy dramatizes the growth of entire industries devoted to producing genetically modified (GM) animals, diagnoses the forces that gave the giant Biocorps power, depicts a character genetically engineering an extinction-level pandemic, details the diverse genetic sources of her chimeras, describes the method of distribution for the pandemic's vectors, and enumerates the nonhuman traits Crake splices into the DNA of a cloned species designed to replace humanity. By contrast, Ishiguro's story is not about astounding scientific advances but about the *normalization* of science, about how biodystopia becomes accepted as the price of medical marvels. Even the victims of this system, the clones, accept this state of affairs as the norm. They never think of rebelling. Once they become adults and leave Hailsham, they encounter no restraints on their free movement, no covert surveillance. “Why don't they just run away?” my students invariably ask. The answer comes readily to hand: because they have completely internalized the conditions of their oppression.

Their failure to lash out at an unjust social order departs from a standard plot convention of dystopia but is unsurprising in biodystopia, which is distinguished from the former by this very process of internalization.<sup>10</sup> As we saw in the prior chapter, biodystopia transposes the structures of domination into the self. The focus of the novel's early chapters on the children's education gives us a step-by-step illustration of how such internalization occurs. At Hailsham, the cultivation of self, or *Bildung*, cannot be disentangled from the socialization of the children for their

destined fate. Both at the institutional level, in their classes, counseling sessions, sports events, and facilities, and on the personal level, as they respond to peer pressure, vague fears, and emerging desires, an education designed to foster humanistic values simultaneously prepares them to accept their future as organ donors. Sadly, this is no paradox.

The classical *Bildungsroman*, or novel of education, narrates the story of how a young person develops into maturity by navigating a series of adolescent crises to find, at last, his or her true calling as an adult. The telos of this process is a mature acceptance of one's destiny and place in society, even when this role represents a diminishment of one's youthful dreams. Franco Moretti has pointed out that for the last two centuries, this destiny has coincided with finding a professional vocation, an occupation that fulfills a place within the social order. That this occupation in the clones' case means sacrificing their lives for the good of others does not prevent them from accepting their fate, any more than it might a well-trained soldier. But their very lack of dissent forces the reader to think again about the project of *Bildung*. Is cultivation of selfhood in service of vocation always praiseworthy? The answer depends on two crucial factors: the roles a society affords its citizens, and even more important, who counts as a citizen.

Matthew Eatough explores the challenge *Never Let Me Go* offers to *Bildung* as a way of raising policy concerns about a current strategy for assessing patients' suitability for organ transplants. Eatough demonstrates that the understanding of *Bildung*, or character development, governing the treatment of the clones in Ishiguro's novel is similar to that used in quality-of-life studies, which are often a factor in decisions about who receives organ transplants. Quality-of-life studies attempt to shift the debate over expensive surgeries and the allocation of scarce organs away from cost-benefit calculations focused exclusively on survival rates and toward measures that weigh participants' affective responses to their condition. The goal is to use affective preferences to "establish an objectively measurable scale . . . that can translate subjective states into a calculable, comparative metric" (Eatough 145). Patients are asked to say whether they would prefer a longer life in reduced health or a shorter life in better health. Using preference-based psychometrics, researchers then "quantify the difference between certain medical conditions *on the basis of participants' affective responses to those states*. This procedure yields what is called a 'quality-adjusted life year' (QALY), a number . . . that designates the difference between an individual's reduced quality of life and that of a fully functional individual" (Eatough 140, italics in original).

Eatough asks several questions about this number. First, what defines a “fully functional individual”? The answer turns out to be the same one offered in *Never Let Me Go* and in the *Bildungsroman* generally: a “fully functioning individual” is defined as someone with the ability to pursue a chosen vocation. The unintended result of this definition is that patients’ affective investments in their vocation play a role in the calculation used to determine their eligibility for organ transplantation. For the clones, the reverse is also true. Trained at Hailsham to value the cultivation of the self above all else, they have no difficulty choosing their “professional oriented *Bildung* . . . as organ donors” (Eatough 142) over the continued healthy functioning of their bodies. Second, what are the consequences of considering “the body’s physical well-being . . . only to the extent that it impacts the patient’s affective experience of the time period under consideration” (Eatough 143)? One is that patients and medical personnel alike are prompted to become less responsive to the body, to discount its suffering as an adequate measure of well-being. This lessening of regard for the body can have distinct drawbacks. For medical professionals, the admirable effort to attend to quality-of-life measures paradoxically results in devaluing of bodily trauma. For patients, the effort requires one to choose between the time of the body and the time of *Bildung* – that is, between the time one has to live and the life one wants to live in time.

As a literary form, the novel has traditionally excelled at registering the variable meanings to individuals of different temporalities. A work of fiction like *Never Let Me Go* can bring home to readers the intensity of felt time, the dilation of what Virginia Woolf called “moments of being,” the remembrance of *temps perdu*. In this respect, the form simultaneously honors the transient personal apprehension of time and the shared cultural meanings of a longer durée. This is one of the great achievements of *Never Let Me Go* – its power to imbue both temporalities with a full measure of meaning, our fleeting time on earth and our intimation of times that extend beyond the self.

Eatough’s article shows how the study of an individual novel can bring added value to the conversation about an important policy issue. As an example of a literary study that holds as much interest for public policy makers as for readers of fiction, Eatough’s work is unusual but not unique. In Chapter 1, I listed some of the other pioneers in this effort. Another literary scholar claims our attention here because his work has also focused on organ donation. Robert Mitchell is a literary critic of Romanticism who has coauthored with Catherine Waldby a book-length study of organ transplantation policy, *Tissue Economies: Blood, Organs, and Cell Lines in*



*Late Capitalism.* Waldby and Mitchell's book highlights contradictions within the gift-giving economy that governs organ donation policy in the United States. Their work, like Eatough's, deserves to figure into conversations about how we make decisions in an exchange fraught with conflicting needs, values, and emotions – an exchange that involves deeply held cultural beliefs about the value of human life.

### **Humanism and the Human**

Perhaps the most common function of clones in literature has been to challenge traditional definitions of the human. Are artificially created beings individuals; if so, do they have souls; do they have rights that must be respected by the state? The clones' experience at Hailsham is premised on demonstrating their essential humanity. Yet the instinctive revulsion that even some of their committed advocates feel in their presence shows the tenuousness of this conviction. Moreover, the emphasis on artistic expression in the novel asks us to reconsider the traditional link between art and humanity. From earliest childhood, the clones are encouraged to treasure artistic expression and to cultivate their imaginations by creating poetry and drawings for a gallery that, we discover, is intended to prove that clones have souls. But the failure of the gallery after the Morningdale scandal and the collapse of the nascent abolitionist movement on behalf of the clones cast doubt on the persuasive power of art.

Interwoven with these reflections on the human are scenes that provoke one to reflect on humanism as well.<sup>11</sup> Respect for education and faith in the creative imagination as a sign of human worth are only two of many humanistic values that the guardians of Hailsham endorse. In search of a more just polity, the guardians denounce prejudice and inculcate principles of tolerance, sympathy for others, and humane treatment for all. Miss Emily, the former director of Hailsham, believes that her cause was just: "Together, we became a small but very vocal movement, and we challenged the entire way the donations programme was being run" (261). She urges that "Hailsham was considered a shining beacon, an example of how we might move to a more humane and a better way of doing things" (258) and that Kathy and Tommy have "turned out well" (256). She has sacrificed her own comfort and most of her possessions to the cause, and she is consoled by "the knowledge that we've given you better lives than you would have had otherwise" (265). In the end, however, her reformist movement racked up only isolated victories before being swept away by the negative wave of reaction to the Morningdale scandal. Whatever

successes she achieved were short lived and confined to the personal realm; they did not touch the material conditions of the clones' existence, whether political, economic, or biomedical. Structural change proved beyond Miss Emily's reach, perhaps even her imagination.

What do we make of the crushing failure of Miss Emily's liberal, reformist movement and the humanistic values that inform it? Shameem Black sees the failure of art and liberal reform as an indictment of humanism and Romantic conceptions of sympathy in favor of the more radical potential in posthumanism. Black writes, "the novel indicts humanist conceptions of art as a form of extraction that resembles forced organ donation" and "the concept of the soul invokes a fundamentally exploitative discourse of use value" (285). These contentions seem wrong to me, or at least overstated. Art as forced organ donation? The concept of the soul as an exploitative discourse of use value? Most readers' experience of the novel involves intense empathy for the humanity of Kathy and the other clones (Groes and Lewis 2). Like the Romantic predecessors to Ishiguro's characters from Frankenstein's creature onward, Kathy's painful growth to adulthood, poignant losses, and imminent death mobilize the repertoire of sympathetic response and gradual insight that is another strength of the realistic novel – mobilize it to impress us with her shared humanity.

Yet despite Black's overstatement, her larger point seems reasonable, that liberalism's answer to coercion is tainted by its acceptance of the values that determine who qualifies for rights – the values that determine the human. Invoking Giorgio Agamben's concept of "bare life," Black notes how the boundaries of Hailsham, a protective environment, are also depicted in terms that remind us of the Nazi concentration camps. Like the prisoners in those camps, the clones are stripped of "any forms of political identity [and] denuded of citizenship" (Black 789). I agree. Ishiguro's novel severely qualifies any simple affirmations of art, humanism, and the sympathetic imagination. The failure of these values to counter the dystopian conditions of a society that is all but identical to contemporary England represents a powerful critique of this belief.<sup>12</sup>

There is a difference between challenging a naïve faith in humanism, which is what I think the novel does, and abandoning the human as a measure of basic rights. Abandoning the human as a metric is an increasingly prominent ethical position, advocated in other contexts by writers such as Donna Haraway, Cary Wolfe, and Jane Bennett, but it is not a position this novel endorses. Nothing in the story suggests that the cloned organ donors are anything but profoundly human individuals, deserving of

the same human rights as all other people on the planet. Instead, Ishiguro's novel asks us to expand our conception of the human to encompass categories of people and states of being that have too often been excluded.

What *is* radical about *Never Let Me Go* is its critique of the institutions and safeguards of the modern state for having failed to prevent the exploitation of marginalized populations.<sup>13</sup> What is radical is the exposure of the subterfuges of biopower, which blind the beneficiaries of an immoral medical system to the inequities upon which that system depends. For better or worse, there is nothing posthuman about the clones in *Never Let Me Go*, only the sad spectacle of what can be done to those disempowered populations who have been made to seem less than human.

### Memory and Consolation

No aspect of *Never Let Me Go* highlights its vexed relationship to humanism more than the novel's treatment of memory. From the first moment when Kathy confesses that she has given in to her patients' frequent pleas that she tell stories about her childhood at Hailsham to the final paragraph when she closed her eyes and "imagined this was the spot where everything I'd ever lost since my childhood had washed up" (287), memory casts a melancholy, even elegiac tone over the book. Recollected in that strange tranquility that bewilders and intrigues so many readers, Kathy's memories serve as her sole consolation for all she has lost. Matthew Arnold saw Wordsworth's poetry of consolation as a source of his greatness, and the compensatory structure of Kathy's memories recalls that poet's most affecting passages.

Like Wordsworth, Kathy takes solace from the "memories [she] value[s] most" (*Never* 286). After all the deaths she has witnessed, she too finds "strength in what remains behind," in the "thoughts that spring / Out of human suffering" (Wordsworth, "Intimations Ode" ll. 185–88). Her memories take a "sober colouring from an eye" that has literally "kept watch o'er . . . mortality" ("Intimations Ode" ll. 201–2). "For such loss," Kathy believes, memory serves as "abundant recompense" ("Tintern Abbey," ll. 87–88). In perhaps her most poignant affirmation of the consoling power of memory, she insists, "I lost Ruth, then I lost Tommy, but I won't lose my memories of them. . . . I'll have Hailsham with me, safely in my head, and that'll be something no one can take away" (*Never* 286–87).

More than thirty years ago, in *Romantic Vision and the Novel*, I explored a compensatory structure common to Wordsworth, George Eliot, Dickens, and other Victorian novelists in which the loss of youthful

intensity is replaced by a “higher” state of consciousness. These authors – or their characters – accept this compensatory exchange as recompense for what they have left behind, but they understand that such acceptance does not cancel out loss. Rather, loss is enshrined in the act of memory that provides consolation. Recently, David James has noticed that several “prominent writers from recent decades” have begun to theorize consolation, “often in the most unlikely genres and forbidding scenarios” (486), including Cormac McCarthy’s postapocalyptic *The Road* (2006), W. G. Sebald’s postholocaust fiction *Austerlitz* (2001), and Ishiguro’s biodystopia. James notes that “the provision of solace in fiction can be coterminous with sorrow” (486), a paradox only partially explained by the bravery of acknowledging loss as the price of self-knowledge. Solace comes to the reader from understanding the loss as our own. Gerard Manly Hopkins gave expression to this insight in his beautiful, Wordsworthian poem about Margaret grieving over autumn leaves: “It is the blight man was born for / It is Margaret you mourn for” (“Spring and Fall,” ll. 14–15).

Three places focus *Never Let Me Go*’s elegiac power in the manner of Wordsworthian “spots of time”: Hailsham after it has been closed; a boat stranded in a field far from the sea; and a corner of Norfolk where the children pretend that all the things they have lost will one day be found. The memory of these spots flashes up unexpectedly from time to time, with startling power. “These moments hit me when I’m least expecting it, when I’m driving with something else entirely in my mind” (286). In Norfolk, she finds a copy of a cassette tape she had lost years before, and her emotions at this recovered piece of her childhood bring her the mingled pleasure and pain characteristic of Romantic melancholy. “Then suddenly I felt a huge pleasure – and something else, something more complicated that threatened to make me burst into tears” (172). The novel ends on another of these spots of time. Kathy stands before a windswept field in Norfolk and imagines that the rubbish tangled in a fence is where everything she has lost – her childhood and Ruth and Tommy – have come to rest. The first two times I read the novel, I found myself near tears at the end. “A good deal of fiction’s poignancy,” David James observes, “stems from its moving apprehension of what ultimately cannot be repaired” (484), words that nicely capture how *Never Let Me Go* intensifies the sense of our shared mortality. But Ishiguro turns away from pathos in the last sentence. Kathy straightens her back and returns to her car, “to drive off to wherever it was I was supposed to be” (Ishiguro 288).

The irony of these last few words underlines how thoroughly Kathy has internalized her professional obligations and speaks to her acceptance of

her own death as the price of that calling. Just as important, the irony marks a distance from Wordsworth, a shift in tone that is as crucial to the meaning of the novel as is its pervading melancholy. Acceptance of loss as the price of maturity may be the burden of famous works by both authors, but how different the weary phrase “supposed to be” sounds from Wordsworth’s ringing endorsement of a “faith that looks through death” in the final lines of the “Intimations Ode” (l. 189). This ironic tone in Ishiguro is characteristic of a larger pattern in his works of capitalizing on the formal and thematic resources of nineteenth-century literature while simultaneously questioning some of the assumptions that that tradition has perpetuated.

Take, for example, the frequent invocation of George Eliot and Charles Dickens in *Never Let Me Go*. Kathy dedicates her final school project to a study of the Victorian novel, focusing particularly on George Eliot’s *Daniel Deronda*, and readers have been struck by the significant parallels between Miss Emily, headmistress at Hailsham, and Miss Havisham in Dickens’s *Great Expectations*. The parallel becomes especially apparent during Miss Emily’s final appearance in the novel when her withered, wheelchair-bound form emerges from the shadows to justify her conduct to Kathy and Tom. Once again, however, the differences between Ishiguro’s novel and its predecessors are significant. At the end of *Great Expectations*, Pip demonstrates that he has put aside his childhood dreams and entered adulthood by embracing that most Victorian of all values, hard work. He dedicates himself faithfully to a career in the service of repaying his debts to his friend, Herbert Pocket, and gives up not only his former unrealistic dreams but also a family of his own. “I lived happily with Herbert and his wife,” Pip writes, “and lived frugally, and paid my debts, and maintained a constant correspondence with Bidley and Joe” (Dickens 489).

Dickens’s novel registers the sad diminishment of Pip’s expectations, but it does not turn aside from Victorian beliefs about the value of hard work, paying one’s way, and doing one’s duty. Instead, it sees the acceptance of loss as a sign of maturity. The satisfactions of fulfilling a professional vocation, however modest, are presented without irony, and the elegiac tones with which Pip remembers his foolish dreams and lost chance for love go uncontradicted in his final meeting with Estella, the woman around whom those dreams had revolved. The compensatory structure of Pip’s exchange of youthful hopes for mature self-knowledge is as clear in the concluding chapters of *Great Expectations* as it is in the final lines of Wordsworth’s “Tintern Abbey” and “Intimations Ode.” And the same

compensatory exchange structures the ending of *Never Let Me Go*. Only the last ironic line signals that Ishiguro means for us to question the trade-off that Kathy has accepted.

David James maintains that Kathy questions her own rationalizations, reinforcing the critical judgment that readers often make about Kathy's submission to the society she lives in. Grounding his reading in a discussion of description's power to contradict the explicit meaning of a passage, James argues that there are stylistic traces of "Kathy's apprehension of consolation as an illusion" (498). This seems right, especially when James adds that the novel's ending strengthens "our apprehensiveness about the gruesome destiny she's now set to fulfill" (498).

Where David James looks to description for traces of the "friction" between style and action (485), I want to turn to the novel's unusual point of view for insight into a related tension, that between irony and the author's affection for traditional realism. The novel's conversational first-person narrative addressed to an unnamed "you" is in essence an extended dramatic monologue, a colloquial version of the form Robert Browning introduced in the nineteenth century. In Browning's hands, the dramatic monologue forged a new mode of poetic realism, a lyrical narrative that led readers to sympathize with the subjective experience of the narrator even when they felt profoundly critical of his actions (remember the Duke's inadvertent revelation of his murderous jealousy in "My Last Duchess"). Robert Langbaum identified the tension between "sympathy and judgment" as the distinguishing characteristic of dramatic monologues – readers experience a pull between the sympathy the narrator evokes and their powers of critical judgment (75–108). Although Kathy's companionable voice does not resemble Browning's taut verse, the novel uses the dramatic monologue form to similar ends. It solicits our sympathy for Kathy while provoking us at every turn to wonder about the narrator's obvious evasions and suppression of self-knowledge. The narrative voice almost compels us to treat it symptomatically, to hear notes of critique in the very words that disavow it.

Observe, for example, the prominent use of deixis to smooth over the many temporal jumps in the story. "Deixis" is a lexical marker that points to a person, place, or time – a word or phrase that cannot be fully understood without reference to the speaker or listener: "I," "you," "here," "there," "then," and "now" are standard examples. Inevitably, deixis will have a special importance in dramatic monologues in which the reader overhears a speaker talking to a particular person. In *Never Let Me Go*, phrases such as "Looking back now" or "My memory of it" occur

throughout – I count more than twenty variants. References to Kathy’s listeners carry equal deictic force: versions of the phrase “I don’t know how it was where you were” occur often, implicating the unnamed listener (and momentarily, the reader) in the story being told. Deictic language plays an important role in autobiographical writings too, where it locates an event from the speaker’s life in relation to the moment of the telling. It anchors memory in relation to both past and present. In Ishiguro’s dramatic-monologue-as-*bildungsroman*, deixis is responsible as much as anything else for the prevailing mood of melancholy.

Yet deixis has a disruptive effect in a dramatic monologue that it does not possess in ordinary first- or third-person narrative. A phrase like “I don’t know how it was where you were” momentarily brings the reader up short, making us wonder if we are being addressed by the narrator. Anne Whitehead remarks: “Ishiguro’s use of second-person address throughout the novel, a device commonly used in Victorian fiction to enhance sympathetic connection . . . acts rather to unsettle the reader” (58). It “raises the question of the reader’s relation to the dystopic world that is depicted in the novel. Is Kathy addressing someone within her own world, or, finding no empathetic listener there, does she seek to bear witness to an unknown and unknowable future reader?” (Whitehead 73–74). This momentary confusion turns our judgment on biodystopia back on ourselves. *How is it where we are?* we ask, and the question prompts us to wonder whether the pleasures of realism have led us to overlook inquiries we ought to pursue – inquiries not only about the novel we are reading but about our own world.

To come to terms with Kathy’s society, we must come to terms with the voice of the character it has forged. In a novel where the point of view has been shaped by the conditions of abjection, the pull between sympathy and judgment becomes acute. We might say that the novel has found an ideal voice for biodystopia. The critical force of the genre is simultaneously displaced and channeled through the text’s odd repetitions, preternatural calm, and idiomatic phrasing. In a similar way, the tension between the pleasures of nineteenth-century realism and the irony about what those pleasures encode is rendered equally acute.

### Time and Sorrow

Every sorrow has its own time signature. Some are short and sharp. These concentrate the present, blotting out any thought of a future without pain. Others prolong the present, stretching it out into what seems an

interminable *durée*. Still others deepen the present moment, binding it to a cherished past and infusing it with borrowed meaning. This last is the sorrow that underwrites Kathy's memoir.

In the nineteenth century, this sorrow went by the name of Romantic melancholy. Its compensatory structure still had the power to console, braced as it was by self-recognition in Wordsworth, George Eliot, Hopkins, and the late Dickens. Knowledge of the diminishment of life's expectations was the sorrow these authors were willing to bear for the growth of a writer's mind. But if Romantic melancholy can now seem maudlin or self-pitying, it is because the Romantics seemed to be mourning themselves as they remembered their past. We miss the irony with which Ishiguro chastens his characters' sorrow.

For most of my life, this kind of sorrow has bound our collective present to a planetary future we wanted to avoid but feared we could not. During the Cold War, it was fear of nuclear holocaust and an end that Jonathan Schell memorably captured in his book on nuclear winter. Today, this future is mostly associated with ecological disasters consequent on climate change. It is not the present we mourn for but the future our children may not have. Or if we mourn the present, it is a present that encompasses past and future as well, a swollen, guilt-stained, accusatory present, implicated in all the misdeeds of the era we have come to call the Anthropocene and shadowed by all the extinctions to come. But the vast temporal apprehensions of climate change are not the form sorrow takes in Ishiguro's novel. Just as Romantic melancholy is banished by irony, so large-scale planetary concerns are set aside by the intimate proportions of this *bildungsroman*.

The concept of genome time is an appropriate way to understand the short, sad lives of these genetic creations, the clones, made only to give up their bodies for others. Their sorrow is one that all creatures share, the sorrow of mortality, yet it is expressed differently in every person's life. The personal scale of a life-form shaped by biotechnology, of memories that will be "lost like tears in the rain,"<sup>14</sup> is well served by a spatiotemporal image that begins at the nanoscale and extends to all life-forms on the planet – perhaps most of all, to each of us. Ishiguro hardly refers to science at all, but the metaphor of the genome, shared by us all as our inheritance and our legacy, infinite yet unique, common as mortality yet exceptional in every case, encapsulates the sorrow this novel evokes.