



Review: *Never Let Me Go* by Kazuo Ishiguro

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Never Let Me Go

Kazuo Ishiguro

272 pp / Faber and Faber (2005) / £16.99

Review by Eli Park Sørensen

The Lost Corner of England

The narrative potential of memory informs much of Kazuo Ishiguro's *oeuvre*. His latest novel, *Never Let Me Go*, uses memory in new and masterful ways. As with Ishiguro's earlier works of fiction, *Never Let Me Go* constructs a narrow, isolated universe, the character of which is conveyed through subtle inference rather than concrete explication. The narrative, framed as a product of retrospection, is a melancholic longing for the irrevocable. Although time, place, and narrative position are specified early in the novel, an atmosphere of uncertainty emerges from the crevice between the told and the untold.

Never Let Me Go is about the inevitable narrowing of possibility. The main characters of the book are clones who exist only to donating their organs to humans. Their lives are prescribed, their time is short, and their 'choices' are two: become donors and 'complete' (that is, die), or become 'carers' for donors — and then donate and complete themselves.

Little is revealed about the regime in charge of the clones and there is no direct commentary on the ethical meanings of their system. Instead, Ishiguro's crisp and restrained prose creates a dream-like *nachträglich* series of fragmented and frozen images which are tied together by the narrative of a fragile subjectivity.

We follow Kathy, who, like Mr Stevens in *The Remains of the Day* (1989), travels solitary internal roads that seem to lead further and further into the treacherous landscape of memory. Looking back on her life, she remembers her adolescent years at the boarding school Hailsham, where she met Tommy and Ruth. Years later, when she has become a 'carer' for the donating clones, Kathy is reunited with Tommy and Ruth, who have become donors. The retrospective narrative begins at the point when Ruth and Tommy have 'completed' and Kathy herself is about to become a donor.

Recollections of Hailsham play a central part in the story because the boarding school in itself *is* the sign of Kathy's memory. Unlike other places, Hailsham focuses on its students' artistic skills and creative capabilities. By depicting the 'humanity' of the clones, the narrative expresses the 'inhumanity' of society. Kathy remembers how their paintings were collected and taken away, seemingly so that other people could study the nature of their souls. She recalls how Kathy and Tommy used their paintings to convince their superiors of their love — and thus be allowed to postpone

donation — but their optimism is clouded by the impossible bleakness of their situation.

Kathy's memories of a period when possibilities and dreams existed — even though these dreams were always already futile — brings to *Never Let me Go* a genuine, and universal, sense of loss.