

Repression and Displacement in Kazuo Ishiguro's *When We Were Orphans* and
Never Let Me Go

by

Emily Cappel

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For my mother and father

and for John

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Abstract

This thesis is a psychological reading of two novels by Japanese-born British author Kazuo Ishiguro: *When We Were Orphans* (2000) and *Never Let Me Go* (2005). In particular, it examines the ways in which repression and displacement, themes often cited in Ishiguro's earlier works, are represented with increasing sophistication and complexity in these novels. Repression and displacement plague the narrators of Ishiguro's four previous books. In *When We Were Orphans* and *Never Let Me Go*, these two conditions influence not only the narrators, but their supporting characters, the novels' settings, and the way a reader interprets each story.

The introduction lays out the precedent for reading Ishiguro psychologically. My model is the criticism of Brian W. Shaffer and Barry Lewis, two of Ishiguro's most renowned scholars. Shaffer concerns himself largely with repression in Ishiguro's novels, Lewis with displacement. Both offer definitions of repression and displacement, largely Freudian, which I expand for my own reading to include meanings beyond the psychological realm. My understanding of repression includes its pre-Freud meaning of holding back or suppressing a person, not just a memory or desire. Displacement I take to mean any physical moving-out-of-place that results in a cognitive feeling-out-of-place. This introduction also relates Shaffer's and Lewis's most compelling arguments, as well as the plots of Ishiguro's four earlier novels.

My first chapter examines *When We Were Orphans*. Its narrator, Christopher Banks, moves from Shanghai to England at age nine, in 1911. The resulting cultural displacement he experiences drives him to attempt to recreate his childhood home. He represses certain memories of this home so he can believe it was happy, and that retrieving it will assuage his displacement. Additionally, I argue that Christopher's occupation as a gentleman detective allows a reading of the novel as part of the detective fiction genre. In including elements of mystery fiction in the otherwise purely literary fiction of *When We Were Orphans*, Ishiguro creates eerily dream-like surroundings for Christopher. The imperialist politics of 1930s England that emerge through Christopher's fellow characters further contribute to the strangeness of his world. Reading the novel as an example of the detective genre, and with political themes, supports an expanded psychological reading, in which Christopher's environment exhibits repression and displacement.

In Chapter Two, I discuss *Never Let Me Go*. The protagonist, Kathy H., is a clone. By reading her narrative, we displace it from its intended audience (clones in an alternate reality) to our own world. As a narrative displaced from Kathy's alternate world, *Never Let Me Go* feels to its readers like science fiction. Its two most "science fictional" elements (clones and an omnipotent, big-brotherish government) each exhibit a form of repression: psychological repression in the clones' case, social in the government's. The novel retains a convincingly, almost disturbingly, realistic atmosphere, because the repression that makes Ishiguro's cloned characters seem so mechanical ultimately proves to be a mark of their humanity.

My concluding remarks address the similarity of themes throughout Ishiguro's novels and the critical reactions to it. I argue that *When We Were Orphans* and *Never Let Me Go* represent a break with Ishiguro's earlier works, as his two most strongly "genred" novels, and as narratives that deepen and complicate the recurrent themes of repression and displacement.

Contents

Short Titles	i
Introduction	1
Chapter One: <i>When We Were Orphans</i>	10
Chapter Two: <i>Never Let Me Go</i>	36
Conclusion.....	57
Works Consulted.....	62

Short Titles

NLMG: Ishiguro, Kazuo. *Never Let Me Go*. London: Faber and Faber, 2005; New York: Knopf, 2005. Page references are to the Knopf edition.

WWWO: Ishiguro, Kazuo. *When We Were Orphans*. London: Faber and Faber, 2000. Reprint, New York: Vintage, 2001. Page references are to the 2001 edition.

Introduction

From the publication of his first novel in 1982, Kazuo Ishiguro has excited great interest in the literary community. Having prior to that date published only three short stories, the Japanese-born British author's *A Pale View of Hills* received remarkable recognition for a first novel, winning the Winifred Holtby Prize and widely favorable reviews. In the ensuing twenty-seven years, Ishiguro has written two more short stories, four screenplays, the lyrics for several jazz songs, and five additional novels.¹ His newest work, a story cycle entitled *Nocturnes: Five Stories of Music and Nightfall*, will be released on May 5 of this year. His novels in particular have inspired a significant body of literary criticism. Amidst the articles, dissertations, and chapters are two books that have established a psychological framework for analyzing Ishiguro's work: Barry Lewis's *Kazuo Ishiguro* and Brian W. Shaffer's *Understanding Kazuo Ishiguro*.²

I will draw from both Lewis and Shaffer as I discuss Ishiguro's two most recent novels to date: *When We Were Orphans* and *Never Let Me Go*. From their largely psychological analyses I take my two key terms: repression and displacement. In examining the relevance of these two themes to *When We Were Orphans* and *Never Let Me Go*, I build upon Shaffer's and Lewis's analyses, while creating my own psychological reading of the two novels.

As Brian Shaffer says in the introduction to *Understanding Kazuo Ishiguro*, Ishiguro's first four novels are "hauntingly evocative, psychologically compelling" works (2). Shaffer reads Ishiguro with an eye to unearthing the mental defense mechanisms so prevalent among his characters. As Shaffer's work reveals, the question to ask of

¹ A complete listing of these works appears in the "Works Consulted" section of this thesis.

² Lewis, *Kazuo Ishiguro* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000); Shaffer, *Understanding Kazuo Ishiguro* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1998). Both hereafter cited in the text.

Ishiguro's characters is not *whether* they are repressing information. Every Ishiguro narrator "has something to hide, from themselves no less than from their readers" (6-7). More illuminating is to ask *what* the narrator is concealing, and how that affects the story he or she is telling. In discussing Ishiguro's first four novels, Shaffer uncovers the protagonists' secrets, the reasons they were rationalized, denied, and repressed, and the effect those secrets have on the protagonists' narratives.

Shaffer begins with an analysis of Ishiguro's first novel, *A Pale View of Hills*. The novel's narrator, a Japanese woman named Etsuko, lived in Japan with her first husband until shortly after WWII, but now lives in England with her second husband, Mr. Sheringham. At the novel's outset, Niki (Etsuko's daughter by her second husband), has just visited. Etsuko relates this visit, and the recollections it prompts of a long ago summer in Nagasaki, when Etsuko was pregnant with Keiko (her daughter by her first husband). Shaffer begins by pointing out Etsuko's hints that her "marriage to Jiro [her first husband] was unhappy" (13). He makes no mention of repression yet, but notes Etsuko's tendency not to state unpleasant things openly. Later, he points out Etsuko's express desire not to dwell in the past (in spite of her doing just that) as a sign that she is "overcome with a painful past and sense of personal failure that she attempts, sometimes successfully and sometimes not, to repress" (16). For Shaffer, Etsuko's true story exists *behind* the one she tells, "expressed 'by the way' and tacitly" (17). The bulk of Etsuko's recollections concern the friendship she developed that summer with a woman named Sachiko and Sachiko's daughter, Mariko. Shaffer draws numerous parallels between this relationship and Etsuko's own with Keiko, asserting that Sachiko and Mariko actually are Etsuko and Keiko, "individuals onto whom Etsuko can project her own guilt for neglecting and abusing Keiko" (21). Keiko has recently committed suicide, and Etsuko

represses her fear that she caused the suicide until it can emerge only “via Etsuko’s repressed, projected, and rationalized tale of Sachiko and Mariko” (23). The bulk of the novel, then, concerns the way Etsuko’s repressed guilt manifests itself in her consciousness.

In his subsequent chapters, Shaffer follows similar methods. Ishiguro’s second novel, *An Artist of the Floating World*, tells the story of a Japanese painter, Masuji Ono, as he attempts to find contentment for himself and his daughters in the aftermath of WWII. Ono ignores hints from his daughters and conveniently misremembers significant conversations until his story becomes a jumble of half-truths and bluster aimed to disguise his fear that his career was meaningless. For Shaffer, the whole novel is Ono’s “attempt to establish his own artistic significance” (59).

In Ishiguro’s most celebrated novel, *The Remains of the Day*, the narrator Mr. Stevens has been the butler of an English country house since the 1920s, and frequently recalls earlier days, though an American now owns the manor and the year is 1956. For most readers, Stevens’ “repression is difficult to miss” (64). Consequently, Shaffer concerns himself with “the myriad ways in which Stevens *conceals* his striking sexual and political disengagement” behind “the garb of ‘professional dignity’” (64-5). For example, Stevens stops meeting Miss Kenton, the housekeeper and the woman he loves, for cocoa in the evenings because it detracts from the sleep they both need to run the house. He carries out the anti-Semitic instructions of his employer, never mentioning that he disagrees with them, because to do otherwise would be poor service. Stevens takes the reserve expected of good butlers to extremes, applying it to his personal as well as his professional life.

The last novel Shaffer treats, *The Unconsoled*, is Ishiguro's longest and strangest work. A massive volume chronicling the visit Mr. Ryder, a world-famous pianist, makes to an unnamed central European city, *The Unconsoled* teems with inexplicably effusive characters (like the bellhop who divulges his entire life story to Ryder in an elevator), dream-like encounters (as when Ryder meets an old school friend in the foreign city's back alleys), and impossible configurations of space and time (Ryder's hotel is somehow connected to an art gallery it took hours to reach by car). In Shaffer's analysis, Ryder suffered an unhappy childhood, and "developed various coping skills, among them repression, to help him "forget," yet also capitalize on, his earlier traumatic experiences" (104). Ryder represses the fact that his parents are indifferent to him. He talks as if they loved him, but simultaneously seeks to earn their affection. He contradicts himself just as Ishiguro, by filling Ryder's narrative with impossible events, contradicts reality. Repression goes on to play a key role in Ishiguro's two novels published after Shaffer's book: *When We Were Orphans* and *Never Let Me Go*.

It is during his analysis of *The Remains of the Day* that Shaffer articulates a definition of repression. He does so in Sigmund Freud's words, calling it "a device protecting 'the mental personality,' by which 'forgotten memories' or 'intolerable wishes' are originally 'pushed' out of 'consciousness.'"³ One of Freud's earlier lectures contains his most famous explanation of repression, words that *A Dictionary of Psychology* recognizes as "frequently quoted" and that Shaffer cites on page 68: "*The essence of repression lies simply in turning something away, and keeping it at a distance,*

³ Freud, *Five Lectures on Psycho-analysis* (New York: Norton, 1961), 21-22, quoted in Shaffer, *Understanding Kazuo Ishiguro*, 68.

from the conscious.”⁴ Shaffer uses this Freudian understanding of repression throughout his book, to explain not just the way Stevens handles his attraction to Miss Kenton (68), but Etsuko’s attempts to hide her sense of personal failure (16) and Ono’s selective memory (43).

Indeed, Shaffer unearths a plethora of convincing examples of Freudian repression in Ishiguro’s first four novels. But because approximate understandings of Freud’s work on repression are so widespread, a strictly Freudian approach is not the only one to take when reading the work of a non-psychologist. After all, Ishiguro describes himself as concerned with “the language of self-deception,” the way people try “to manipulate memories,” and “the justification process that takes place inside people’s minds.”⁵ Ishiguro’s books are about how *he* thinks people repress information, not necessarily about how Freud thinks they do it. I will depart from Shaffer in undertaking my reading with an expanded understanding of repression, one Freudian-derived but not strictly Freudian.

It is worth noting that “repression” was not always a psychological buzzword. To repress can mean to hold back or suppress things other than memories and desires, for instance, people.⁶ In addition to the Freudian-inspired psychological understanding of repression that I employ throughout my thesis, I bring this more general meaning of repression to bear on my reading of *Never Let Me Go*, in which I make a case for the presence of political repression, or oppression.

⁴ *A Dictionary of Psychology*, 2nd ed., ed. Andrew M. Colman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), s.v. “repression”; Sigmund Freud, *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1957), 14:147. Italics in original.

⁵ The first two quotations in this sentence appear in Gregory Mason’s “An Interview with Kazuo Ishiguro” (1986), in *Conversations with Kazuo Ishiguro*, ed. Brian W. Shaffer and Cynthia F. Wong (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2008), 5. The third quotation appears in an interview by Suanne Kelman, “Ishiguro in Toronto” (1989), also in *Conversations*, 45.

⁶ *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed, s.v. “repress, v¹” 2b, 4a.

In 2000, two years after Shaffer's book came out, Barry Lewis published his own inclusive study of Ishiguro's works: *Kazuo Ishiguro*. Like Shaffer, Lewis devotes a chapter to each of Ishiguro's first four novels, but adds a postscript on *When We Were Orphans*.⁷ Lewis understands Ishiguro's fiction "through the optic of displacement" (2). For Lewis, displacement is akin to homelessness and is the opposite of dignity, since "to be dignified is to be 'at home' with oneself and one's circumstances. To have dignity is to be correctly placed *vis-à-vis* your self demands and the expectations of others" (2). In Ishiguro's first five novels, Lewis sees a conflict between feeling homeless (displacement) and being "at home" (dignity) (3). Lewis supplies additional meanings for displacement also relevant to Ishiguro's fiction, and these, like the definitions of repression, fall into both psychological and colloquial categories.

Within the colloquial realm, displacement can denote several things. Its most typical meaning is "Removal of a thing from its place; putting out of place; shifting, dislocation."⁸ It is in this sense that displacement is used to describe exiled persons. It also connotes replacement. But like the word repression, Freud turned displacement into a psychological term when, as Lewis notes, he chose it "to designate the dream-process that diverts the attention of the psyche away from potentially damaging material." Thus "fears and forbidden desires are masked by their association with relatively trifling symbols, objects or situations" (Lewis 16). More clearly, displacement names "the transfer of feelings or behavior from their original object to another person or thing."⁹ Thus an angry child might lash out at a sibling instead of its father (*APA*). Essentially,

⁷ *When We Were Orphans* did not appear until two years after Shaffer's book was published.

⁸ *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed, vol. 4, s.v. "displacement," quoted in Lewis 16.

⁹ *APA Dictionary of Psychology*, ed. Gary R. Vandenbos (Washington: APA, 2007), s.v. "displacement." Hereafter cited in the text.

“displaced” is the word Freud uses to describe misdirected feelings, and that laymen use to describe anything in any way out of place.

Lewis begins his analysis with *A Pale View of Hills*, which contains “the geographical displacement of Etsuko from Japan to England; the cognitive displacement induced by Etsuko’s memories; the psychological displacement between herself and Sachiko; and the familial displacement precipitated by the suicide of Keiko” (Lewis 27). Etsuko’s “geographical displacement” is readily understood; here displacement is used colloquially and means dislocation. The “cognitive displacement induced by Etsuko’s memories” refers to the reader’s confusion about whether Sachiko and Mariko are real or fantasy. The “psychological displacement” between Etsuko and Sachiko describes Etsuko’s habit of attributing thoughts and actions to Sachiko, then later revealing that they applied to her, not Sachiko. “Familial displacement” describes the breaking up of Etsuko’s family by death and distance. Together, the various displacements create for Lewis a number of ways to interpret the novel: Etsuko could be confusing memories, blending memory with fantasy, or projecting her guilt about making Keiko move to England onto a related situation that could be either memory or fantasy (36).

Lewis represents *An Artist of the Floating World* as a novel whose plot is the displaced sub-plot of *A Pale View of Hills* (an artist struggles with guilt over his past propagandist art), which also contains many displaced components of Ishiguro’s earlier short story “Summer After The War,” about a boy whose grandfather painted posters for the Japanese government during WWII (Lewis 48-9). In his discussion of *The Remains of the Day*, Lewis notes Stevens displacing his real feelings and undergoing a displacement of identity as he strives for dignity, which Lewis, as noted above, calls the opposite of displacement (84, 89). *The Unconsoled*, Lewis explains, is the story of a man

living within a dream (124). Using Freud's concept of displacement, Lewis explains many of the novel's seemingly inexplicable events as displacements of Ryder's anxieties. In just these three examples, we see displacement describing recycled plot elements, mistaken identity, and Freudian dream theory. As Lewis's work illustrates, analyzing displacement presents a problem: "displacement" can refer to so many different situations that its psychological sense, of misdirected feelings, is often lost as the word gets used to describe any sort of mental confusion or physical movement.

In my analysis of *When We Were Orphans* and *Never Let Me Go*, I assign displacement a hybrid meaning, blending both colloquial and psychological aspects. In my understanding, displacement refers to a physical moving-out-of-place that results in a cognitive feeling-out-of-place. Thus, when Christopher Banks, narrator of *When We Were Orphans*, moves from Shanghai to England it is not displacement. It is relocation. But moving from Shanghai to England *displaces* Christopher because its result is to alter his psyche and make him feel uncomfortable. Moreover, displacement in this sense often leads to further psychological consequences, such as repression. Such trajectories beg to be examined in a psychological reading.

The first chapter of this thesis, on *When We Were Orphans*, comprises two sections. In the first, I argue that Ishiguro creates a sense of temporal displacement in his reader to mirror Christopher's displacement, both cultural and familial. Familial displacement drives Christopher to become a detective. Cultural displacement prevents him from feeling at home in England. In an attempt to assuage his displacement, he represses unsatisfactory memories of his childhood home, making himself think he has a past that, if he can reclaim it, will make him feel happy and placed.

In the second section, I examine two other possible readings of *When We Were Orphans*, both of which influence a psychological reading: as a study in genre and as politically themed. Christopher operates within a world that shifts between realism and fantasy throughout the novel. Part of his world's strangeness arises from the traditional elements of detective fiction that Ishiguro displaces from the mystery genre and adapts for the literary fiction of *When We Were Orphans*. For example, Christopher uses his magnifying glass until he resembles a caricature more than an actual detective. In doing so, he adds to the case for his psychological oddness. His supporting characters contribute to the feeling that all is not right in this novel, for they assign him unrealistic importance on the world stage. Their fantasies come from the fact that they are acting out England's political stance at that time.

In Chapter Two, on *Never Let Me Go*, I begin where I ended my discussion of *When We Were Orphans*: with questions about genre. As a narrative displaced from Kathy's alternate reality, *Never Let Me Go* has the otherworldly feel of science fiction, even before anyone reveals that the main characters are clones. The novel's two most "science fictional" elements (clones and an omnipotent, big-brotherish government) each exhibit a form of repression: psychological repression in the clones' case, social in the government's. The novel retains a convincingly, almost disturbingly, realistic atmosphere, largely because the repression that makes Ishiguro's cloned characters seem so mechanical ultimately proves to be a mark of their humanity.

My concluding remarks address the similarity of themes throughout Ishiguro's novels and the critical reactions to it. I argue that *When We Were Orphans* and *Never Let Me Go* represent a break with Ishiguro's earlier works, as his two most strongly "genred" novels, and as narratives that deepen and complicate the recurrent themes of repression and displacement.

Ishiguro's fifth novel, *When We Were Orphans*, tells the story of detective Christopher Banks as he pursues his lifelong quest to find his missing mother and father. Born in Shanghai's International Settlement to two English parents, Christopher lives there until age nine, when his father and then his mother mysteriously disappear within a few weeks of each other. In the absence of his parents, Christopher is shipped to England to live with his aunt. He completes school there and becomes a gentleman detective, earning considerable renown. Apart from solving several high-profile cases, he develops a relationship with London socialite Sarah Hemmings and adopts an orphan named Jennifer. Throughout these years, Christopher maintains the desire to find his parents. In his thirties, he returns to Shanghai to look for them and finds himself in the middle of the Second Sino-Japanese War. Despite the chaos, Christopher is eventually able to discover his parents' fates, and the novel closes with Christopher, now nearing sixty, looking back on his life and his search.

Ishiguro begins *When We Were Orphans* by creating a sense of temporal displacement in his reader. He locates Christopher's narrative in a particular time, then moves it to another in such a way as to leave his reader with the unbalanced feeling that is a hallmark of displacement. The text begins with a heading, locating a reader firmly within the novel's physical layout and the story's fictional space and time: it is "Part One: London, 24th July 1930." But turn the page and read Christopher's first words: "It was the summer of 1923, the summer I came down from Cambridge, when..." (*WWWO* 3). The reader finds herself in a story seven years earlier than the one she thought she was entering. It is page 37 before Christopher describes "yesterday evening" (July the 23rd). No sooner does he complete that anecdote then it is "Part Two: London, 15th May 1931,"

the first page of which describes Christopher's six-year-old self in 1907 Shanghai.¹⁰ Christopher has yet to relate an event that actually takes place during the day indicated by the section headings. Only in the rare instances when Christopher calls attention to himself as the "rememberer" with words like "'looking back now" (24) or "looking back today" (56) does a reader find herself located in the place and time that the section headings promise. In Part Six, Christopher's narrative finally catches up with the headings, but when a reader first meets him, Christopher's narrative is a displaced one, in the sense that the events he relates are removed from their proper place in the past and presented in such lengthy flashbacks that many are easily mistaken for present-day events. Christopher's past often feels like a displaced present, his present like a displaced past.

Consequently, Christopher's reader, no less than Christopher himself, often feels like a displaced person, seldom finding herself in the time periods Christopher's narrative leads her to expect. For these misleading headings seem to be Christopher's handiwork. The memories recorded on the first seventy pages result from Christopher "[sitting] down...to gather in some sort of order these things [he] still remembers" (70). At one point, he deems a certain encounter "perhaps worth mentioning here" (23). The act of sitting suggests a desk, and indicating a place (here) instead of a time (now) for confiding information implies lines on a page. Yet Christopher never says outright he's writing his story down. Indeed, if he is keeping a diary, his entries are extraordinarily long (London, 15th May 1931 is close to eighty pages), and his acknowledgments of himself as the writer few. After page 70, even suggestions of journaling disappear. Taken as a part of Christopher's narrative, the headings are an innocent indication of when he's penning

¹⁰ Christopher never supplies his date of birth. I have estimated the dates of critical events based on the facts that he is nine years old in the autumn before his father's disappearance (85), and graduates from Cambridge in 1923, when he is around twenty-one or twenty-two (17).

several years' worth of memories. Taken as orientation from Ishiguro, the headings are a clever method of placing a reader in the mental situation later revealed to be Christopher's: always thinking one has the measure of a situation, but never being entirely correct.

Diana Postlethwaite falls into Ishiguro's trap when she writes that "One day (24 July 1930, we're quite precisely informed), Christopher Banks runs into a casual acquaintance from his university days."¹¹ On the contrary, we have been quite precisely misinformed. Christopher meets his acquaintance not on 24 July 1930, as the section heading suggests, but some time during the summer of 1923, as his first words casually indicate. Ishiguro blurs the boundaries dividing the past from the present until it is difficult to distinguish between the two. As Brian Finney notes, Ishiguro uses "narrative structure to uncover the structure of the narrator's unconscious," for as the story progresses, Christopher tries harder and harder to relive his childhood, confusing the distinctions between his own past and present.¹² That today and yesterday are often indistinct in Christopher's narrative not only reflects his psychological struggle, but also Ishiguro's attempt to put a reader in Christopher's shoes. Thanks to the narrative's misleading headings and "non-chronological sequence" (Finney 148), Christopher's reader experiences the temptation that Christopher eventually succumbs to, of calling what is present, past and what is past, present.

Christopher attempts to recreate his past because of the displacement he suffers in his present. Having moved from Shanghai to England at age nine, Christopher feels a persistent sense of cultural displacement in his new country, not unlike what Mariko fears and Keiko experiences in *A Pale View of Hills*. Christopher's discomfort is evident in his

¹¹ Diana Postlethwaite, "Fiction in Review," *The Yale Review* 89, no. 2 (2001): 164.

¹² Brian Finney, "Kazuo Ishiguro: *When We Were Orphans*," in *English Fiction Since 1984: Narrating a Nation*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 148. Hereafter cited in the text.

exaggerated attempts to fit in to English society. In his early twenties, he encounters his old school friend, James Osbourne, while out on a walk, and invites Osbourne back to his flat for tea. Christopher's flat is one he has "chosen with some care" and is convinced will "win the approval of any visitor" (*WWWO* 3, 4). It is the "unhurried Victorian" furnishings Christopher so admires and the Queen Anne tea service he purchases to impress guests that prompt Shao-Pin Luo to remark on the "constructedness" of Christopher's flat, which "is also reflective of Banks's carefully preserved English identity."¹³

Christopher begins creating this identity as a boy in Shanghai, when he asks permission to copy his Uncle Philip in hopes of learning the English way of doing things. He adds to it when he arrives in England at age nine and mimics the gestures and mannerisms of other boys at school, convinced he also understands the deeper workings of his new environment (Luo 65). As an adult, Christopher enjoys "the London parks, the quiet of the Reading Room at the British Museum...the streets of Kensington" (*WWWO* 3). Though in appearances he is every inch the Englishman, Christopher's desperate concern that Osbourne think him settled implies he doesn't really feel at home at all. He resembles the nomadic Ryder in *The Unconsoled*, anxious to please any inhabitant of his host city. Why would someone confident of his status in a society worry so much about the impression his living space gives? Eager as a child to fit in, eager as an adult to impress, Christopher never loses the feeling that England is foreign territory. He admits much later that "all these years I've lived in England, I've never really felt at home there. The International Settlement. That will always be my home" (274). Throughout his adult life the sense of "belonging" only in Shanghai haunts him.

¹³ Shao-Pin Luo, "Living the Wrong Life": Kazuo Ishiguro's Unconsoled Orphans," *The Dalhousie Review* 83, no. 1 (2003): 64. Hereafter cited in the text.

In addition to the cultural displacement Christopher feels at being transplanted from the melting pot of the International Settlement, full of “Chinese, French, Germans, Americans, what have you” (79), to the culturally homogenous England, he suffers familial displacement. As Lewis notes, *A Pale View of Hills*’s Etsuko suffers “familial displacement” when her family members begin to die and move away (27). Christopher experiences a similar psychological upset when his parents disappear. His mother and father were a large part of what made him feel at home in Shanghai, and their loss contributes to his inability to feel settled in England. Upon arriving at his aunt’s, he makes no new friends, but spends “much of [his] first few weeks” alone, reenacting the detective scenarios he and his best friend Akira played at in Shanghai (*WWWO* 11). These games centered around finding Christopher’s recently disappeared father. Christopher retains this desire to become a detective, though his school friends mock him for it (9-10). He grows up to become a detective, at one point calling his career “hardly the whim of a moment. It’s a calling [he’s] felt [his] whole life” (17). Even the man to whom Christopher makes this declaration thinks it’s an “idealistic notion.” Christopher’s displacement in British society persists in part because he wants to be a detective, and he wants to be a detective in order to assuage the familial displacement he experienced as a child.

Christopher’s lost mother and father remain influential throughout Christopher’s adulthood, their absence deciding his profession and what he remembers of their presence dictating his professional actions. Like Stevens, who takes his butler father as a model, Christopher recalls his parents for inspiration, though they were not detectives. He settles (at least superficially) in to London society, for his detective work earns him great renown. But when the excitement of high society threatens to distract Christopher from

his work, he recalls “the example set by [his] parents” to strengthen his resolve (22). His “intention [is] to combat evil—in particular, evil of the insidious, furtive kind” (23). Christopher suspects Uncle Philip, the Banks family’s trusted and respected friend, was secretly involved in his mother’s disappearance, providing a perfect example of insidious and furtive evil. Unlike Stevens, whose professional pride becomes in certain instances “a displacement of his personal loss” (Lewis 84), Christopher chases professional achievement to soothe his sense of not belonging.¹⁴ He dedicates his whole career to eradicating the kind of evil that took his family and left him displaced.

Though British society stops doubting Christopher’s career choice once he becomes successful, his unease in England continues throughout his life. Christopher deals with his cultural and familial displacement primarily through repression. He never says it aloud, but he wishes to be restored to his childhood, where he was comfortably placed in his family and the comfortable surroundings of the International Settlement. As Finney points out, “childhood becomes associated with Shanghai’s International Settlement” where the young Christopher felt “protected in this privileged enclave” (141). Christopher not only seeks to regain his childish feeling of safety, he wants to reclaim his exact childhood: parents, house, furnishings and all, or as Ishiguro puts it, “to set the clock back.”¹⁵ His apartment reveals this unvoiced longing. Not only does the furniture he likes so much evoke a “Victorian past,” it evokes his own. Christopher describes his childhood home in Shanghai as situated on a “carefully tended ‘English’

¹⁴ Finney likens Christopher to “the immigrant” who, like “the grown up child longs to win the approval of the parental imago left behind” (141). That Ishiguro is an immigrant whose transnational identity has similarities to several of his narrators’, including Christopher’s, receives frequent critical attention. Examples include Yasue Arimitsu’s “Diaspora and Identity: A Comparative Study of Brian Castro and Kazuo Ishiguro,” which discusses Ishiguro’s heritage in relation to *When We Were Orphans*, and Lewis’s *Kazuo Ishiguro*, which consistently probes the question of whether Ishiguro’s characters’ displacements reflect his own.

¹⁵ Kazuo Ishiguro, interview by Brian W. Shaffer, “An Interview with Kazuo Ishiguro” (2001) in *Conversations* (see introduction, note 5), 163. Hereafter cited in the text as (Shaffer, “An Interview”).

lawn...the house itself, a huge white edifice with numerous wings and trellised balconies” (*WWWO* 53). This part of his childhood was English, and once in England, striving for the “English” living quarters described above offers Christopher social repute and mental comfort simultaneously. Christopher’s Shanghai house contained a “heavy oak cabinet” around which he and his friend Akira often played (60), and the “library” where he did his homework, “an anteroom whose walls happened to be lined with books” (72). Not in a position to afford his own house full of antiques and anterooms, the adult Christopher makes do, choosing for himself an apartment with “an antique sideboard and an oak bookshelf filled with crumbling encyclopaedias,” which create the Victorian atmosphere he is so proud of (4). He recreates his past in order to satisfy a repressed longing to return to it.

It’s no coincidence that Christopher describes his mother, the central figure throughout his recollections, as “a beauty in an older, Victorian tradition” (58). In a comforting loop, his furniture reminds him of his old home, which reminds him of his mother, who reminds him of the Victorian aesthetic, which reminds him of his furniture. Exiled from his home and mother, wishing to return to a childhood impossible to recreate, Christopher represses that desire until he no longer recognizes it, but it emerges in his chosen surroundings.

Christopher’s penchant for the childish comes out in his chosen companions as well, namely Sarah Hemmings. Though she played no role in his Shanghai past, she too likes to relive moments of her childhood during her adulthood. It is on the occasions she does this that Christopher finds her most attractive. When he first meets her, he does “not think her at all pretty,” and sees hints of her ruthless, mercenary nature (15). He warms toward her when he finds her in tears over her mother, who died when Sarah was young

(68). Christopher understands what it is like to miss one's mother. Sarah tells him she and her mother spent a lot of time riding busses for fun, so Christopher suggests they ride one together. It is while reenacting this youthful pastime of Sarah's, during which she displays "a childish delight," that Christopher lets down his guard and talks about his childhood friend Akira (69-70). Afterward, Christopher finds himself "surprised and slightly alarmed" at their conversation, since he has never "spoken to anyone about the past in all the time [he has] been in this country...[and] certainly never intended to start doing so today" (71). Christopher attributes this unexpected confession to an increasing preoccupation with his memories, but why does he choose Sarah Hemmings as his confidante? She alone of Christopher's social set takes the same satisfaction he does in reliving childhood memories, and this allows him to relax around her.

Christopher first expresses his affection for Sarah years after their bus ride, when he discovers her fondness for childhood relics. She takes excellent care of her teddy bear, Ethelbert, and brings it with her from England to Shanghai to Macao since it has "been with [her] since, well, for ever really. Silly, isn't it?" Not only does Christopher not think it's silly, he "understand[s] perfectly" (237). He should, seeing as he decorated his house to remind him of his past. It is immediately after Christopher declares his empathy about Ethelbert that he and Sarah kiss for the first time. Their shared desire to hold on to their childhoods brings them first to conversational intimacy on a London bus, then to physical intimacy in a Shanghai gramophone shop. Though he did not originally find her attractive, Christopher initiates a close relationship with and expresses affection for Sarah after he finds she too displaces past and present. But even her charms can't permanently distract him. Though he promised to elope with her, Christopher leaves

Sarah in the shop to pursue a lead on his parents' location. Despite their shared interest, Christopher's true passion is for his own past, and its pull proves stronger than Sarah's.

Christopher remains determined to erase his present woes by reclaiming his past happiness, but for his past to have that curative power, he must repress certain details about it. He seeks to return to a childhood he's only *convinced* himself was idyllic. Christopher's mother was a committed anti-opium activist. Christopher's father worked for Morganbrook and Byatt, an English firm that imported massive quantities of Indian opium into China. As Christopher recalls, their recurring arguments frequently lead to long periods of silence, usually lasting a few days, but occasionally continuing for weeks (74). In one such fight, Christopher's mother uses "righteous" tones to tell her husband his actions are "a disgrace" and he should act more like Uncle Philip, her fellow activist (73). During another, Christopher's father sobs and desperately tells his wife he cannot do as she asks: quit his job and return the family to England. Without Morganbrook and Byatt, they cannot afford the expensive trip, and he tells her, "You're asking too much, Diana...It's beyond me, do you hear?" Diana replies in a "quiet, angry voice" (91). She and her husband never resolve the tension between her expectations for him and his inability to live up to them. As Christopher eventually learns from Uncle Philip, his father was not kidnapped, but ran away with his mistress when he "could not make himself good enough" for Diana (307).

Young Christopher "never concerned [him]self unduly" with the bouts of silence that follow his parents' fights, as they did not much inconvenience him (74). He recalls additional instances of his father's desperate attempts to win Diana's approval and his despair at failing "*only* because...it was so uncharacteristic of my father to talk of himself in this way" (87, my emphasis), or because "at the time, it was simply a bewildering

experience” (91). As a child, it is understandable that Christopher should ignore his parents’ fights. But as an adult, Christopher researches the Shanghai opium trade and Morganbrock and Byatt’s involvement with a purpose to “grasp the nature of those forces which as a child [he] could not have had the chance of comprehending” (119). With all his study, Christopher should realize his parents stood on opposite sides of a bitter conflict. It seems he does, when he remarks that his parents’ situation “must have been a source of true torment for” his mother (71). Yet he relates his parents’ arguments without acknowledging that perhaps their conflicting activities put their marriage, not just his mother’s mind, under great strain. Admitting his parents’ marriage was troubled would mean admitting he never had a happy home, and that Christopher simply is not willing to do.

Christopher brings this repression-induced confidence in his parents’ marriage to bear on his detective career. His quest is to find his parents, never one parent or the other. He believes them to be together in their captivity, though they disappeared at different times. When an old Chinese man suggests that Christopher will need a room for his father and mother to share once they are found, Christopher does not contradict him, and eventually takes part in the dreamy speculations on where to house his soon-to-be-recovered family (207). He plans alterations to the Chinese man’s house (which, conveniently, is the house Christopher grew up in) to accommodate his parents and his *amah*, Mei Li, since “she’ll be living here with [them]” (209). Though he currently has no idea where she is, Christopher never doubts his ability to find his old nanny. She was a part of his “happy” childhood home, so she *will* live with them again, in the very same house they once shared. He remembers his parents’ fights, but he never doubts that they have stayed together all the years they’ve been missing, and that they will want to keep

living together after he rescues them. He doesn't repress his memories of their rocky marriage, but he represses any recognition of what those memories represent.

Further proof of Christopher's repression emerges in the roundabout way he approaches recovering his mother and father. Just as Stevens "is seen *deliberately* refusing to face that which causes him pain" (Shaffer 69), Christopher drags his feet about searching for his parents. Subconsciously, he knows the odds are against their being together (or even alive), and against the feasibility of recreating his childhood. But he would rather prolong his hopeful search and the fantasy of a fairytale ending than face the facts. Christopher's most critical clue in this case is a photograph of Chinese warlord Wang Ku, whom Christopher recalls arguing with his mother a few days before her disappearance (*WWWO* 122). Christopher happens upon the photo entirely by accident; it is on the back of an article he requests about trading regulations from a correspondent. He doesn't write to his informant for more information until six weeks after seeing the picture, his only excuse being he "could not for a long time remember anything about the context in which" he had first seen Wang (121). Christopher could have requested details without knowing exactly why Wang was significant. If he were truly eager to find his parents, he would doubtless have done so, but he prefers looking for them to actually finding them, repressing his suspicions to testing them.

Christopher claims "it remains, incidentally, [his] intention to embark on such an investigation in the not-too-distant future," when "the demands on [his] time" are not "so relentless" (119-20). From what Ishiguro shows of Christopher, the detective spends his days walking around Kensington, going to luncheons, riding busses with Sarah Hemmings, and solving the occasional case. It's obviously not work that delays his Shanghai trip from May of 1931, when he states his intentions, to September of 1937.

Like Ono, who believes his art changed the world or Ryder, who thinks his visit was a great success, Christopher has the weakness for self-deception often found in Ishiguro's narrators. When guilt and the lure of Sarah Hemmings finally take Christopher to Shanghai, he pursues the flimsier of his two leads more enthusiastically, putting off the moment when he discovers his parents' fates and has to admit he can't rebuild his childhood. Eventually, that lead dead-ends and Christopher has no option but to face the man behind his parents' disappearance: family friend Uncle Philip. Walking into this meeting, Christopher reveals he "had been expecting to see him" (304). Though Christopher fails to say how long he has harbored this expectation, he's been repressing thoughts of Uncle Philip since 1931 (66, 131). Clearly Christopher had some inkling of Uncle Philip's sinister activity. He avoided confronting his "uncle" just as he avoided searching for his parents in earnest, just as he avoided anything that would drag his repressed doubt in his fantasies into the light.

The lead Christopher pursues so eagerly in Shanghai is one that allows him to leave intact his hopes for his parents' situation *and* lets him recreate part of his beloved childhood. Upon arrival in Shanghai, Christopher investigates his most promising lead, but faces opposition from an uncooperative consulate. Instead of persisting, he turns to the line of inquiry that feeds his fantasies. After his father's disappearance years ago, Christopher and Akira played at rescuing Christopher's father. Their games soon "established a basic recurring story-line. [His] father was held captive in a house somewhere beyond the Settlement boundaries," and the scenarios "would always conclude with a magnificent ceremony held in Jessfield Park" (117-8). After abandoning the uncooperative consulate, Christopher's search eerily resembles his childhood games. He dredges up reports of a 1915 shooting, in which a captured man revealed houses his

gang used to hold their captives. One house, a house outside the boundaries of the International Settlement, was never searched. Christopher believes “that is where [his] parents are being held” (221). Immune to this self-created *déjà vu*, Christopher offers to honor a helpful police lieutenant “during the ceremony that will take place in Jessfield Park to commemorate the freeing of [his] parents” (254). Unaware he is reenacting, almost word for word, a childhood game, Christopher sets out to find this house.

Christopher’s fantasy would be incomplete without Akira, but miraculously, he meets Akira (or thinks he does) behind Japanese lines. Searching through a labyrinth of collapsing houses known as the “warren,” Christopher finds a wounded Japanese soldier facing torment from Chinese children, whom he assumes is Akira. Akira at first does not “recognize” Christopher, calling him “pig” and demanding Christopher “let [him] die” (267). Undaunted, Christopher remains convinced he has found his friend, even though Akira pronounces Christopher’s name “almost experimentally,” never gives his own name, and calls himself Christopher’s friend in a situation where not to do so would mean “Akira’s” death (269). During their nightmarish trip, Akira volunteers no remembrances of their childhood, only parroting the details Christopher supplies, and referring once to his own “home village. Where I born.” At this, Christopher asks, “Which home village is this?...You mean the Settlement?” to which Akira replies, “Okay. Yes. Settlement” (274). It’s obvious to everyone but Christopher that “Akira” is lying to save his own skin. Later, escaped from the maze of ruined buildings and disemboweled human entrails, Christopher admits he’s “not so certain” it was Akira (297). At last, Christopher begins to realize how thoroughly he’s deluded himself.

Christopher’s admission that he might have imagined meeting Akira is a step toward confronting his repressed fear that his parents aren’t together, waiting for him to

rescue them and pick up their family where they left it. He realizes his childhood “is hardly a foreign land...in many ways, it’s where [he’s] continued to live all [his] life. It’s only now [he’s] started to make [his] journey from it” (297). Christopher dwelt in his youth even as he attempted to reclaim it, for the desire never to leave childhood is after all a childish one. While recovering from the injuries he sustained in the warren, Christopher notices “gradually, one by one, the cobwebs began to clear, so that by the time I was awoken...I found I had an entirely fresh view on all that had been troubling me about the case” (295). Shaffer notes about *The Remains of the Day* that numerous references to mist and fog obscuring Stevens’s vision “describe not only local meteorological conditions but Stevens’s self-censoring, self-deceptive psychological orientation” (70). Christopher finds his mind clouded by similar cobwebs representing his repression, which part to reveal “many things aren’t as [he] supposed” (296). With his rescue fantasy proved hopeless, Christopher opts to face his repressed fear and find out what really happened to his parents from the man he long suspected might know: Uncle Philip.

Seeing Uncle Philip was the promising lead Christopher abandoned after a few days in Shanghai. He had insisted upon a meeting with the communist informer known as the Yellow Snake, only to have his requests denied. After his ordeal, “all parties seem happy now to grant [his] request” (302). Christopher finally confronts the Yellow Snake, who is, as he expected, Uncle Philip (304). Philip confirms that Christopher’s long-standing belief about his father, that he “made a stand, a courageous stand, against his own employers concerning the profits from the opium trade” and was consequently kidnapped, is just what Philip and Diana agreed “to have [Christopher] believe” after his father ran off with another woman, though he died two years later (306). Philip continues

to correct the childhood views Christopher displaced onto his adulthood. The Shanghai detectives Christopher revered as a child were “under-paid, overworked flat-feet” who “wouldn’t have found an elephant gone missing in Nanking Road” (308). Christopher’s mother, whom Christopher thought was imprisoned in the house in Chapei, was kidnapped by Wang Ku and kept as his sexual slave.¹⁶ On hearing she could still be alive, Christopher resolves “to start again, and this time to find her” (317). He undertakes his new search without the hindrance of repression or childish longings.

Ultimately, Christopher succeeds in locating his mother. Sixteen years later, he flies from England to visit her in a Hong Kong nursing home. The chaos of the Sino-Japanese War and later, World War II, doubtless made it hard for Christopher to locate or visit Diana. But Diana has been at the home for “nearly two years” (324), and Christopher and his adopted daughter Jenny have “long understood” he would go to visit her alone (323). This suggests Christopher has not entirely grown out of his habit of delaying what he fears. When he finally arrives, he asks her to forgive him (328), indicating what he feared was that she’d blame him for her plight. But she forgives him, or rather, she forgives Puffin, for Diana only shows recognition when Christopher mentions his childhood nickname. He does not tell the nuns that he is Diana’s son, and decides to leave her there because “she did seem, somehow, contented. Not happy, exactly. But as though the pain had passed” (328). Christopher demonstrates his newfound maturity, for he forgoes his last chance to recreate his family for the sake of his mother’s fragile contentment. Yet the placid way he goes about visiting her, and his decision not to tell the nuns who he really is, suggest that he is not eager to have a mother

¹⁶ Though there is no evidence Christopher suspected and subsequently repressed the knowledge that his mother met this fate, it is worth noting that Ishiguro chooses Christopher’s mother to experience a fear many white women living in Asia felt: fear of being raped by a native. The liberal-minded Diana, who considered her family’s Chinese servants friends (61) would doubtless have repressed this fear if she possessed it, proving that, as in her son’s case, repression has no power as a physical safeguard.

again. After so many years of it, Christopher feels at home in his homelessness, placed in his displacement.

Ultimately, Christopher makes a parentless home for himself in London. He says the city “has come to be [his] home, and [he] should not mind if [he] had to live out the rest of [his] days here” (336). Given that Christopher never claimed to feel at home in London in his earlier years when he was trying so hard to fit in, his statement rings true. Having relinquished his impossible attempts to recreate his Shanghai home, Christopher makes do. He still takes “a foolish pride in sifting through old newspaper reports of [his] cases,” but he owns up to his mistakes (336). He apologizes to Jenny, saying: “When you were growing up, I should have been there with you more. But I was too busy, trying to solve the world’s problems.” He recalls Sarah, and how that relationship “went the way of everything else...my great vocation got in the way of quite a lot, all in all” (331). Years earlier, when Christopher was making his way through the war-torn warren with Akira, he told his friend, “After all, when we were children, when things went wrong, there wasn’t much we could do to help put it right. But we’re adults, now we can” (281). After trying for years to retreat from adulthood to childhood, Christopher accepts the agency of an adult. What he comes to realize is that adults are sometimes as powerless as children, but what makes them adults is the ability to accept it.

* * *

As the story of Christopher’s mental struggle with adulthood, *When We Were Orphans* demands a psychological reading. But it is also the story of a detective solving a mystery on the eve of the British colonial empire’s collapse. Such content invites readings of the work as a study in genre and as politically themed. For his fifth novel,

Ishiguro readily admits he “wanted to write a detective story.”¹⁷ But Ishiguro is usually reluctant to allow political interpretations of his novels. Asked why he chose the politically charged settings he did for his first three novels, Ishiguro responded that it was because “they are potent for my themes. I tend to be attracted to pre-war and post-war settings because I’m interested in this business of values and ideals being tested.”¹⁸ He mentions no interest in creating characters that represent political ideals or situations that mirror world events. When he does research for his novels, Ishiguro wants “to know the fictional landscape in which [his] novel takes place very well. That’s the landscape [he has] to research, not any actual chunk of history or real country” (Swift 45). For his next novel, currently in progress, Ishiguro hesitated to choose a historical setting:

If I were to write about France, though, it becomes a book about France. I imagined myself having to face all these experts on Vichy France asking me, So what are you saying about France? What are you accusing us of? And I’d have to say, Actually, it was just supposed to stand for this bigger theme. (Hunnewell 43)

Yet the effects of British imperialism on Christopher’s life and surroundings are too great to ignore. To fully understand how Christopher’s psyche develops as it does, and why his world operates the way it does, a reader must allow for political themes and aspects of a genre novel in *When We Were Orphans*.

Elements of detective fiction contribute in large part to the odd feeling of surreality that pervades much of Christopher’s narrative. This feeling isn’t readily noticeable at the novel’s outset. Stylistically, *When We Were Orphans* is similar to

¹⁷ Kazuo Ishiguro, interview by Susannah Hunnewell, “Kazuo Ishiguro: The Art of Fiction No. 96,” *The Paris Review* 184 (2008): 50-51. Hereafter cited in the text.

¹⁸ Kazuo Ishiguro, interview by Graham Swift, “Shorts: Kazuo Ishiguro,” (1989) in *Conversations* (see introduction, note 5), 36. Hereafter cited in the text.

Ishiguro's first three novels. Concise, unruffled, and unfailingly polite, Christopher's voice resembles the reserved tones of Etsuko, Ono, and Stevens, all of whose stories take place within a recognizable reality. Any absurdities in these books are products of the narrator's mind. But as Christopher's story progresses, the more his surroundings seem to resemble Ryder's in *The Unconsoled*: dream-like and unreal. Ishiguro's "idea was that this novel [*When We Were Orphans*]... would move slightly from occupying one kind of world to occupying another kind of world—that we would slide toward the stranger world rather than go bang into it, as in *The Unconsoled*" (Shaffer, "An Interview" 163). Ishiguro begins his fifth novel's subtle transition into unreality by introducing elements of the mystery.

As a detective story, *When We Were Orphans* is a nod to a long tradition of English crime fiction whose most famous hero is Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes. Like Holmes, Christopher is a gentleman detective, a figure Tobias Döring convincingly proves does "not exist outside of stories."¹⁹ Though Ryder dwells in a totally topsy-turvy world, he has a real job: he's a pianist. Christopher's world begins by being only slightly askew, but his profession is fictional. His job title alone, however, does not reveal to a reader that his story won't be as realistic as its calm tone and recognizable setting promises. Christopher comes of age not long after the first Holmes story's debut in 1887: a time before Ishiguro's readers were born. That Christopher is a gentleman detective does not mark him out to the casual reader as figment of the imagination, as if he were a wizard. He is more like the American cowboy: a figure whose time is so far past and whose fictionalized image is so familiar that we forget he

¹⁹ Tobias Döring, "Sherlock Holmes—He Dead: Disenchanting the English Detective in Kazuo Ishiguro's *When We Were Orphans*," in *Postcolonial Postmortems: Crime Fiction from a Transcultural Perspective*, ed. Christine Matzke and Susanne Mühleisen (New York: Editions Rodopi, 2006), 86. Hereafter cited in the text.

never existed in quite such a way, or in the case of the gentleman detective, at all.

Eventually, Ishiguro employs enough genre tropes to indicate without a doubt that Christopher's isn't a straightforwardly realistic tale.

The first sizable hint of unreality in *When We Were Orphans* is Christopher's behavior on the job. Christopher, to belong in the British mystery novel tradition, must not just *be* a character in a book; he must *feel* to a reader like a character in a book. Ishiguro accomplishes this by giving Christopher greatly exaggerated investigative mannerisms. As a child, Christopher's friends discover his ambition to be a detective and present him with a magnifying glass. After all, what childish vision of a sleuth would be complete without one? Christopher still carries the glass as an adult, deeming it not "quite the crucial piece of equipment of popular myth, but it remains a useful tool for the gathering of certain sorts of evidence" (9). This may perfectly well be, but Christopher's use of this tool borders on cartoonish. He peers through the glass for inexplicably long amounts of time: while investigating the Emery murder, Christopher scrutinizes a mossy stone for more than twenty minutes, all the while lying on his stomach (33). During his Yellow Snake inquiries, he spends "over two hours on [his] hands and knees in a rotting boat in which three decaying corpses had been found" (179), presumably using the magnifying glass; as the next example shows, he never misses a chance to use his favorite tool.

When he and Akira encounter an orphaned Chinese girl in the ruins of Chapei, Christopher attempts to comfort her by showing her his magnifying glass. In a truly surreal moment, he looks through it at her dead mother's torn-apart elbow, noting that the woman's "stump looked peculiarly clean; the bone protruding out of the flesh was a shiny white, almost as though someone had been polishing it" (291). Of course a detective

story's hero must use his magnifying glass, but these scenes are absurd even within the context of detective fiction.²⁰ As Döring puts it, "Ishiguro shows us his protagonist, in the helpful phrase of a reviewer, 'as a man deformed into genre'" (Döring 72).²¹ The surreality of Christopher's gestures arises from the fact that Ishiguro hasn't created him as a man who is also a private investigator. Christopher is meant to be (and is) literature's version of the detective, through and through.

Another "characterization" of Christopher comes in the form of the case names he tosses off without explanation. Who was Charles Emery? Trevor Richardson? What on earth happened during the oft-mentioned Mannering case? Without a sidekick, Christopher plays both the reticent Holmes and the admiring Watson, who frequently refers to Holmesian adventures that Doyle never wrote. Christopher talks about his work casually, "in the way no English gentleman would ever credit a professional activity with great importance" (Döring 67). To supply details about his cases would be in poor taste. These background-less case names also reflect on Christopher's often wishful state of mind. Add his excessive use of the magnifying glass to the unsubstantiated name-dropping, and Christopher seems like he's play-acting at an imagined career. He's saved from such damnation by the praise other characters lavish on his exploits and the newspaper articles that describe his cases, but nevertheless, his career retains a distinctly imaginary tinge. One gets the feeling that if Christopher hadn't actually become a successful detective, he'd have convinced himself he had.

²⁰ Christopher's use of his magnifying glass can also be taken as a metaphor for his psychological state. His glass does to clues what he often does to events: magnifies them (like solving his parents' case, which he comes to equate with preventing WWII) and decontextualizes them (like his parents' disappearances, which he plucks out of three weeks' worth of incidents and assumes are related to each other).

²¹ The review to which Döring refers is James Wood's "The Unconsoled: *When We Were Orphans* by Kazuo Ishiguro," *The New Republic* 223, no.16 (Oct 2000): 47. Hereafter cited in the text.

Many of the other characters Christopher interacts with seem to share his penchant for imagining things. It is from these surrounding characters and their attitudes toward England's situation in Shanghai that a political reading emerges. On several occasions, Christopher runs into people who assign him unrealistic importance on the world stage. Before he departs for Shanghai, Christopher encounters a police inspector who tells Christopher "'if [he were] a greater man'—and here, without a doubt, he looked accusingly straight into [Christopher's] eyes—'if [he were] a greater man, then...sir, [he]'d hesitate no longer'" and go straight to the heart of the problem (*WWWO* 145). The inspector does not specify where the "heart" lies, but a related incident supplies the answer. At a lecture, cleric Canon Moorly tells Christopher, "of course, *you* know the truth. You know that the real heart of our present crisis lies further afield... in Shanghai, to be exact" (146). That Christopher takes these men so seriously as to feel guilty for months afterward is a mark of his mental insecurity. But their remarks cannot be dismissed as figments of Christopher's troubled mind.

There would be something amiss about these two characters even if Christopher were not paranoid. The police officer looks at Christopher with "fury" in his face, and suggests Christopher ought to be the one to "go this day to where the heart of the serpent lies and slay the thing once and for all" (144). He expects Christopher to destroy the source of all England's evils, Christopher who has only solved domestic cases about which he never supplies any details. Moorly also becomes exasperated with Christopher when Christopher claims to hold no power in Shanghai. Christopher tells Moorly: "you can hardly expect me" to influence faraway happenings, to which Moorly replies, "Oh come! Really!" (147). Obviously he thinks Christopher should be able to fix Shanghai. How Christopher is supposed to single-handedly resolve Shanghai's difficulties with

Japan, control the opium trade, and avert the impending Second World War, no one ever explains, but clearly, these two characters believe it.

The words of two Englishmen can't be called the voice of the country, but England's expatriate community likewise treats Christopher as if he were responsible for Shanghai's problems. When Christopher returns there as an adult, he finds the International Settlement full of English people ready to turn the whole problematic situation of their city over not to its native inhabitants, but to him. As Finney notes, "the heirs of colonialism, while attempting to foist onto the ex-colonized the stigma of eternal childishness, are in fact themselves behaving like children" (141). These expatriates perhaps left England under the pretense of aiding Shanghai, as Sarah and her husband did, but they end up, like Sarah and Sir Cecil, unable to help England, Shanghai, or themselves. At the cabaret Christopher attends on his second night back, an elderly lady tells Christopher, "we didn't like to show it, but we were getting extremely concerned" about the Japanese shelling (*WWWO* 169). Moments later, the guests push to watch the gunfire from a window, and one man calls it "quite a sight. Rather like watching shooting stars" (170). When someone hands Christopher opera glasses (another kind of magnifying glass) to aid his vision, the image of the war as entertainment for the foreigners is complete. It's clear that watching the fighting is all they can do. Desperately seeking someone who will succeed where they have failed, the guests seize upon Christopher as Shanghai's, and their, savior. (His first name now links him not only to Christopher Robin [Wood 48], but to Christ.) The same elderly woman asks Christopher, "Do you have any idea at all how relieved we all feel now that you're finally with us?" (169). She assumes Christopher will stop the bombing. When the general conversation turns to the factors influencing the war's outcome, another man asks, "and

besides...hasn't Mr. Banks turned up?" (171). At this, the ballroom falls silent as the guests await Christopher's response. They want Christopher to be able to solve their problems as badly as Christopher wants to be able to solve his own.

Together, these characters depict a nation seeking to avoid liability. All these Englishmen assign responsibility for the problems of imperialism wherever they can, as long as it isn't to themselves. As Ishiguro notes, the situation in 1930s Shanghai was "not official imperialism...the foreigners had won this thing called 'extra-territoriality' which meant that they were not subject to Chinese law."²² Consequently, though they tried to "dominate economically," nothing required the British people to feel "that sense of responsibility that came with colonizing countries in the imperial sense" (Wong 185), but it plagues Christopher's countrymen all the same. The police inspector, Canon Moorly, and the British expatriates in Shanghai all realize the city has problems that some British person should fix. They pick Christopher to accomplish that monumental task, even though the far more qualified statesman Sir Cecil failed at the same job and wound up a drunken gambling addict. As Christopher embarks on his investigation, the rest of England's empire is crumbling around it, and its approach to resolving the problems in its unofficial colony of Shanghai is to hand the torch to Christopher.

The detective genre that *When We Were Orphans* builds upon reached its "Golden Age...in the 1930s, i.e. not long before the structure of the imperial world, as an immediate consequence of the Second World War, began to crack and yield to decolonization" (Döring 62-3). Ishiguro's fictional 1930s England wants Christopher to be the hero from 1930s English mystery fiction. To fill this role, Christopher should protect the home from sinister outside forces (Döring 62). He tries, returning to Shanghai

²² Kazuo Ishiguro, interview by Cynthia F. Wong, "Like Idealism Is to the Intellect: An Interview with Kazuo Ishiguro" (2001), in *Conversations* (see introduction, note 5), 184. Hereafter cited in the text.

at the crucial time of September 1937 and quickly becoming burdened with the insecurities of those in power. He sees his countrymen in Shanghai as members of “a pathetic conspiracy of denial,” though they stand “at the heart of the maelstrom threatening to suck in the whole of the civilized world” (*WWWO* 173). The English of England seize upon Christopher to fight their battles for them. The English of Shanghai have given up their efforts to avert crisis, and likewise pin their hopes on Christopher.

Under such pressure, faced with such allies, Christopher arrives at the only conclusion that will let him meet his responsibility to his parents and his country at the same time. When he answers the anxious guests in the ballroom, Christopher reveals perhaps his strangest conviction: he believes that by solving the case of his parents’ disappearance, he will simultaneously avert WWII. As Ishiguro notes, “there is no logical or rational relationship here between [Christopher’s] wanting to solve the mystery about his parents and his wanting to avert the Second World War. That’s a gap that simply cannot be filled with any kind of reason or logic; it’s a purely emotional response” (Shaffer, “An Interview”164). Christopher’s reaction stems from the fictional detective’s illogical assumption that Ishiguro admits Christopher holds: “the notion that all the bad things that happen come from a master criminal somewhere, that there’s a Moriarty figure behind the bad things. The way to conquer them is to become a detective and ferret out the source of evil.”²³ Christopher tells the British expatriates in the ballroom that he “can well see the situation here has grown rather trying” (*WWWO* 172). After observing the shelling for the last two pages, the situation he refers to seems to be the Chinese-Japanese conflict. Yet he reassures his audience with a declaration of his optimism about “bringing this case, in the very near future, to a happy conclusion” (172).

²³ Kazuo Ishiguro, interview by Lewis Burke Frumkes (2001), in *Conversations* (see introduction, note 5), 192.

It is discovering his parents' whereabouts that he always calls a "case." But no one questions him, or doubts his ability to resolve both case and war. These British citizens readily believe Christopher can fix both problems because his doing so will save them the trouble. Christopher believes he can resolve both conflicts because of his fictional detective's confidence that all the world's evil comes from one source. In finding his parents, he will rout that source and thus avert WWII.

Christopher slips deeper into his delusion of total responsibility as his work progresses. By the time Sarah asks him to run away with her, he feels responsible for the whole world, which is "on the brink of catastrophe. What would people think of me if I abandoned them all at this stage?" (227). Sarah tells him he has to stop thinking like that if he wants to be happy, not if he wants to be sane. No one seems to think Christopher is strange or crazy for believing he can save the world. In a detective story, the task of resolving the conflict belongs to the detective. The conflict in Christopher's narrative begins as a simple kidnapping case, but the period's politics complicate it further. Christopher shoulders the whole burden. His tale's dream-like quality comes from the magnitude of the task he tries to accomplish, and the number of people who believe he can succeed.

Together, the political and genre aspects of *When We Were Orphans* allow for the possibility of an expanded psychological reading. The first half of this chapter discusses Christopher's own repression and displacement, the psychological reading of an individual's actions. The second half explores peculiarities in Christopher's environment by reading his narrative as a politically themed genre novel. Such a reading suggests that Christopher's world suffers from repression and displacement just as he does. Consider Christopher's fellow characters as possessing one collective mind. Could the fact that

everyone thinks Christopher can save civilization result from responsibility repressed *en masse*? Is the reason no one finds Christopher's use of his magnifying glass odd because they've been displaced from their detective fiction home to a novel masquerading as historical? Christopher's psyche takes him in and out of fantasy. His world's psyche takes it in and out of realism. In addition to writing a complex story of individual psychological growth, mystery, and imperialism, Ishiguro has created what could be called "a novel with a mind of its own."

Ishiguro's sixth and most recent novel, *Never Let Me Go*, tells a radically different story from *WWWO*, or from any of his earlier novels. Set in England during an alternate 1990s, its narrator, Kathy H., describes herself as a "carer," whose job it is to look after people who have made "donations." What this means doesn't become clear until much later, after Kathy has related the story of much of her childhood. She and her two best friends, Ruth and Tommy, grew up in a place called Hailsham, a boarding school where the teachers are called "guardians" and the children never go home. Their lessons center on creating artwork and the importance of physical health. Why such a strong emphasis on fitness? About halfway through the book, Kathy reveals to her reader what she and the other children were told long ago: the students at Hailsham are clones, created for the purpose of donating their vital organs once they've reached physical maturity. The organs go to ordinary humans who need transplants, and the clones, after they've made their fourth donation, die, or as they call it, "complete."

Clones work as carers before they begin their donations, tending their fellows who have already begun the process. Kathy, an unusually successful carer, is allowed to choose her patients, and it is thus that she gets to see Ruth for the first time in years. With death approaching, Ruth confesses to Kathy that she deliberately kept Kathy and Tommy from discovering their mutual love when the three of them were students at Hailsham, and later, when they reached young adulthood and moved to a halfway-house called the Cottages. To make good, Ruth gives Kathy the address of the woman who collected their student artwork from Hailsham, a woman the students called Madame, and tells Kathy to go there and see if Kathy and Tommy can obtain what they've heard of in rumors: a deferral, available only to students who are deeply in love. If their donations

were delayed, Kathy and Tommy could have a few years together to make up for the years Ruth denied them. Now the importance of the art lessons seems to become apparent to Kathy and Tommy: the students' artwork provided a window to their souls, giving Madame the ability to determine which of them were truly soul mates and thus deserving of deferral. Kathy and Tommy make the trip, only to be told their artwork served a different purpose. Madame collected it as part of a movement aimed at improving clones' living conditions, which outside of Hailsham were terrible. The art was intended to prove to the rest of the world that cloned students had souls at all. With their last hope gone, Kathy and Tommy return to their lives as donor and carer, knowing they cannot defer completion.

Ironically, *Never Let Me Go* begins as much more of a mystery than its detective-story predecessor. Kathy, for all her matter-of-fact manner, doesn't even come close to giving her reader all the facts he would need to fully grasp her situation. "My name is Kathy H.," she announces. "I'm thirty-one years old, and I've been a carer now for over eleven years" (3). There is mystery behind the word "carer," arising from displacement. Just as Christopher's first sentence establishes his narrative as temporally displaced from its section headings, Kathy's first line alerts the reader to her narrative's displacement: not from its correct time, but from its correct audience. Kathy's story is not intended for us. "Carers" are all Kathy talks about for the next page. But what is a carer? Who are the "they" that carers report to? What do "donors" donate? The answers to these questions are crucial to understanding Kathy's story. Though a reader can attempt to puzzle out the answers, it's page 81 before Miss Lucy, one of Hailsham's guardians, tells the students explicitly: "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." Why is it Miss Lucy and not Kathy, the story's narrator, who clarifies such a critical plot point?

Kathy doesn't mention her genetic status or her future at the start of her story because she assumes her reader already knows it. She frequently speaks directly to her reader, sometimes as if that reader is a fellow carer ("I know carers, working now, who are just as good and don't get half the credit. If you're one of them, I can understand how you might get resentful" [3-4]), sometimes not so specifically ("I don't know if you had 'collections' where you were" [38]), but always as if that reader is a clone ("I'm sure somewhere in your childhood, you too had an experience like ours" [36]). Kathy isn't writing for ordinary humans, whom the clones call "normals." As that slightly sarcastic nickname implies, her story was meant for a certain circle of which we the readers are not a part. In reading it, we displace her narrative from its intended position among the clones of her world to one among the ordinary humans of ours. In a sense, Kathy "donates" her narrative, for she cannot control who reads her words after they leave her pen.

In addition to telling a displaced story, Kathy and her fellow clones lead displaced lives. As clones, each student has only a first name and a last initial (Kathy H., Tommy D.). They can't have a family name because they have no family. No student knows whom he or she was modeled from, though "since each of [them] was copied at some point from a normal person, there must be, for each of [them], somewhere out there, a model getting on with his or her life" (139). These models, or "possibles," could be anyone, of any age. As the copies of other people, clones are embodiments of displacement. Each *is*, genetically, another person, but has been moved away from that person's life and family, with the unsettling effect that no clone knows his or her origins.

Some students want to track down their models in the hopes of catching a “glimpse” of their futures (140). Some, like Ruth, believe “we’re modeled from *trash*. Junkies, prostitutes, winos, tramps” (166), but no one knows for sure. Students simply make what they can of their lives without thinking too much about the fact that they are identical to someone else, and so in a sense leading that person’s life, only displaced.

Though a reader may find the fact that Kathy and her friends lead displaced lives disturbing, the students take it for granted. That Kathy’s story is displaced from her alternate England to her reader’s world means more than simply that her terminology is occasionally confusing. Kathy’s England is only an “alternate” one to us. To her, it’s just ordinary England, and her displaced life is just her life as she’s always known it. Her narrative is temporally displaced as well. Her present (the late 1990s) is already her readers’ past. But as Earl G. Ingersoll notes, her narrative has the “chilling sense of a futuristic dimension.”²⁴ Though a reader has lived through the ‘90s, those familiar years become strange when filled with the events of an alternate world. Add the setting made alien by its inhabitants’ technological progress, and *Never Let Me Go* becomes “different in ways similar to the worlds of speculative fiction, and certainly science fiction” (Ingersoll 3). Just by reading Kathy’s narrative, we displace it. Displaced, friends and situations that are normal to her become otherworldly, “science fictional,” to us.

In addition to elements of science fiction, *Never Let Me Go* contains the withheld revelations often found in mystery novels. As Ingersoll rightly claims, to dwell too heavily on the secret behind the heroine’s upbringing reduces “the poetry of a sensitive, imaginative exploration of a situation into a detective story” (3). Detective stories can be quite complex, as *When We Were Orphans* proves, but Ingersoll’s point is that Kathy’s

²⁴ Earl G. Ingersoll, “Taking Off Into the Realm of Metaphor: Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go*,” *Studies in the Humanities* 34.1 (June 2007): 3, <http://find.galegroup.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/itx/start.do?prodId=AONE>. Hereafter cited in text. Page references are to the online printable full text version.

tale is far more than just a mystery.²⁵ It's far more than just a futuristic story as well, but Ishiguro didn't make his protagonist a clone and her life the plaything of an unseen government by accident. Kathy's genetic makeup and her strictly regulated life, made alien by their displacement from her world, prove important avenues for understanding her psychology and that of the "normals" around her. As a clone, Kathy experiences the full big-brotherish effect of England's alternate government. Those in power socially repress the clones they've created by conditioning those clones to psychologically repress knowledge of their futures and their feelings about it.

The government of Kathy's alternate England represses the clone population, with repression operating here in its non-psychological sense. Before Freud coined "repression" as a psychoanalytical term, the word meant simply to hold back or keep in check not just memories or feelings, but objects, forces, or people. Clones experience social repression, or oppression, at the hands of "normals." It is for this reason that Kathy writes her narrative solely for her biological equals. In her world, no clone would ever expect an ordinary human to take an interest in a clone's story.

Another principle of Kathy's world is that no clone ever has direct contact with the government that created the clone program and consequently the stand-offish attitudes of most ordinary humans. As students at Hailsham, the only physical indication Kathy and her friends receive that someone somewhere is interested in ensuring they have healthy bodies in addition to cultured minds are the medical exams they "had to have...almost every week." These take place with "stern Nurse Trisha, or Crow Face, as [they] called her" (*NLMG* 13). However stern Nurse Trisha may be, the fact that the children mock her behind her back suggests she is not an intimidating official sent from

²⁵ For a discussion of *NLMG* and the autobiographical genre, see Keith McDonald's "Days of Past Futures: Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* as 'Speculative Memoir,'" *Biography* 30, no.1 (2007): 74-83.

the government that controls these children's lives. After they leave Hailsham for the Cottages, students who wish to start their training as carers simply "go through the forms" with Keffers, the grumpy maintenance man (202). Once she becomes a carer, Kathy mentions contact with doctors and refers to them as "whitecoats," but that's the closest any clone ever comes to contact with the people who make the rules about the donation program. Miss Emily refers in passing to "vast government 'homes' (265), but otherwise, no character ever explicitly mentions the controlling body responsible for the rules about clone treatment in those homes, in the privileged Hailsham, and in society.

The government Miss Emily mentions that restricts clones' entire existence is faceless and nameless, but no less oppressive for that. Medical check-ups, carer registration, all the procedures that prepare a clone for donations, are accomplished by people several times removed from whoever is really in charge. This sly approach leaves the clones no one to argue with. Nurse Trisha and Keffers did not make the policies they execute; the rules they follow come from higher up, from an unidentified "they" (230) impossible to find and thus challenge. No one wears an official government badge, or says where "their regulations" come from (259). It's not just the novel's setting in the past that supports the "'Orwellian framework'" Caryn James suggests (Ingersoll 4). England's mysterious government works through its citizens, and it is at the hands of those ordinary citizens that Kathy and her friends experience social repression.

As students at Hailsham, Kathy and her peers fear the normal human world. Pupils aren't allowed outside the fenced-in grounds, and no student in Kathy's time ever attempts to leave. Though exact consequences are never mentioned, rumors abound about what happens if a child breaks this rule. One story has the ghost of a girl who climbed the fence haunting the woods beyond them, since the guardians in her day would

not let her back inside. Unable to reenter, she'd gone somewhere "out there, something had happened, and she'd died" (*NLMG* 50). To describe the rest of the world as "out there" gives it an alien, dangerous quality, especially if it's the kind of place where a little girl meets a mysterious demise. A second story tells of a boy who'd left the grounds being found two days later, his body "tied to a tree with the hands and feet chopped off" (50). These stories present the world outside Hailsham as a sick, threatening place where horrible things happen to students. Given the clones' role in British society, this isn't far from the truth. Just as the boy who wandered out of bounds was found tied up and missing his hands and feet, once the students leave Hailsham, they will find themselves restrained by the rules of the donation program and forced to give up parts of their bodies. These stories represent displaced anxiety on the part of the students who tell and listen to them, for they choose to fear the woods, which they can avoid, instead of worrying about the repressive, controlling donation program, which they can't.

Despite their infrequent contact with normals, clones feel oppressed by the prejudice they know ordinary humans have toward them. Apart from students and their guardians, and later, donors and their surgeons, clones and non-clones don't interact. Once they've outgrown ghost stories, Kathy and her friends would like to; when a rumor reaches them of a Hailsham student working in a clothing store, "there were murmurs of approval and for a while we all looked dreamily out at the clouds" (152). But this could never happen, and not just because donation program rules only allow clones the single career choice of carer. As Ruth points out after she and Kathy have a polite conversation with an art gallery's proprietress during their time at the Cottages, "Do you think she'd have talked to us like that if she'd known what we really were?" (166). Clones know the consequences would be unpleasant if they attempted to join ordinary human society.

Even as the clones' social repression gives England's never-seen but always-felt government its omnipotent, science fiction feel, that repression also resonates with literary representations of class and caste. As Bruce Robbins points out, "the organ-donation gulag, tucked away from public view and yet not kept fully secret, has its obvious real-world counterpart in what we call class."²⁶ Robbins compares the clones to welfare recipients in the world outside the novel, but even within *Never Let Me Go*, the clones emerge as a class of their own, separate from and lower than the classes that divide ordinary humans. At Hailsham, to see "a car was a rarity, and the sight of one in the distance was sometimes enough to cause bedlam during a class" (*NLMG* 34). Obviously the students don't have families visiting them, but if cars are a rare sight, the guardians can't be leaving or receiving visitors frequently either. Presumably they all had lives in the outside world before coming to Hailsham. Yet they've abandoned those lives, as if coming to Hailsham were entering a nunnery or, more probably, a leper colony. The place operates as if it's under quarantine.

The only regular visitors to Hailsham are "gardeners or workmen" who come in vans every couple of days, bringing necessities and doing repairs (34). That menial laborers are the only ordinary people who frequent Hailsham suggests that to have anything to do with clones is something unclean, a task that belongs to people used to doing other people's dirty work—people of the lower class. Madame, who visits Hailsham only once or twice a year, is "a tall, narrow woman with short hair" who "always wore a sharp grey suit" (32). She has the sleek, stylish appearance of someone well-off. She drives a car, not a truck like the workmen, and she evaluates and collects artwork—an upper-class pursuit. Kathy reveals that "unlike the gardeners, unlike the

²⁶ Robbins, "Caring: Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*" in *Upward Mobility and the Common Good*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 200.

drivers who brought in [their] supplies—unlike virtually anyone else who came in from outside—she wouldn't talk to [the students] and kept [them] at a distance with her chilly look" (32). When Kathy and her friends approach Madame, the woman suppresses a shudder and freezes in place until the girls pass. They sense her "real dread that one of us would accidentally brush against her...she was afraid of us in the same way someone might be afraid of spiders" (35). Though she's open-minded enough to work for Hailsham and the "clone rights" movement, she does not want to touch the children.

Madame's reaction gets at the reason behind the oppressive donation program and the isolation of clones. These policies are not in place just to keep track of the clones' valuable organs. The restrictions also comfort normals, who fear the clones. When Tommy and Kathy visit Miss Emily years later, she tells them, "We're *all* afraid of you. I had to fight back my dread of you all almost every day I was at Hailsham. There were times I'd look down at you all from my study window and I'd feel such revulsion..." (269). As Kathy and her friends suspect after their first close encounter with Madame, ordinary people fear the clones as disgusting and possibly dangerous creatures. The guardians had to "[fight] those feelings" in order to help the children (269). Such reactions stem from ordinary humans' fear of being displaced by clones, with displacement referring not just to a move which results in psychological repercussions, but actual replacement.²⁷

As Miss Emily tells Kathy and Tommy in the novel's *dénouement*, this fear has always been present, but was piqued by the Morningdale scandal, which involved the scientist James Morningdale and his discovery of a way to create children with "enhanced characteristics. Superior intelligence, superior athleticism, that sort of thing"

²⁷ Lewis mentions this meaning of displacement in *Kazuo Ishiguro*, 16.

(264). This research was illegal, for it “reminded people...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 who’d take their place in society? Children demonstrably *superior* to the rest of us? Oh no. That frightened people. They recoiled from that” (264). The stigma attached to Morningdale’s superior children extends to any created child, genetically modified or not, and the few fair-minded normals who funded Hailsham withdrew, leaving cloned children with only the “deplorable” government homes for shelter (261). Feared for the threat of displacement they represent, clones experience increasingly repressive restraints on their lives as normals’ fear grows. After the Morningdale scandal, few ordinary people are willing to allow clones a “place in society.” Even before that, clones were an “untouchable” group, lower than the lower class, which at least is still human. Only volunteers like the guardians or lower class workers being paid for it readily associate with clones. As Robbins points out, the students cannot break from this stratification. They face an “absolute, biological blockage of advancement” (200). Their social repression is as permanent as the perceptions of their inherent physical makeup, which, given the history Miss Emily provides, seem very permanent indeed.

Despite their lowly status, stigmatized roles, and reduced freedoms, Kathy and her peers do not seem very strictly oppressed. Kathy and Ruth can’t hold jobs as clones, but they can also pass as non-clones. If they can have a pleasant conversation with an art gallery’s owner, presumably they could work there, too. Hailsham students are not allowed to leave the grounds, but how oppressive is a fence no one wants to cross? Few normals will touch a clone, but the deliverymen at Hailsham “joke and laugh with [them] and call [them] ‘sweetheart’” (*NLMG* 36). That clones are denied freedoms is the

symptom of a socially repressed population. Yet Kathy never reports or experiences any normal ever actually restraining a clone from doing anything. Even after Miss Emily gives Kathy and Tommy the upsetting news that there is no such thing as deferral, the two are allowed to get in Kathy's car and drive away without supervision. Kathy and her friends always know what they are "supposed" to do, and for the most part, they do it (150, 288). These clones repress themselves.

All their lives, Kathy and her friends obey the rules. The students at the Cottages, even the non-Hailsham ones, have the freedom to get drivers' licenses and come and go as they please, with only the part-time Keffers to observe them. Still, no one ever runs away. Kathy and Tommy's wildest dreams are only of deferral, not total escape. Once Tommy becomes a donor, he has to "sign in" when he returns to the recovery center after a trip (275), but if there are technical reasons pre-donation clones can't blend in among normal people, like identification papers or registers, Kathy never mentions them. Yet student after student, Kathy included, chooses to leave the Cottages and voluntarily become a carer, voluntarily put themselves on the road to donorship and sign-ins, for once a student becomes a carer, it is at the discretion of the program authorities when that student becomes a donor. Though the government creates a repressive program and society holds repressive prejudices, the clones could escape them if they chose. England's alternate government achieves social repression by conditioning clones from childhood to psychologically repress knowledge of their futures, and thus socially repress themselves.

As discussed above, the clone program authorities work through ordinary citizens. In the case of Hailsham students, it is guardians who condition the students to repress knowledge. By encouraging psychological repression, the guardians achieve political

repression. When Kathy meets Tommy years after their Hailsham days in a recovery center, he tells her his recently-developed theory:

Tommy thought it possible that the guardians had, throughout all our years at Hailsham, timed very carefully and deliberately everything they told us, so that we were always just too young to understand properly the latest piece of information. But of course we'd take it in at some level, so that before long all this stuff was there in our heads without us ever having examined it properly (82).

Kathy admits there's "probably something in it" (83). After all, Kathy and her friends have had inklings of the attitude of ordinary humans toward clones from the ages of "five or six," which means the "talks, videos, discussions, warnings" the guardians gave them must have begun even earlier (36). Yet despite what they know "about who [they] were, how [they] were different from [their] guardians, the people outside...[they] hadn't yet understood what any of it meant" (36). Kathy makes this statement about her eight-year-old self. Reflecting as an adult, she recognizes that even three years later, the lessons her guardians taught her at five still hadn't entirely sunk in.

Even when certain lessons do sink in, Hailsham's guardians ensure their students relegate that information to their subconscious. When Kathy and her friends approach Madame for the first time, they realize she is scared of them. As recounted earlier, the six girls all walk toward Madame at once, surrounding her, and they sense that she fears to touch them. After this disturbing realization, "mention of Madame became, while not taboo exactly, pretty rare among" Kathy and her friends. The unspoken ban "spread beyond [their] little group to just about all the students in [their] year" (37). Unprepared for the knowledge of how different they are from ordinary humans, Kathy and her friends repress the fact when it appears by refusing to think or speak about it. Likewise, the

guardians “never mentioned the Gallery, and there was an unspoken rule that we should never even raise the subject in their presence” (31). Clearly they don’t want to encourage thoughts of Madame, her attitude, or her role in the students’ lives either. In addition to introducing information to Kathy and her peers before they are old enough to handle it, the guardians encourage the children to avoid talking or thinking about the ugly facts of their futures.

By releasing donation-related information to their students when the students are too young to comprehend it, the guardians condition the children to accept their fates unquestioningly, as if, to use another science fiction trope, they’d been brainwashed. No pupil ever questions a guardian for more information about donations. For as long as they can remember, Hailsham’s students have known what’s in store for them, so they don’t try to find out additional details. At twelve, when Tommy reports Miss Lucy wishing the students were taught more about their futures as donors, Kathy replies, “But we *have* been taught about all that...Does she think there are things we haven’t been told yet?” (29). Kathy and Tommy think they know everything there is to know about their fates when they are still far too young to realize what it means to have their lives cut unnaturally short.

All the students know they’ll never reach middle age. Yet they study and gossip like they’ve nothing to worry about because they are used to that fact, having had it told to them before they could fully fathom it. By the time they’re thirteen, they’ve developed a running joke of “unzipping” themselves (pretending to unzip their skin, remove an organ, and zip their skin back up again) as a way of acknowledging their futures (88). (Unaware as she is of her narrative’s displacement from her world to ours, Kathy sees “unzipping” only as a childish prank, not the chilling and heartbreakingly naïve practice

it appears to readers.) At sixteen, the topic of donations only arises among the students as a possible excuse for intercourse: some thought “things like your kidneys and pancreas didn’t work properly unless you kept having sex” (96). Obviously, there are quite a few things about their bodies that they don’t know. Even on the brink of their departure from Hailsham, the students don’t discuss their fates—just who’s going out with whom. They keep thoughts of their futures so far in the backs of their minds that they continue blithely down the path toward their “completions,” itself a term rife with repression, for it does not name the death that awaits them.

Students are not the only Hailsham inhabitants engaging in repression. Their guardians aid a socially repressive government in allowing and even encouraging the children’s behavior, but they believe they are doing the students a favor. As Miss Emily puts it, the guardians want to give the students their childhoods (268). This explains the term “guardian,” for the guardians do more than teach: they protect. If the students hadn’t suppressed their unease at their futures, they would not have “lost themselves” in the lessons and artwork that make them cultured, humane individuals. But they’re also docile as lambs as they head for the slaughter, which no guardian acknowledges. Miss Emily tells Tommy and Kathy that their dream of deferral “would always have been beyond us to grant, even at the height of our influence” (261). With their obviously limited power, guardians cannot change their students’ fates, so why worry the students by raising their awareness, or worry themselves by admitting they’re raising sheep?

In this way, the guardians resemble their fellow normals, who collectively repress their knowledge of clones.²⁸ When clones were first created in the 1950s, no one wanted to acknowledge where the miraculous organs that cured cancer and heart disease were

²⁸ In this way, England’s alternate society exemplifies the idea of a society that sees only what it wants to see, common to science fiction (most famously, perhaps, in Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World*, where unhappy people take a drug called *soma* and enter a pleasant dream, literally seeing only their fantasies).

coming from. As Miss Emily tells Kathy and Tommy, “people did their best not to think about you” (263). Despite this repression, some people couldn’t help but think about the clones, present in the “shadows” of their society. When these unwelcome thoughts appeared, they “tried to convince themselves you [clones] weren’t really like us [people]. That you were less than human” (263). As long as the world required students to donate (for it did; how could one “ask a world that has come to regard cancer as curable . . . to go back to the dark days?”), “there would always be a barrier against seeing [clones] as properly human” (263). That barrier is British society’s unwillingness to confront an uncomfortable truth. When they attempted to improve living conditions for clones, Miss Emily and Madame took on the task of dragging society’s knowledge of clones’ humanity out of its subconscious, where the fact had been relegated, to its conscious, where it could no longer be ignored. Admirable though their mission is, they too engage in repression, turning away from the thought that they are raising children as sacrificial lambs to medical science.

For the most part, Hailsham students operate within a guardian-sanctioned double-consciousness, in which they understand in the backs of their minds the sterilized outline of their fates provided by their teachers, but simultaneously plan alternate, happy futures for themselves.²⁹ Only Miss Lucy ever attempts to wake the students out of their childhood dreams, and in doing so, she forfeits her position as a guardian at Hailsham. What finally prompts Miss Lucy to make the declaration on page 81 that explains so much to the reader is overhearing two boys imagine such fantasy lives. Peter and Gordon are “talking about what it would feel like if [they] became actors. What sort of life it would be” (81). They plan to “go to America to stand the best chance” (82). At this,

²⁹ The students’ double-consciousness is mirrored in the reader’s, who “believes” in the clones’ fictional world even as she knows it is fictional.

Miss Lucy angrily tells the students that they've been "told and not told" about their futures. She wants them to "know and know properly" that "none of [them] will go to America, none of [them] will be film stars. And none of [them] will be working in supermarkets as [she] heard some of [them] planning" (81). It's because she insists on dragging these truths into the light that Hailsham's headmistress decides Miss Lucy "had to go" (268). Had Miss Lucy continued to raise students' awareness, their "happiness at Hailsham would have been shattered" (268). Incomplete comprehension of some facts and repression of the rest is critical if the cloned children are to grow up like normal, and more importantly, docile, children.

In their extreme docility, the clones don't just resemble domesticated animals, but clones in their earliest science fiction representations. As Kerstin Bergman points out, "Clone fiction in the 70s was dominated by horror visions of bad clone "copies" controlled by evil dictators."³⁰ The clones of *Never Let Me Go* are not zombie-like killers, but they do fit the description of "copies," with all that it implies about being watered down, pale imitations of the original, like photocopies of photocopies. Hailsham's guardians condition their students to docilely accept their fates in the weak-willed, mechanical way expected of a 1970s fictional clone. Yet Ishiguro's clones are much more than that. Bergman cites *Never Let Me Go* as part of a positive trend that "dominate[s] the fictional depiction of human clones post-Dolly... clones are now portrayed as complete individuals who are fundamentally good and innocent."³¹

Ishiguro's own remarks support Bergman's claim: "I wanted to show three people who were essentially decent" (Hunnewell 52). Ruth, Tommy, and Kathy are basically good,

³⁰ Bergman, "Invasion of the Clones," *The Scientist*, 3 August 2006, <http://www.the-scientist.com/news/print/24249/>. Hereafter cited in the text.

³¹ Dolly the sheep was the first mammal cloned from a single cell. She was born in 1996 and saw widespread news coverage.

and individuals to boot. Ruth is sometimes friendly, sometimes cruel, but always bossy and demanding. Tommy, after a few emotionally tumultuous years, grows into a sweet-tempered, considerate youth. Kathy is an individual in the sense that her personality is unique, but that personality is so passive and submissive as to seem a throwback to pre-Dolly representations of clones, as easily controllable copies. Kathy takes the repression encouraged in Hailsham students to extremes, and in doing so almost becomes less than human.

Kathy's personal repression extends beyond what is encouraged by her guardians. In addition to repressing unpleasant knowledge about her future, Kathy represses her own emotions for most of her life. When she's eleven, she purchases a cassette tape at one of Hailsham's rummage sales. The tape is called *Songs After Dark* by Judy Bridgewater, and what makes it "so special" for Kathy is a song called "Never Let Me Go" (70). She plays it over and over, imagining:

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

What makes this a poignant moment is the fact that Kathy and all her fellow clones cannot have children. They're given information about sex and reproduction alongside facts about their donations, and Kathy has known about donations since she was six or seven (83). She never says aloud that she wishes she could have a baby. She knows her interpretation of "Never Let Me Go" can't be right, that it doesn't "fit with the rest of the lyrics." Yet that isn't "an issue" for her, and she listens to the song as often as she can,

whenever she has a moment alone (70). In her mind, the song says what she wants it to say, and she wants it to describe what it feels like to hold a child. On several occasions, she even holds a pillow in her arms like an imaginary infant. Though she never says so, Kathy is clearly the woman who wants to have the miracle baby. She represses her hopeless desire until it emerges only in a fantasy.

In many ways, Kathy shows a strong similarity to Stevens, Ishiguro's emotionally repressed butler in *The Remains of the Day*. Like Stevens with Lord Darlington, Kathy submerges her will in another's; her best friend Ruth's. From Kathy's earliest memories of Ruth, the two girls' roles as leader and follower are clear. At only seven years old, Ruth singles Kathy out and asks Kathy to play with her, which Kathy does. Ruth bosses Kathy around and says everything she does is wrong, but Kathy remains her friend (47). For years, Kathy caters to Ruth's whims. She buys an expensive chess set because Ruth claims to be an expert, but does no more than walk away when she discovers Ruth doesn't know how to play at all, despite her justified anger (53). Kathy defends the make-believe game of "Secret Guard" that Ruth invents, even after Ruth expels Kathy from the guard as punishment for the chess game embarrassment (55). Years later, when Ruth lies to Tommy in front of Kathy, saying she and Kathy often "have a good laugh" over Tommy's most personal artwork, Kathy says nothing (194). She knows Ruth is twisting her words, but she "just g[ives] up" and lets Ruth have her way (195), afterward behaving "toward both Tommy and Ruth as though nothing special had occurred" (198). She admits she "was upset at the time," but that's the closest Kathy comes to outwardly expressing anger at a vicious betrayal (197).

Kathy also represses her own deep love for Tommy. Friends from childhood, she and Tommy are each other's confidantes, even after Tommy and Ruth begin dating.

Kathy hastily breaks off a relationship she'd initiated at Hailsham when Ruth and Tommy split up and Kathy realizes she is Ruth's "natural successor" (100). Yet Kathy helps Ruth and Tommy get back together when Ruth asks her to, even though the request upsets Kathy so much even Ruth notices (103). When, at the Cottages, Ruth feels it necessary to warn Kathy that Tommy "doesn't see [her] like that," like a potential girlfriend, because Kathy isn't sexually pure enough for Tommy (201), Kathy doesn't defend herself; she just hopes that Ruth will change the subject. Soon after that conversation, Kathy leaves the Cottages (and Ruth and Tommy) to become a carer. Ruth's words obviously hurt her deeply, and not just because Ruth was cruel enough to bring up the sexual experiences Kathy confided to her in private. She has wanted to be with Tommy for years, but time and time again she lets Ruth come between them.

Only when Ruth gives her the go-ahead can Kathy enter a relationship with Tommy. Well into Kathy's carer career, when Ruth and Tommy have both begun their donations, Kathy takes both of them on a car trip. During the drive, Ruth announces that "the worst thing [she] did" all those years ago was to keep Kathy and Tommy apart (232). She knows Kathy must be angry, as she doesn't expect Kathy to forgive her (232). On Ruth's continued prompting, Kathy finally arranges to become Tommy's carer and try for a deferral for the two of them, on the grounds of their love. Had Ruth not brought it up, it seems unlikely that Kathy would ever have sought to become Tommy's carer, and even more unlikely she would have spoken to him about her long-hidden feelings. Kathy represses her love and her anger, never speaking of either, until Ruth drags them both into the light more than two decades after the three friends met and Kathy's strong emotions first formed.

For all the similarities, Kathy's deep emotional repression is even more interesting than Stevens's. Shaffer calls *The Remains of the Day* "one of the most profound novelistic representations of repression masquerading as professionalism, yet it is also aimed at an entire nation's mythical sense of itself" (87). Stevens's emotional repression exemplifies the extremes of stereotypical "butlerism" and Englishness. Kathy's casts a new light on certain images of clones, and what it means to Ishiguro to be human. Kathy's lack of passion could be construed as an attempt to show her as once removed from the human emotional spectrum. It would fit in with the depiction of placid clones going mechanically to their deaths; indeed, she would be the ultimate in clone-like passivity. Yet Kathy is only one of many clones, none of whom share her problems expressing emotion. Inhuman as Kathy's repression seems in the extent to which she takes it, it serves as confirmation of her humanity.

When he talks about *Never Let Me Go*, Ishiguro never refers to his main characters as anything other than people, human beings. That Kathy's emotions are so repressed makes her seem robotic, but underneath the repression, her emotions are painfully human. In the book's last pages, Kathy shows a spark of the anger and grief readers would expect from an ordinary human in her situation. When Tommy tells her that he doesn't want her to remain his carer through his last donation, Kathy is "furious," but she keeps her "voice quiet and under control" (281). At such an upsetting time, her control appears truly inhuman; she has not yet removed the repression veiling her emotions. She and Tommy have "loved each other all [their] lives. But in the end, [they] can't stay together forever" (282), and Tommy cuts short the few months they have together. Kathy keeps her superhuman composure until after Tommy dies. Then she allows herself one revealing indulgence:

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. (287-8)

Here, at last, is the deep emotion Kathy has kept under wraps the entire novel, hinting at but never expressing. She cries, but “[doesn't] let” the fantasy get out of control, and eventually returns to her car and resumes driving. Her tendency to repress takes over, but a momentary slip is enough to reveal the humanity it made doubtful. Kathy's repression is not proof she's less emotional than a human being, more clone-like than other clones; it simply masks the emotional sensitivity that identifies her as incontestably human.

Indeed, given Ishiguro's fascination with repression in his five other unambiguously human narrators, repression becomes in his novels a mark of humanity, and the fact that he bestows it upon Kathy proof of hers.

In *Never Let Me Go*, Ishiguro weaves threads of science fiction through the story of three ordinary human beings. That they are clones in an alternate reality ultimately does little to remove their story from the readers. Displaced as Kathy's narrative is, its feeling of science-fictionality fades as she and her fellow clones reveal more of themselves. As socially and psychologically repressed as Kathy is, as displaced as her life is from whatever life her model led, by the end of the novel, Ishiguro leaves a reader in no doubt of how human she is. By giving the psychology conceived in a human mind to characters conceived in test tubes, Ishiguro creates a powerful argument to support the case Miss Emily and Madame tried so hard to prove: that Kathy, Tommy, and all the rest were never “less than fully human” (262); that of course they “*had souls at all*” (260).

Conclusion

In a 2008 interview, Ishiguro describes his second novel, *An Artist of the Floating World*, as emerging from a sub-plot in his first novel, *A Pale View of Hills*. In its turn, his third novel, *The Remains of the Day*, came about when he realized he wanted to write *An Artist of the Floating World* over again, but as the story of a man who wastes his personal life, rather than his professional life. Ishiguro set *The Remains of the Day* in England instead of Japan like his first two novels because he “realized that the essence of what [he] wanted to write was moveable.” When interviewer Susannah Hunnewell remarks that moving to a new setting “shows a certain chameleon-like ability,” Ishiguro rejoins: “I don’t think it is that chameleon-like. What I’m saying is I’ve written the same novel three times. I just somehow got away with it” (Hunnewell 41-2). Ishiguro certainly did “get away with” recycling themes in his first three novels. Not only did *A Pale View of Hills* win the Winifred Holtby Prize and *An Artist of the Floating World* the Whitbread Award, *The Remains of the Day* won the Booker Prize in 1989.

But the similarity of Ishiguro’s first three novels did not escape notice, or criticism. In his review of *When We Were Orphans*, James Wood writes that “there are novelists whose books are always the same, as similar as postage stamps...Kazuo Ishiguro might have been one had he not published” his fourth novel, *The Unconsoled*. Ishiguro relates each of his first three novels by way of a narrator whom Wood describes as “reliably unreliable.” Ultimately, Wood claims, Ishiguro’s “reliability” in producing such a narrator “was in danger of overwhelming his narrator’s unreliability” (43). In other words, a fourth novel in a similar vein would be, at least to Wood, dully predictable.

In an attempt to break from the pattern of his first three novels, Ishiguro wrote *The Unconsoled*, which he envisioned as a “messy, jagged, loud kind of book.”³² Instead of spending two years mapping out the story, as he did for *The Remains of the Day*, Ishiguro wrote with “a sense of exploration, and improvisation.”³³ The result was a much longer, much more confusing work that travels between realism and fantasy. Wood despairs of Ryder’s “elaborately pressed and buttoned English” (44), which resembles the language of Etsuko, Ono, and Stevens. (He does not think much of the book as a whole, asserting “it invented its own category of badness” [44].) But Lewis sees the fact that “*The Unconsoled* is not so different from Ishiguro’s previous novels after all” in a positive light, referring admiringly to the way its setting, like the settings of *A Pale View of Hills*, *An Artist of the Floating World*, and *The Remains of the Day*, “operates subtly on an analogical level” (128). Likewise, Shaffer accepts the existence of “characteristics that the novel shares with the earlier works” as a way to “shed light on Ishiguro’s most complex and difficult work to date” (91). These characteristics include “a first-person protagonist who paradoxically conceals yet at the same time reveals elements of his past life and present reality” (Shaffer 91), as well as “the themes of guilt and fear of humiliation...excessive, insincere flattery, elisions, voluntary or involuntary amnesia.”³⁴ For these scholars, Ishiguro’s failure to break completely from his old mold is less a shortcoming than a preserving of worthy techniques.

As related in the introduction to this thesis, Shaffer’s and Lewis’s analyses unearth the themes of repression and displacement that Ishiguro’s first four novels share. These themes persist in his next two novels, as Chapters One and Two of this thesis

³² Ishiguro, quoted by Susan Chira, in “A Case of Cultural Misperception,” *New York Times (1857-Current file)*, 28 October 1989, <http://www.proquest.com/>.

³³ Kazuo Ishiguro, interview by Maya Jaggi (1995), in *Conversations* (see introduction, note 5), 112. Hereafter cited in the text.

³⁴ Amit Chaudhuri, “Unlike Kafka,” *London Review of Books*, (8 June 1995): 30.

illustrate. By employing expanded versions of Shaffer's understanding of repression and Lewis's of displacement, I show that Ishiguro not only reuses these two themes in *When We Were Orphans* and *Never Let Me Go*, he deepens and complicates them as well.

In Ishiguro's first three novels, his narrators experience repression and displacement as individuals, inside their own heads. In *When We Were Orphans*, the displacement and repression that Christopher feels are mirrored in his larger surroundings, making them strange. *The Unconsoled* takes place in an unrealistic setting too, but one "so odd, so obviously constructed according to another set of priorities, that it must be obvious we're not in the game of trying to faithfully recapture what some real place is like" (Jaggi 111). In *When We Were Orphans*, the oddness has been scaled down from *The Unconsoled*. Christopher's environment is close enough to realistic that normal rules of behavior should still apply. But they don't, quite, and the reasons why originate in repression and displacement. Christopher begins his narrative experiencing displacement akin to Etsuko's when she arrives in England, exercising repression much like Stevens' as he tries to make memories of his past more palatable. Ishiguro increases the scope of those two psychological defense mechanisms when he applies them to Christopher's England, which represses its sense of responsibility for the mess it has allowed to fester in Shanghai, and to Christopher's monumental task, which has been displaced from a detective mystery, along with a cast of characters who don't think it at all strange Christopher should hold the classic detective's belief that he can root out all the evil in his story, even if, as in this case, that evil includes the coming of WWII.

In *Never Let Me Go*, Ishiguro employs repression and displacement in ways different from his first four novels and from *When We Were Orphans*. Whereas in *When We Were Orphans*, Ishiguro displaces elements from detective fiction into Christopher's

story, in *Never Let Me Go*, he displaces Kathy's story until it takes on elements of science fiction. Set in an alternate reality foreign to readers, Kathy's life is ordinary and familiar to her. In reading her narrative, we displace it from its intended audience of the clones who are Kathy's peers. Those clones and the socially repressive British government they live under are normal to Kathy but otherworldly to her readers, the fantastic inventions of a science fiction novel. Additionally, repression operates not just at the level of the individual in *Never Let Me Go* as it does in Ishiguro's earliest novels. In Kathy's story, Kathy represses her thoughts, as do normal human members of society, and the British government as a whole, in the sense that it runs a socially repressive regime. The controlling political force in Kathy's England is one very oppressive to clones, and very clever as well, for it encourages in the clones the psychological repression that prevents them from questioning their lives.

Thus the themes of repression and displacement are present in all six of Ishiguro's novels. Christopher speaks the same stilted English as his predecessors. Kathy lives in the quintessentially English setting of a boarding school just as Stevens occupies the classically English position of butler. Every Ishiguro narrator to date tells his or her story through flashbacks and memories, all of which are occasionally hazy. Yet *When We Were Orphans* and *Never Let Me Go* form a distinct pair among the six books, and not only because they are Ishiguro's two most recent novels to date. They are his two most "genred" novels, for though their resemblances to the detective mystery and the science fiction story are by no means overwhelming, they are stronger than the first four novels' ties to any specific genre. Those ties present in *When We Were Orphans* and *Never Let Me Go* arise through the new and more complicated ways Ishiguro understands repression and displacement in these books. In this way, Ishiguro achieves the break

from his self-created tradition that he sought with *The Unconsoled*, while maintaining the themes and techniques that make all his novels complex, beautiful, and always recognizably Ishiguro.

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