"LOOK IN THE GUTTER": INFRASTRUCTURAL INTERIORITY IN NEVER LET ME GO

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Set in late 1990s England, Kazuo Ishiguro's novel Never Let Me Go presents a world that remedies previously incurable diseases through the aid of a government cloning program, which harvests organs from human clones. While this scheme doesn't share the same status of public utility as water or gas, it nevertheless supplies goods that, over time, have become less like commodities and more like necessities. As the reader eventually learns, the program is a vast enterprise, large enough to assure the British population that "their own children, their spouses, their parents, their friends, did not die from cancer, motor neurone disease, heart disease" (263). Its development echoes those raised by developments in infrastructure, whereby a previous luxury becomes more widely available (even, perhaps, a necessity) through technological advancement.1 With these dystopian valences, Never Let Me Go is defamiliarizing for readers of Ishiguro's oeuvre, moving away from the locatable historical settings that characterize novels such as A Pale View of Hills, The Remains of the Day, and When We Were Orphans. However, Never Let Me Go maintains Ishiguro's trademark protagonist: a highly self-conscious character nostalgically, if ambivalently, orbiting a lost past. Narrated by Kathy H., a clone about to begin "donating" her organs, this lost past takes the form of Hailsham, a specialized institution within the larger cloning program that allows its charges to spend their child-
hood in a cultivated, beautiful environment. As a Hailsham alumna, Kathy is special and individuated; and yet, as her simple, flat narrative style suggests, her subjectivity is radically delimited by her status as a clone. The program ensures that she and her fellow students circulate through a rigorously controlled world-system in order to gain maximum profit from its all-too-human resources.

With these parameters, *Never Let Me Go* provides an important test case not just for Ishiguro's oeuvre, but also for the novelistic tradition as a whole, whose ideological core Nancy Armstrong has described as "the presupposition that novels think like individuals about the difficulties of fulfilling oneself as an individual under specific cultural historical conditions" (9–10). Although Armstrong expresses doubt that novels can modify their ideological core, she also proposes that if the novel is to evolve, it must begin imagining a "genuine alternative to the individual, one that does not inspire phobia and yet is grounded in the world we now inhabit" (25). This is a useful way to approach the project of *Never Let Me Go*, a careful hybrid of realism and science fiction whose stakes are dramatized through its unique narrative perspective. As many have suggested, the novel forces us to contend with the disappearance of the individual and the emergence of the social aggregate, as well as the difficult, often alien emotions that arise from its dark biopolitical premise. Lisa Fluet, for instance, reads the novel as an experiment in class consciousness, asking "what it might feel like to lose one's individual sense of 'me' in an impersonal, collective 'we'. . . . with a bureaucratic, even actuarial eye to the exterior limits of human endeavor in the aggregate, rather than to the bottomless depths of strong, individual human feelings about those limits" (285). For Bruce Robbins, Ishiguro's lesson lies in the cold, statistical nature of collective justice, "[i]f only so as not to join the millions in thinking of myself as an improbably individual exception to the statistical rule" ("Cruelty is Bad" 294). And while Rebecca Walkowitz suggests we consider the novel's networks of "unoriginal objects" (such as Kathy's lost cassette, the titular song, and even Kathy herself), her analysis still hinges on the fate of the individual, reading the novel's modes of comparison as helping us "recognize the large networks of approximation and comparison in which individuality functions" ("Unimaginable Largeness" 226).

This article introduces a spatial element to these considerations of the social aggregate by focusing on the novel's infrastructuralism, which I define as its marked attention to the relationship between the clones and their material environment. As the clones pass through the program, we are given a substantial amount of information about the schools and cottages they inhabit as young wards of the state; the bedsits, car parks, and highways they use as carers for their fellow...
clones after organ donations; the recovery centers that house them as donors; and finally, the hospitals that harvest their organs until they die (or "complete," to use the program's euphemistic language). Indeed, the drama of *Never Let Me Go* comes precisely from this confluence of bildung and environment: Kathy's narrative is occasioned not only by her transition from carer to donor but also by the closure of Hailsham and other privately funded enterprises within the cloning program. The closure of these privately funded "privileged estates" signals an imminently bleak future, one stripped of all acculturating facilities and left with only the barest forms of infrastructure.

Although critics agree that conceptualizing the difference between the individual and the aggregate is one of the main problems presented by *Never Let Me Go*, they have overlooked the novel's analogous concern with the difference between exceptional and nondescript places. What distinguishes Hailsham from the rest of the "vast government homes" that make up the majority of the cloning program? What, if anything, makes up its distinct infrastructuralism, especially if it feeds its subjects back into the system? While the program's euphemistic language of "carers," "donors," and "completion" play a role in masking the cold reality of the clones' lives, Hailsham's emphasis on a kind, beautiful environment plays an even stronger role in their repression. Read in this way, *Never Let Me Go* emerges as a deliberation over the meaning-making potential of state infrastructures and whether their promises of cultural value actually sustain those whose lives are thoroughly instrumentalized.

In approaching *Never Let Me Go* as Kathy's struggle to retain her self-as-Hailsham over her self-as-infrastructure, this article participates in the recent interest in using state infrastructure as an optic for literature, especially public utilities and welfare state institutions. These studies acknowledge the Janus-faced tendency to see state planning as promising utopias of large-scale care but resulting in dystopias of totalitarian control. One way to adjust this phobic filter is to render the state's workings more visible, whether by contextualizing their historical development or by locating them in aspects of literary form such as metaphor, character, or genre. In this regard, Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* presents an exceptional case study of literature and the state, as its narrator is herself an infrastructural element—what we might understand as sentient infrastructure, a second aspect of the novel's infrastructuralism. Through Kathy, the novel challenges us to expand our definition of infrastructure, presenting a situation where humans have become utilities (indeed, part of England's National Health Service). One might say we already have an adequate theoretical scaffolding to understand this subjectivity, whether through Agamben's concept of bare life and *homo sacer* or the speciation of
human beings conceptualized by a Foucauldian notion of biopower. However, neither can sufficiently account for Kathy H.’s perspective as a clone and the way that she directly mediates her crisis of self through the crisis of the institution. The innovative nature of *Never Let Me Go* can be attributed precisely to the tension between Kathy’s individual consciousness and infrastructuralized body, a dilemma that both relies on and challenges Ishiguro’s signature style.

Ishiguro gives us a glimpse of this tension in the opening lines to the novel, which begin to carefully unfold the contours of the cloning program:

My name is Kathy H. I’m thirty-one years old, and I’ve been a carer now for over eleven years. That sounds long enough, I know, but actually they want me to go on for another eight months, until the end of this year. That’ll make it almost exactly twelve years. Now I know my being a carer so long isn’t necessarily because they think I’m fantastic at what I do. There are some really good carers who’ve been told to stop after just two or three years. And I can think of one carer at least who went on for all of fourteen years despite being a complete waste of space. So I’m not trying to boast. (3)

While this passage introduces the euphemistic mechanisms of the donations program, as well as the dark, dystopian sense of an "I" versus a "them," what I want to draw attention to is Kathy’s turn to her own figurative language—"a complete waste of space"—which she employs to describe a particularly unskilled carer. Her turn of phrase reveals the relationship between bodies, environment, utility, and waste that is central to the cloning program and to clones’ interactions with their environment. Though this description may seem merely idiomatic, or perhaps officially euphemistic, it is significantly neither. Instead, and even more chillingly, this language comes from Kathy herself, giving the reader a glimpse into her infrastructural consciousness.

**Hailsham’s Paradoxical Infrastructure**

As a privately funded estate within the cloning program, Hailsham’s great trick is to refuse its infrastructural status: it shelters its clones from the outside world for as long as they remain under its care. This is due in part to the guardians’ epistemological wariness when teaching their students about their place in the order of things, cannily letting their students know only so much at a time.
But this deception is also built into Hailsham itself, with its provisions of education, its caretakers, and its beautiful surroundings designed to placate the clones’ otherwise bleak fate. The estate itself is large and immaculately groomed, with several rooms, halls, tranquil ponds, rhubarb patches, and sports pavilions that look like "those sweet little cottages people always had in picture books when we were young" (6). Its boarding-school atmosphere adds an additional level of intrigue to the students' lives, including intimacies of dormitory living and attachments to favorite guardians.4 Hailsham’s traditions also emphasize individual merit, such as the emphasis on artistic creation and the encouragement of collection chests, which students use to house their private, most cherished belongings. By encouraging their creative development, Hailsham gives their students a sizable super-structure of meaning-making values, practices, and places, either to forestall or repress their knowledge of their infrastructural purpose. As Miss Emily puts it to Kathy, "Whatever else, we at least saw to it that all of you in our care, you grew up in wonderful surroundings. And we saw to it too, after you left us, you were kept away from the worst of those horrors. We were able to do that much for you at least" (261). This revelation of environment is crucial: it dramatizes a long-standing belief in an environment’s ameliorative effects on personal development, or as Douglas Mao puts it, the belief that exposure to beauty could "bring human beings to some kind of reconciliation with a world that otherwise seems alien, indifferent, fragmented, or oppressive" (6–7). It certainly appears that Kathy has absorbed this lesson: her narrative is predominantly spatial, consummately in touch with her surroundings.

However, what is particularly grim about Hailsham’s environmental experiment is that it does not ask for a revolutionary turnover of the program but rather seeks to make it more comfortable, and thus more acceptable, to its cloned subjects. The cultural attachments it offers are merely palliative, delivered in advance of the wounds administered by the state. Though privately funded, it nevertheless aids in maintaining and training its students to become healthy, willing organ donors, feeding them back into the larger system. While describing Hailsham, Kathy’s narrative obliquely registers this chilling reality, giving us small reminders of its role as a clone factory. We learn, for instance, that the clones are sterile and that they have been in Hailsham since their "Infants" stage. And while they are given lessons in literature, music, and geography, they are also subject to "Culture Briefings," role-playing sessions to help prepare them for the outside world, or at least the minimum level of social encounter they'll need as carers. Though Kathy doesn't dwell in this paranoid space, she often uses these referents as a means of establishing com-
mon ground between her and her audience, such as this reference to her medical exams: "I don't know how it was where you were, but at Hailsham we had to have some form of medical almost every week—usually up in Room 18 at the very top of the house—with stern Nurse Trisha, or Crow Face, as we called her" (13). Through these asides, Kathy hails us as fellow clones (perhaps even her donors), though the interpellation is never firmly established.

However, Hailsham cannot completely sustain its ideological illusions. Even though it tries to do away with the reality of its infrastructural purpose, the clones still have to come to terms with their status as infrastructure, creating a series of psychic dilemmas regarding their utilitarian personhood and foreclosed futurity. For some, like Tommy, this manifests itself in forms of rebellion and moments of uncontrollable rage. But for the majority of the Hailsham students, this entails inventing compensatory mechanisms to deal with these issues, engaging in their own forms of play, jokes, and fantasies to make sense of their infrastructural status. Indeed, *Never Let Me Go* can be read as a recounting of these meaning-making experiments, which progress one after another, until the end of the clones' short lives.

The dilemmas begin in their childhood years, as the young clones develop an uneasy relationship to their physical bodies as belonging both to themselves and to other people. They register this ambivalence through imaginative play and figurative language, beginning with their concept of "unzipping." It starts as a cruel joke on Tommy; the students pretend that a wound on his elbow was at risk of unzipping like a bag, with "skin flopping about next to him 'like one of those long gloves in *My Fair Lady*'") (86). However, the idea of unzipping persists long after the joke ends, finding new life as a way to conceptualize donations: "The idea was that when the time came, you'd be able just to unzip a bit of yourself, a kidney or something would slide out, and you'd hand it over" (88). Another example occurs during an English lesson with Miss Lucy, when the students discuss POW camps in the Second World War. As Kathy recalls, "One of the boys asked if the fences around the camps had been electrified, and then someone else had said how strange it must have been, living in a place like that, where you could commit suicide any time you liked just by touching a fence" (78). To Miss Lucy's horror (and ours), the students laugh and begin to impersonate "someone reaching out and getting electrocuted. For a moment things got riotous, with everyone shouting and mimicking touching electric fences" (78). Part coping mechanism, part registration of the horror of their bounded, controlled lives, the clones' play is a metaphorization that reflects, but also doesn't quite fit, the reality they face. Ishiguro is interested
in these moments of self-negation as an exit from, even rebellion against, the clones' thoroughly instrumentalized lives. While there is no escape from being-infrastructure, the clones are still able to effect a spectacle of violence, one that cuts through the subdued, euphemized nature of the cloning program.  

While these fantasies center on the materiality of the body, at the Cottages they evolve into more complex questions about personhood and professionalism. For instance, we see Ruth excitedly searching for her "possible," clonespeak for the person from whom each clone was modeled. As Kathy explains, the main idea behind the possibilities was that if you caught a glimpse of your model, "you'd glimpse your future. . . . you'd get some insight into who you were deep down, and maybe too, you'd see something of what your life held in store" (140). Yet as Ruth's search demonstrates, the importance of the possible becomes less about interior personhood and more about professional environment. Her interest is first piqued by hearing her possible was an office worker in some distant seaside town. However, the fantasy doesn't take hold until Ruth sees an advertisement depicting a sparkling open office. Captivated by the ad's vision of professionalism ("Now that would be a proper place to work"), she uses the picture as the basis of her dream future, going into "all the details—the plans, the gleaming equipment, the chairs with their swivels and castors" (144). Here, we have a glimpse into Ruth's own Hailsham-forged consciousness, one drawn to beautiful managerial environments as the pinnacle of her personal development. However, when the clones take a field trip to search for Ruth's possible, the fantasy unravels, leading to Ruth's bitter, abject catharsis: "We all know it. We're modelled from trash. Junkies, prostitutes, winos, tramps. Convicts, maybe, just as long as they aren't psychos" (166). The end of her tirade is even more striking, evacuating any sense of personhood: "If you want to look for possibles, if you want to do it properly, then you look in the gutter. You look in rubbish bins. Look down the toilet, that's where you'll find where we all come from" (166). In other words, look to the infrastructure. Not only has Ruth's vision of professionalism crumbled but also her sense of a viable personhood. Now, she's able to see herself as what she's been all along: an object circulating in the networks of society's refuse.

Poetics of Infrastructuralism I: Searching for Hailsham

Yet there is a reason why Kathy H. is the narrator of Never Let Me Go, rather than the bitterly disillusioned Ruth, the rage-filled Tommy, or even the righteous guardian Miss Lucy. What worries
Kathy the most is not the injustice or loathsome nature of her death but rather the closure of her beloved alma mater and her increasing distance from her childhood life:

"But what’ll happen to all the students?" Roger obviously thought I’d meant the ones still there, the little ones dependent on their guardians, and he put on a troubled face and began speculating how they’d have to be transferred to other houses around the country, even though some of these would be a far cry from Hailsham. But of course, that wasn’t what I’d meant. I’d meant us, all the students who’d grown up with me and were now spread across the country, carers and donors, all separated now but still somehow linked by the place we’d come from. (211)

To Kathy, the loss of Hailsham isn’t just institutional: she isn’t concerned about the physical relocation of the younger students, but rather the symbolic effects for the alumni.7 Indicating its lingering influence as a place, Kathy points to what Gaston Bachelard calls a "poetics of the house" that has laid claim to her and her fellow students, one founded on Hailsham’s environmental ideology (xxxvi). If, as Bachelard suggests, writers "prove to us that the houses that were lost forever continue to live on in us; that they insist in us in order to live again, as though they expected us to give them a supplement of living" (56), Kathy’s narrative follows partially in suit, reanimating Hailsham just on the eve of its disappearance. Yet where Bachelard finds the practice of nostalgia ultimately reparative ("How much better we should live in the old house today!"), Kathy’s reflections are more conflicted. While she does not fully jettison Hailsham’s poetics of space in her post-Hailsham life, neither does she wholeheartedly reproduce it. Instead, she finds herself drawn to an archive of degraded spaces, such as fields and open roads, marshlands and ruins. In doing so, she builds her own poetics of infrastructure, which testify to, but also bear a fraught relationship with, Hailsham’s institutional legacy.

In contrast to Ruth’s looking down toilets and gutters, Kathy’s poetics of infrastructure reflects a more mobile search, catalyzed by her travels through the English countryside. This leitmotif will be familiar to readers of Ishiguro, whose fixation on transportation is unmistakable: from the trams and trains in An Artist of the Floating World and A Pale View of Hills, to Stevens’s country motoring in The Remains of the Day, Ishiguro’s novels are both minutely located and vastly networked. Stevens provides the closest analogue to Kathy, as their sheer mobility across the English countryside sits at odds with their situated roles in Darlington Hall and Hailsham. Their driving also provides a useful frame structure for the novels, catalyzing
flashbacks to their respective pasts. But where *The Remains of the Day* gives us a tour of a mythical "Great" Britain ("as though the land knows of its own beauty, of its own greatness, and feel no need to shout it" [29]), *Never Let Me Go* travels England's darker, uglier backroads, following the more banal, nondescript infrastructures that shape its landscape. And while Stevens's travels represent a rare moment of leisure for him, Kathy's driving is sponsored by the donations program and characterized by a dreary work fatigue from long hours on the road, commuting from donor to donor. The car thus underscores the clones' thoroughly instrumentalized beings, as they use them in accord with the government's plan rather than as a means of escape. For Kathy, driving allows an active way to continue searching for Hailsham:

> Driving around the country now, I still see things that will remind me of Hailsham. I might pass the corner of a misty field, or see part of a large house in the distance as I come down the side of a valley, even a particular arrangement of poplar trees up on a hillside, and I'll think: "Maybe that's it! I've found it! This actually is Hailsham!" Then I see it's impossible and I go on driving, my thoughts drifting on elsewhere. In particular, there are those pavilions. . . . If I drive past one I keep looking over to it for as long as possible, and one day I'll crash the car like that, but I keep doing it. (6)

The violence of the final line is apparent. This is no carefree cruise down memory lane; instead, its escapism suggests a deep ambivalence about what it means to search for Hailsham. Though the last sentence merely gestures to a potential car crash, Kathy's disregard for her own safety is nevertheless disturbing, especially in contrast to her careful professionalism. This specter of vehicular death raises two potential types of closure: either Kathy will metaphorically crash into reality (Ishiguro's trademark epiphany) or die before required to become a donor. In some sense, this episode recalls the earlier joke about the POW camp and the disruptive potentiality of the students' suicidal urges. Yet as before, while Ishiguro inserts the question of resistance into the novel, he does so only in a shadowy, underdeveloped form. *Never Let Me Go* is not interested in outward acts of rebellion, heroic attempts at escape, or even abject acknowledgments of one's fate, but rather in the limited ways clones fantasize themselves out of being infrastructure, limitations that come from their status as infrastructure. And even if Kathy does deliberately crash her car, she may end up fulfilling her infrastructural role after all. Indeed, the specter of the car crash reflects our own quotid...
brush with organ donation, namely, the decision whether or not to identify as an "organ donor" on a driver's license. In this way, Ishiguro cannily reminds us that there is little room for resistance in the world of *Never Let Me Go*, underscoring the distance between choosing and not choosing how we become infrastructural.

Though Kathy never manages to find Hailsham itself, there's something about the empty, gray quality of England's landscape and roadways that is peculiarly conducive to remembering it. In her reminiscences, Kathy uniformly begins by describing the long, expansive nature of her commutes, whether "past fields on a long afternoon, or maybe drinking my coffee in front of a huge window in a motorway service station" (45) or "past rows of furrowed fields, the sky big and grey and never changing mile after mile" (115), which then instigates a memory of Hailsham. Like Proust's madeleine, these memories seem involuntary. Yet they aren't spurred on by a particular object or sensory pleasure. Instead, they come from the absence of direct stimulation, growing from a space where "thoughts have nowhere special to go" (55). It may seem counterintuitive that these bleak, empty infrastructures remind Kathy of Hailsham, especially in relation to its beautiful, cultivated environment. But the unremarkable, utilitarian nature of these roads and service stations are closer to the true nature of being a clone—more than any well-meaning attempt to reform the lived experience of the donations program. These roads and motorway service stations provide a direct reflection of Hailsham, revealing its true nature as a transient, unlivable infrastructure no different from any other vast government home. In this sense, Kathy's driving meditations can be read as akin to Tommy's excessive rage or Ruth's bitter insistence that they are modeled from trash: they are her way of expressing resistance to, or at least awareness of, her thoroughly infrastructural being.

While this specter of potential violence haunts every clone, Kathy's nostalgia grants her an incisive double vision that allows her to see both the beauty of past places and the bleakness of present ones. While her traveling provides the most immediate catalyst for entering this nostalgic mode, it is also activated by representations of past places, such as an old photograph of the Kingsfield, Tommy's recovery center. Taken in the late fifties or early sixties, it shows Kingsfield when it was still a "holiday camp for ordinary families," before it had been converted into a center for ailing clones. The photograph shows a cheerful, sunny place, centering on a swimming pool with "all these happy people—children, parents—splashing about having a great time" (219). The only evidence left of this past structure is the metal frame supporting the pool's high-dive, a remainder that exemplifies the current center's shoddy, unkempt nature. Looking at
the photograph, Kathy muses, "It was only when I saw the photo it occurred to me what the frame was and why it was there, and today, each time I see it, I can't help picturing a swimmer taking a dive off the top only to crash into the cement" (219). From the diver's point of view, this violence is self-inflicted, much like the joke over the electrical fence and Kathy's intimation of her car accident. Yet here, Kathy's projected imaginings double the point, symbolizing not only the clones' entrapment but also the slow leaching of care from the cloning program, as institutions like Hailsham give way to bleak governmental facilities.

The most poignant instance of this infrastructural poetics surfaces when Kathy, Ruth, and Tommy travel out to the beached boat that is stranded in the middle of a marshland. As the boat has become legendary among the donors, this episode requires a closer look, especially to see what revelation it promises (and delivers) to its visitors. The trip is not easy, especially for ailing donors like Ruth, but after a while, the clones discover an eerie, bleached landscape of water and woods:

The pale sky looked vast and you could see it reflected every so often in the patches of water breaking up the land. Not so long ago, the woods must have extended further, because you could see here and there ghostly dead trunks poking out of the soil, most of them broken off only a few feet up. And beyond the dead trunks, maybe sixty yards away, was the boat, sitting beached in the marshes under the weak sun. (224)

The boat, too, is just as bleached and decayed, with cracking paint, crumbling frames, and fading sky-blue color. What the clones see in all this degradation and disrepair, interestingly, is Hailsham, or at least a version of it. As Tommy offers, "I always see Hailsham being like this now. No logic to it. In fact, this is pretty close to the picture in my head. Except there's no boat, of course. It wouldn't be so bad, if it's like this now" (225). And while Ruth at first refuses to see the likeness between the two structures, she then connects the scene to a dream she had, one where she was back at Hailsham, "looking out the window and everything outside was flooded. Just like a giant lake. And I could see rubbish floating by under my window, empty drinks, cartons, everything. But there wasn't any sense of panic or anything like that. It was nice and tranquil, just like it is here. I knew I wasn't in any danger, that it was only like that because it had closed down" (225).

Thus for Tommy and Ruth, the boat becomes a means to assure themselves about Hailsham's closure, whether Tommy's conclusion
that "it wouldn't be that bad, if it's like this now," or Ruth's dream-logic of Hailsham's tranquillity. Likewise, Jane Elliott reads this episode as reinforcing what she calls the clones' "suffering agency," or a desire for self-preservation that leads them to embrace Hailsham's ideological confines as a shelter rather than a prison (95). To Elliott, this desolate landscape provides a "vision of what lays outside the novel's focus on ideological control," a "chilling brush with reality" that leads the clones to turn away from the scene and back to their programmed lives (96). However, I read this scene not as a reinforcement of the divide between ideological sanctuary and dystopian wasteland, but as a collapsing of it. Finding Hailsham here entails accepting its status as a ruined experiment, an abandoned structure, or in Ruth's dream, a giant lake of trash. For Ruth and Tommy, who are donors at the time, the boat offers a compensatory aesthetic vision of their own ruinous status, a compellingly peaceful end for an object created, used, and eventually discarded. For Kathy, however, this moment is less revelatory: still a carer at the time, her self-realization waits until the end of the novel, located in her own mythic landscape of rubbish, emptiness, and infrastructural remains.

Revising the Historical Epiphany in Never Let Me Go

Like the novel's protagonist, Never Let Me Go's parting epiphany is distinct within Ishiguro's oeuvre, in part because the conditions of Ishiguro's typical narrative epiphany are simply not available to Kathy's subjectivity. The form of this epiphany follows roughly the same narrative pattern, beginning with a protagonist reflecting on the remains of his or her day in a manner that suggests a concealing of, or a willful blindness toward, certain traumatic episodes. In recounting their pasts, the characters often express a pride in their status and social position, especially with regards to their consummate professionalism; however, this self-satisfaction becomes untenable as the protagonists come to terms with their complicity in a violent order of things, through a crisis that reveals what they needed to ignore, forget, or injure in order to continue their work.8 Thus Etsuko of A Pale View of Hills (1982) reveals her guilt around her daughter's suicide in the difficult landscape of postwar Nagasaki; retired artist Ono of An Artist of the Floating World (1986) looks back on his contributions to Japanese wartime propaganda; the butler Stevens of The Remains of the Day reflects on what it meant to give his personal and professional best to an employer with Nazi sympathies; and detective Christopher of When We Were Orphans (2000) learns his inheritance came from his mother's service to a Chinese warlord.9
As these examples suggest, Ishiguro's narrative epiphanies are often historically and politically oriented around war, usually the Second World War. As Ishiguro expressed in an 1989 interview with Graham Swift, "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, and people having to face up to the notion that their ideals weren't quite what they thought they were before the test came" (36). While Ishiguro's other first-person narrators play out their ethical dilemmas against the backdrop of historical events and wartime referents, the clones in *Never Let Me Go* are not allowed such access; their engagement with the outside world is as radically delimited as their short life spans and their ability to understand the system in which they live is as carefully monitored as their health. Thus the real challenge posed by the novel is how, if at all, a clone might experience a postwar epiphany in relation to her historical or social context, especially as these contexts are not foregrounded as such.

One way to begin addressing this is to turn to the failure of the historical epiphany in *Never Let Me Go* and to see what, if anything, emerges in its stead. The novel's attempted historical revelation occurs during Kathy and Tommy's visit to the home of her former Hailsham guardians, Madame and Miss Emily. At this point in the novel, Kathy is acting as carer for Tommy. The two make the pilgrimage to the house together, hoping that on the basis of their love, Tommy might be granted a deferral from his donations. Of course, this idea is shown to be just another Hailsham fiction, with Madame and Miss Emily confirming the extent of the cloning program's cruelty. It's a strange interlude, often passed over in critical treatment. Perhaps this is due to the peculiar interface between the guardians and the clones, meeting their makers in a contrived, almost deus ex machina setup. It is also unnecessarily didactic: the reader's common sense needs no further confirmation that cloning is bad, and this episode merely belabors the point.11

However, the failure of this denouement is worth a second look, especially in light of Ishiguro's other novelistic epiphanies. What makes this episode particularly peculiar is the extent of its historical backstory, given in a long explanation that had hitherto been absent in the novel. As a product of the immediate postwar period, the program began when scientific developments in cloning led to the eradication of previously incurable diseases. In the 1950s and 1960s, Hailsham and other estates were created to counter the general way the program was being run; these establishments reached the height of their influence in the late 1970s, when Hailsham's creators organized exhibitions of clone art to gather support for their move-
ment. However, by the 1980s and on through the 1990s (roughly contemporary with Thatcherism in real, historical England), public support for Hailsham was lost through the Morningdale scandal, an experiment in genetic engineering aiming to create superhumans rather than clones. By the novel’s present day, Hailsham and the other planned environments are gone. This historical account is immediately recognizable as the story of the British welfare state. In this light, the novel offers a damning forecast. Shattering the view of welfare as putatively caring, it envisages an exceptionally violent system, one that even trains the dead to bury their dead.

Yet this contextualization comes across as strangely unsatisfying, not only due to its ungainly didacticism but more importantly due to its illegibility for the clones. After years of strategically being "told and not told" about their place in the world, this historical explanation is foreign, even unrecognizable (81). Here we might turn to Lauren Berlant’s concept of the juxtapolitical as a productive way to think about history in Never Let Me Go. As a near or nearly political register, the juxtapolitical "flourish[es] in proximity to the political because the political is deemed an elsewhere managed by elites who are interested in reproducing the conditions of their objective superiority, not in the well-being of ordinary people or life-worlds" (3). Often emerging in marginalized collectivities, the juxtapolitical allows subjects relief from the political through "adaptation, adjustment, improvisation, and developing wiles for surviving, thriving, and transcending the world as it presents itself" (2). This is an apt way to describe Hailsham’s habitus: with power so obviously managed elsewhere, it creates its own intimate public that must, to make life livable, find ways to relieve its students of their thoroughly utilitarian subjecthood. We might likewise call Hailsham’s project juxtahistorical, fighting back the bad history of the donations program. Thus when Miss Emily admonishes, "From your perspective today, Kathy, your bemusement is perfectly reasonable. But you must try and see it historically" (262), we know there’s no way for the clones to do so; unlike Ishiguro’s other novels, history is not what hurts them.

Seen infrastructurally, however, a drama emerges between public utilities and their privatization, one that even the clones can register. Faced with a reality of "vast government ‘homes’" (which, Miss Emily assures, are so unspeakably awful that "you’d not sleep for days if you saw what still goes on in some of those places"), the former guardians of Hailsham retreat to a domestic interior, sequestered away from the world (265). Though this is the first private domestic setting we see in the novel, it does not come as a relief; instead, the clones find the house to be dark and dank with narrow hallways, a
sealed off fireplace, odorous Victorian furniture, and an atmosphere as though "a servant of some sort had got the place ready for the night-time, then left" (249). As these women prided themselves on Hailsham's orderly, well-designed, and disciplined environment, their home's disrepair comes as a surprise. However, as Miss Emily notes, this decrepit domesticity is intimately tied to Hailsham's closure and the loss of their life's work:

And as for Marie-Claude and me, here we are, we've retreated to this house, and upstairs we have a mountain of your work. That's what we have to remind us of what we did. And a mountain of debt too, though that's not nearly so welcome. And the memories, I suppose, of all of you. And the knowledge that we've given you better lives than you would have had otherwise. (265)

Having failed to save their young charges from the misery of growing up, the two women retired from the outside world with only their cobwebbed memories and relics to keep them company. Their lives echo the fate of another thwarted caretaker, Miss Havisham of Dickens's *Great Expectations.* Indeed, there are marked similarities between this scene in *Never Let Me Go* and Pip's visits to Miss Havisham, though unlike Miss Havisham, Miss Emily affirms what she has done instead of begging for forgiveness. The women have transformed their previous caretaking duties into the stewardship of a Hailsham Gallery—their unruly, unmanageable mountain of clone artwork and debt—as well the domestic labors of housekeeping and interior design. Ultimately, these demands of decor end the conversation in a moment both abrupt and unsatisfying ("Oh dear, is that the men come for the cabinet?" "It's that awful man from the decoration company again" [259]). Yet this interruption is no random choice; with the men figured as shadowy intrusions into domestic life, their obsession with interior design reminds us that their house can never be a retreat from the world they designed, nor from the crueler world that conditioned it in the first place. Though their domestic arrangement could be read as a generous attempt to rehouse the institution of Hailsham, its labor is also clearly ambivalent, somewhere between a gift and an obligation, hospitality and hostility. It represents one of the two possible ends of the Hailsham experiment: either total instrumentalization or total privatization—both bleak futures of the state's cloning program.
Poetics of Infrastructuralism II: Somewhere; Wherever

Despite the postwar provenance of the cloning program, Kathy's self-awareness cannot be registered historically; despite the welfarist ideology of Hailsham, her epiphany cannot be politically oriented as such. What then, might her epiphany look like? This article has explored the clones' verbal play, metaphors, and fantasies that they use as compensatory mechanisms, but there is one particularly powerful spatial fantasy that recurs throughout the novel and returns as the means for Kathy's final epiphany: Norfolk. Unlike the playful unzipping, the search for a possible, or the archive of degraded spaces addressed in the previous sections, this fantasy provides an alternative space of shelter that cannot be taken away or otherwise disillusioned.

The clones learn of this county during a geography lesson with Miss Emily, who describes Norfolk's location as a peaceful area, but also "something of a lost corner" (65). After this, the clones begin to associate the lost corner of Norfolk with Hailsham's lost and found, also called the "Lost Corner," and soon start imagining Norfolk as a place "where all the lost property found in the country ended up" (66). As Ruth reflects later on, it was important to them that "when we lost something precious, and we'd looked and looked and still couldn't find it, then we didn't have to be completely heartbroken. We still had that last bit of comfort, thinking one day, when we were grown up, and we were free to travel around the country, we could always go and find it again in Norfolk" (66). And indeed, in the novel's one moment of true magic, Kathy finds another copy of her lost, beloved Judy Bridgewater tape in a Norfolk Woolsworth's, lending improbable credence to this particular myth.

Unlike the tape, however, Kathy's loss of Hailsham presents a more difficult challenge. By the end of the novel, Kathy's solution is to internalize it wholesale, in the ultimate form of spatial fantasy: "Once I'm able to have a quieter life, in whichever centre they send me to, I'll have Hailsham with me, safely in my head, and that'll be something no one can take away" (286–87). As her language suggests, Kathy thinks of this internalization as a small act of defiance against the larger cloning system, a way to preserve the kind old world of her youth. At the same time, however, her solution follows the novel's arc of disenchantment and its slow divestment of meaning from state infrastructure. For though this internalization preserves Hailsham's fiction of shelter, Kathy's language also exposes Hailsham's great lie, pitting its mythology against the reality of the external world. In this moment, then, Kathy has finally embraced the paranoid logic Hailsham leaves in its wake: the myth that good, caring state spaces can mitigate the harm wreaked by bad, harmful ones.
While this solution brings us up to date with Kathy's narrative present, it is crucially not the last word of *Never Let Me Go*. After affirming Hailsham as something no one can take away, Kathy recounts one last return to Norfolk, producing a coda that interrupts the dichotomy of good and bad. As she reveals, "The only indulgent thing I did, just once, was a couple of weeks after I heard Tommy had completed, when I drove up to Norfolk, even though I had no real need to" (287). After driving through "field after flat, featureless field, with virtually no change," she finds herself in the now familiarly abject setting of an empty field surrounded by barbed wire, where "all along the fence, especially along the lower line of wire, all sorts of rubbish had caught and tangled" (287). Unlike Ruth's boat epiphany, however, Kathy doesn't fixate on the rubbish as a terminus to her thoughts. Instead, she starts to imagine what she describes as "just a little fantasy thing, because this was Norfolk after all, and it was only a couple of weeks since I'd lost him," an exceptional registration of Tommy's loss that is then followed by this exceptional meditation:

I was thinking about the rubbish, the flapping plastic in the branches, the shore-line of odd stuff caught along the fencing, and 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. The fantasy never got beyond that—I didn't let it—and though the tears rolled down my face, I wasn't sobbing or out of control. I just waited a bit, then turned back to the car, to drive off to wherever it was I was supposed to be. (288)

Through this Norfolk-induced fantasy, Ishiguro brings us to the realm of somewhere, conceptualized as a nearly real place with all of its detrital quiddity: a lost-and-found, a field full of rubbish, and a horizon full of potentiality. Turning away from her search for Hailsham, Kathy orients us toward a different space, registered through the figurative and the subjunctive. Her speculation culminates in the reanimation of Tommy, whose figure grows larger and more recognizable the longer she waits. This scene provides the last moment of enchantment in the novel, one final attempt at humanization and meaning-making contra the destructive infrastructures of the state. Yet after imagining this world, Kathy gently takes her leave of it, able to name this passage for what it is: a fantasy. She then returns to her car, leaving this fantastical "somewhere" for all the "wherevers" that constitute her infrastructural life.
Perhaps, as Kathy suggests, the only way we can create meaning in such a totalizing system is through a registration of its loss. Read this way, *Never Let Me Go* mirrors this Norfolk fantasy; documenting the various ways the clones attempt to rehabilitate themselves, the novel archives all their washed-up losses and attempts at becoming people, and becoming places, rather than becoming utility. As such, this final scene emerges as a unique departure from Ishiguro's other novels. Unlike Stevens's recommitment to bantering in *The Remains of the Day* or Christopher's reinvestment in London in *When We Were Orphans*, Kathy does not convince herself of the necessity of returning to the professionalism or places of her present life, even in an ironic way. Where the final lines of Ishiguro's other novels try to make these referents more bearable, even pleasurable, *Never Let Me Go* relieves Kathy from such an unliveable responsibility. Instead, Ishiguro allows her to drive off to "wherever it was [she] was supposed to be" (288)—a now profoundly indefinite place, emptied of Hailsham's ideological infrastructuralism, where she can finally let herself go.

**Notes**

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1. See, for instance, Rubenstein's discussion of the "basic amenity" and its ambiguous signification, felt in different contexts as "a necessity, a modernizing imposition, a luxury, or a sign of the arrival of the 'great society'" (18).

2. See Robbins’s "Orange Juice and Agent Orange," Hart and Hansen’s "Introduction: Contemporary Literature and the State," and Amanda Claybaugh's "Government is Good" for pithy overviews of this discourse of literary criticism and the state.

3. Key among these readings are Sophia Beal's *Brazil Under Construction* and Michael Rubenstein's *Public Works*, which analyze the modernizing effects of public utilities, and Michael Szalay's *New Deal Modernism*, Bruce Robbins's *Upward Mobility*, and Sean McCann's *Gumshoe America*, which identify key aesthetic characteristics of literature and the welfare state.

4. Indeed, *Never Let Me Go* creepily inhabits the novelistic infrastructure of British school fiction, rendering education not as soul-producing (as in the egregious example of J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series) but as organ-producing.
5. An apt comparison might be made here to the epiphany in Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*, in which Stevens finally breaks down over the idea of "giving his best" to Lord Darlington (255).

6. The clones also favor the scene in *The Great Escape* when "the American jumps over the barbed wire on his bike," demanding that it be played again and again ("Rewind! Rewind!" [99]). This is the clearest, most potentially redemptive representation of freedom in the novel, a dramatic vision of escape with one's self intact. Of course, in the film, the American (the dashing Steve McQueen) is caught just seconds later, his body cruelly entangled in a second line of fencing. This captivity is closer to the world of *Never Let Me Go*, whose subjects continually vacillate between the body ensnared by the barbed wire and, as I suggest, the wire itself.

7. What's worse, Hailsham is not merely closing but transforming: its house and grounds are being sold to a hotel chain, creating a new form of institutionalized domesticity uncannily related to Hailsham's original function. This grim course of reconstruction is a ubiquitous specter in the postwar British novel, beginning with Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited*, which finds the estate turned into military barracks. Regarding Ishiguro, see John J. Su's "Refiguring National Character."

8. See Walkowitz's chapter on Ishiguro's "treason" in *Cosmopolitan Style* for another take on these consistencies to his oeuvre.

9. The exception to this remarkably consistent oeuvre is *The Unconsoled* (1995), which is a more dreamlike, surreal meditation on memory loss (and piano performances) that is not immediately locatable in any specific historical moment. It was largely lambasted by literary critics, who were flummoxed as much by its departure from the typical Ishiguro novel as its length and experimental style. However, Ishiguro's recent short story collection *Nocturnes: Five Stories of Music and Nightfall* (2009) also obliquely follows this pattern, with all five protagonists reflecting on the twilights of their days.

10. Of course, Ishiguro is also notoriously ambivalent and ambiguous about his fidelity to his own historical or geopolitical representation; see, for instance, "The Novelist in Today's World," in *Conversations with Kazuo Ishiguro*.

11. The episode thus confirms Robbins's characterization of Ishiguro's work as seeming to be "committed to making only the most banal and uncontroversial ethical statements," like "cruelty is bad" ("Cruelty is Bad" 301). James Wood's reading also finds the novel "weakened by a didactic ending, in which the spirit of Wells or Huxley bests the spirit of Borges" ("The Human Difference" 38).

12. Though some critics compare *Never Let Me Go* to Shelley's *Frankenstein* (see especially Gabriele Griffen, Keith McDonald, and Tiffany Tsao), it is also fruitful to read it as a return to and reworking of the Victorian novel, whether in relation to Dickens's concern over orphans
Infrastructural Interiority in *Never Let Me Go*

and marginal progenitor figures (for example *Great Expectations*'s Abel Magwitch as Pip's benefactor, which Ishiguro rewrites in *When We Were Orphans*), the doubling of "Kathy" as a protagonist name (as in *Wuthering Heights*, which also foregrounds her experience of wild, open spaces), or even Kathy's research project on Victorian novels. This is more evidence of Ishiguro's canny, parasitical inhabitation of the British novelistic tradition.

**Works Cited**


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