

Becoming Things in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*

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[Abstract]

Ishiguro's objects in *Never Let Me Go* empower his objectified human clones, re-establishing their thing-status in a world that humans exploit them as non-humans. The objects, evokers and mediators of empathic feelings, seem to stake a claim to be more than consumables even once their use value is gone. Kathy's music tape, for example, plays a pivotal role in calling up empathy in her and her friends, helping them develop reciprocal relationships with one another. In contrast, the same music fails to do so in their human counterparts like Madam. Indeed, through Kathy's narrative, Ishiguro explores the meaning of objects beyond their use value. The question is existential for his clone characters who are objectified, both in body and soul, by the world. While being half-concealed from the students' perception, their bodies are carefully watched and controlled, later for their organs to be harvested when need be. The aesthetic education at Hailsham further permits them to be smoothly incorporated into the biopolitical system. The educators hail the clones' better treatment as beings who have souls just as much as any other humans. Yet the clones' education reduces them to the aesthetic objects they produce. Internalizing the idea of their own existence as an instrument, the students perceive themselves as objects. The empathic power the surrounding objects render them, however, helps

them refute such an idea and embrace their individual uniqueness. If they cannot escape from their doomed donation as objects, they become objects for commemoration after their deaths, as does Tommy in Kathy's narration.

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One of the worst form of objectification is dehumanization. No matter how commonplace the term objectification has become in the discipline of humanities, it is only in recent days that scholars have attempted to pin down its meaning. Many feminist scholars in particular have paid serious attention to its meaning. Andrea Dworkin, for example, observes that a person is objectified when he or she “through social means, is made less human, turned into a thing or commodity, bought and sold” (30). Introducing Dworkin’s definition of objectification, John M. Rector explains that humans are fungible “not in terms of multiple persons’ capacities to fulfill certain roles, jobs, and so forth, but in terms of the inherent value of an individual’s life” (16). Sandra Barkty, meanwhile, focuses on the fragmentation of objectified humans, pointing out that their “entire being is identified with the body” (qtd. in Rector 17). Later, Martha Nussbaum identifies the major features of objectification – instrumentality, denial of autonomy, inertness, fungibility, violability, ownership, and denial of subjectivity (257). In *Never Let Me Go*, the reader can observe many of these aspects on display in the treatment of Ishiguro’s clone characters. Reduced to the organs humans need for themselves, these clones are treated as those whose bodies are easily violable and whose existence is simply replaceable. The danger of objectification is obvious; it generates violence against others. As Rector puts it, “The less one perceives a sense of unity, or self in the

other, the further along the objectification continuum one is likely to progress, and the greater the possibility of either assenting to the violent treatment of others engaging in violence personally” (23). To prevent such violence, he continues, we need to be “empathic and compassionate – to ‘feel with’ others as if they were deeply connected to one’s own self” (Rector 23). Ishiguro’s novel is filled with empathy, expressed by his clone characters, also eliciting it from the readers. What is interesting in his novel is that the capacity for connection with others is often made through objects. Objects may be considered the antithesis of humans. Certainly, they possess none of the innate value that humans do. However, Ishiguro pays attention to the process by which value-free objects transmute, through empathy, into valuable memento. Like their precious keepsakes, the clone characters in *Never Let Me Go* transform into something irreplaceable. Bill Brown explains this process in “Thing Theory,” as the “story of objects asserting themselves as things, then, is the story of a changed relation to the human subject and thus the story of how the thing really names less an object than a particular subject-object relation” (4). Based on his idea, my essay examines the ways in which the clones fuse somehow with their surrounding objects in order to claim their new status as things. In particular, I argue that even while the clones cannot escape their own objectification in the face of a ruthless biopolitical exploitation, Kathy’s narrative elevates the clones’ status to objects of commemoration. Paying attention to this process in Ishiguro’s novel may raise a question of the dichotomic view on humans vs. non-humans. While many researches revolve around what divides non-humans from humans and how we should see the clones in such a division, my research, focusing on their transformation from objects to things, suggests that the division itself can be problematic as a product of anthropocentrism.

1. Objectified Bodies

Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* portrays a dystopian world under biopower set in 1990s England where human clones are routinely created and raised to supply their organs for humans suffering from various diseases. The rapid development of bioscience following the Second World War enabled human clones' creation and their organs' plantation. Humans chose "these ways to cure so many previously incurable conditions" for "their own children, their spouses, their parents, their friends" without much consideration of ramifications of such a choice (262, 263). The choice brought about the existence of Kathy, Ruth and Tommy who spent comparatively privileged childhood at Hailsham. Unlike other cloned children, they received one of the best humanist education until they are sent to Cottages. After the interim period in the Cottages, they become either donors or carers – those who help stabilize the mental and physical conditions of the donors. While the period of serving as a carer varies, all carers end up donating their organs, a task unilaterally given to them by humans (3-4).

Hardly is this inhumane reality detectable, though, due to the narration, which holds possible atrocities at bay. For us, indeed, it is hard to notice that these people are the clones until Kathy vaguely realizes that she and her fellows are different from the "normal people outside" (69). Even after this difference is uttered, these Hailsham students do not seem, to us, different at all from the others in their feelings, thoughts, and actions. It is not the students themselves but the language unnaturally picked up for them, especially regarding their bodies, that alerts us to become aware of the different *treatment* they receive. The death of these donors, for example, are described as "to complete" or "to switch off." Still, the horrible meanings of such terms dawn on the reader only when Tommy's fourth donation

becomes unavoidable toward the end of the novel. Responding to Tommy's fear of this final donation, Kathy describes the rumors going with it:

He'd have known, too, he was raising questions to which even the doctors had no certain answers. You'll have heard the same talk. How maybe, after the fourth donation, even if you've technically completed, you'll still conscious in some sort of way; how then you find there are more donations, plenty of them, on the other side of that line; how there are no more recovery centers, no carers, no friends; how there's nothing to do except watch your remaining donations until they switch you off. It's horror movie stuff, and most of the time people don't want to think about it. (279)

Kathy describes this reality as if it is an unverifiable rumor; however, precisely because of this unverifiability, the rumor could betray some unspeakable truth about the treatment of the clones, a reality that their bodies are completely instrumentalized in this final operation. Unlike earlier operations, which were similar to a normal operation for cure and recovery (albeit their purpose is for the next donation), the fourth donation is artificially performed as a series of operations to maximize the use value of the donor's body. In other words, their bodies are treated as a collection of spare parts, awaiting their use in turn as in a conveyer belt, while their consciousness remain in a human form. This discrepancy is what makes the objectification feel horrible, as Kathy's narration, though under the veil of rumor, makes us visualize and identify with the human consciousness in the scene. Only then can we recall the similarities between the atrocities regularly performed on the operation table in *Never Let Me Go* and those medical experiments by the Nazi regime or the Japanese Empire made on living bodies before World War II. The objects for such experiments are changed from real humans to cloned humans whom people consider to be a lesser human form. Such a consideration perhaps exonerates them from the severest

humanitarian condemnation of such operations having been performed on fellow human beings. More beguiling and treacherous in this sense, the operations done on the clones' bodies may poignantly suggest the war-like reality the fictional characters of Ishiguro's novel are living despite the calm mood of Kathy's narration.

If her narration is surprisingly peaceful, it is because she has not been aware of this stark reality she and her peers must one day face. It is hardly their own negligence, though. It is rather the society's negligence to inform them correctly. As Miss Lucy puts it, they have "been told and not told" as they are not made to "really understand" what it means to be donors (81). She continues that "some people are quite happy to leave it that way" (81). Such translucence makes it hard to find the direct description of the clones' objectification; it is obliquely suggested in the biopolitical governance such as the one at Hailsham. Indeed, the bodies have been subjected to the most attentive surveillance and control so that their donation can be free from trouble. As Kathy recalls, the Hailsham students "had to have some form of medical almost every week" (13). The institution also forbids and censures any activities that might endanger their physical health. When the issue of smoking is broached, for example, Miss Lucy tells the students, "You've been told about it. You're students. You're . . . *special*. So keeping yourselves well, keeping yourselves very healthy inside, that's much more important for each of you than it is for me" (68-69). Without knowing the destination of the students, her remark sounds like a sensible and caring advice of a senior. With growing suspicion of their looming donation, however, Miss Lucy's advice takes a most sinister tone: it is not the students' souls but their bodies that the guardians really care for. Miss Lucy turns out to be the only guardian to have struggled with the question about what is right for the students, rather than what is right for the guardians at Hailsham in the pursuit of their "humanitarian" ideas. Nevertheless, it is clear that the humanitarian project at

Hailsham cannot outweigh the risk of freeing the students from their biological regulation. It can be perfectly explained in Kathy's recollection that "some classic books – like the Sherlock Holmes ones – weren't in our library because the main characters smoked too much, and when you came across a page torn out of an illustrated book or magazine, this was because there'd been a picture on it of someone smoking" (67-68). Instead, Kathy tells us, "there were the actual lessons where they showed us horrible pictures of what smoking did to the insides of your body" (68). As Kathy describes the pictures to be "horrible," these medical documents appeal to the students' emotion through which their aberration is carefully prevented (68). Under the disguise of liberal arts education, their bodily objectification is also carefully hidden.

It is hardly surprising that the Hailsham students are, to an alarming extent, ignorant of their own bodies. When Tommy rips up his elbow, one of his fellow students fools him by warning that his gash can "unzip like a bag opening up" (85). Excessively worried by this and successive jokes, he asks Kathy to splint his arm so that his skin could not be ripped further (86). Seeing how serious Tommy is, Kathy cannot immediately disclose to him the absurdity of this notion. Even given Tommy's characteristic naiveté, his ignorance about his own body is striking. Such ignorance is not just Tommy's. Others are not much better than him when they imagine donation to be a simple act in which "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). They hardly foresee that their bodies are going to be irrevocably damaged in the process. Nor do they understand the implication of their bodies being "unzipped." They are deprived of their human rights in this unfeeling objectification of their bodies.

The situation gets more entangled when this ignorance begins to affect their lives more seriously. Kathy, for example, cannot understand her own sexual drive despite

Miss Emily's clichés such as the necessity to “respect our physical needs,” or the idea of sex as “a very beautiful gift” (95). For her, it is one fragment of knowledge inculcated by Miss Emily who “brought in a life-size skeleton from the biology class to demonstrate how it was done” (83). Miss Emily proceeded with her lesson in such a blunt fashion “without the slightest self-consciousness” that she went “through all the nuts and bolts of how you did it, what went in where, the different variations, like this was still Geography” (83). The scene perhaps best exemplifies the abject objectification of the clones' body via the skeleton. Approaching sex in the most scientific manner, the guardians were not liberal in its practice as they “made it more or less impossible for any of us [the students] actually to do much without breaking rules” (95). As a result, the students “were pretty confused about this whole area around sex” (95). Such confusion, as Tommy's on his wound, leads the students not to be clearly aware of objectification. Indeed, failing to develop such awareness, the clones are ready to accept their own objectification. Ignorant of her own sexual urges, for example, Kathy assumes that she is different from other students and that her impulse must come from her “possible,” the model of her cloned body (181). She thus gathers and scrutinizes the pornographic magazines to see if her “possible” is there when she finds them left behind (134-35). Kathy's anxiety about her sexual urge never recedes, so when Ruth uses it as a means to separate her from Tommy, Ruth's little manipulation works. Accepting Tommy's conventional notion on female chastity too readily, Kathy believes that he has no interest in her as a girl with the urge. Kathy thus volunteers to be trained as a carer and leaves the Cottages. Kathy's ignorance about her body and bodily needs is no more an innocent joke as in Tommy's case; her ignorance smashes up her possible romantic relationship with Tommy, perhaps irrevocably, despite their long-standing attachment to each other. The sex education at Hailsham alienates the students from their own bodies, which in turn

affects their emotional life.

2. Objectified Souls

Many critics notice the biopolitical power exercised over the bodies of the human clones in *Never Let Me Go*. However, hardly does anybody seem to remark on how the power infiltrates into the realm of their “souls,” a realm generally assumed to contain one’s distinct individuality. Precisely because of this irreplaceability, Miss Emily and the guardians of Hailsham educate their students focusing on art. Such emphasis on art is based on the Romantic idea that an aesthetic object can reveal its creator’s soul (cf. Black). Miss Emily tells one of her students that “things like picture, poetry, all that kind of stuff . . . *revealed what you were like inside*,” that they “*revealed your soul*” (175). It is hardly surprising that Hailsham encourages its students’ artistic spirit and enthusiasm through “The Exchange,” a “kind of big exhibition-cum-sale” (16). Here they buy what other students have created with tokens they earned for submitting their own works of art. The experience of possessing their own “collections,” personalized treasures of their own choice for the first time, immensely delights and thrills the students (38). As they can get more tokens when their works of art get more highly valued, there are “plenty to choose from,” created by these “prolific” artists full of enthusiasm (16). More significantly, their best works are harvested by “Madame” who is rumored to exhibit these works in “The Gallery” (32). Though the Gallery is a verboten topic at Hailsham, it is widely accepted at Hailsham that a work worthy of the Gallery is a great honor for its artist. Such high regard for artistic creativity and sensibility prevents the students from seeing the Gallery’s real purpose – being there “*to prove you had souls at all*”

(260). That is, they display the students' best works "to the world" to show "that if the students were reared in humane, cultivated environments, it was possible for them to grow to be as sensitive and intelligent as any ordinary human being" (261). The implication is clear: the clones are yet entities without souls, but with proper education being provided, they could be ensouled. According to Nathan Snaza,

The education at Hailsham produces souls in the clones. This is considered humane not because it spares the clones any pain or suffering, nor because it leads to a recognition of the students as humans. Rather, it is humane from the standpoint of the organ recipients because once the donors have souls and a singularity produced in relation to their own mortality, then the language of "donation" and "donors" is neutralized and non-ironic. (226)

Snaza points out that Hailsham's education for ensouling the clones serves at best to justify the donation program from the very perspective of humans. By doing so, he suggests, the students are subjected to the mechanism of biopower through which their bodies and souls are watched, controlled, and disciplined to maintain the current system of donation (Snaza 226).¹⁾ Their newly acquired sense of selves becomes a site for biopower to be exercised. Unlike the World War II prisoners who were prevented from escaping the camps by electrified fence, the students of Hailsham are not physically barred (78).²⁾ Their psyche, though, is similarly harmed; they cannot imagine stepping out from Hailsham without horror (50-51). Hailsham's ensouling education binds the students more tightly – and perhaps irreversibly – to the system that ultimately exploits their bodies in which they remain to be, according to Snaza, "en-souled non-humans" (217).

Since the Hailsham students are ensouled, learning to evaluate themselves and others by the standard of artistic creativity, they also begin to internalize the value of

instrumentalism. In “Ishiguro’s Inhuman Aesthetics,” Shameem Black points out that “this emphasis on artwork encourages an instrumental philosophy of individualism” (795). “While Madame and Miss Emily believe that showing regular people student art will assert intrinsic over instrumental personhood, the novel reveals exactly the opposite process at Hailsham,” Black elaborates (795). Indeed, the students develop their artistic creativity to gratify the expectations of the guardians and to gain the token – the currency circulated in Hailsham for the market economy (Rollins 353). They may cultivate such capacity because it becomes a tool, as Black observes, to gain respect and popularity among their peers as well (795). In the same vein, he further observes, “students feel justified in humiliating Tommy because of his failures” both in art and in his attempt to produce it (795). In this way, Black summarizes, the aesthetic education at Hailsham “encourage[s] students to think instrumentally about the worth of their peers, thus preparing them for an acceptance of their own instrumental lives” (795). The students become more docile bodies because of their artistic souls.

Such a consequence is not a mere derivative of their otherwise perfectly humanitarian treatment at Hailsham. Miss Emily and the guardians have instrumentalized the students for their own political cause. These activists insist that they have “given you [the students] better lives than you [they] would have had otherwise” – lives in the horrible conditions of “those vast government ‘homes’” (265). Yet they seem never able to concede human rights to the students. During Kathy and Tommy’s visit, Madam suddenly erupts while Miss Emily is speaking: “Don’t try and ask them to thank you. . . . Why should they be grateful? They came here looking for something much more. What we gave them, all the years, all the fighting we did on their behalf, what do they know of that? They think it’s God-given. Until they came here, they knew nothing of it. All they feel now is

disappointment, because we haven't given to them everything possible.” (265)

Madam's words betray what these activists really think about the status of the student-clones: instead of having God-given rights as any humans do, the student-clones have only what the humans have selectively given them. Thus positioning themselves as God, the activists, quite contrary to their egalitarian idea between humans and non-humans, expose their sense of superiority and pride over non-humans. Ishiguro, in this sense, re-plays the old trope of excessive human pride coming before the human fall, as in the case of Dr. Frankenstein in Mary Shelly's *Frankenstein* (1818) or of Aylmer in Nathaniel Hawthorn's "The Birthmark" (1843). Absorbed too much in their own ideas like these scientists, the political activists in *Never Let Me Go* do not see how natural it is for Kathy and Tommy to be disappointed at the revelation of the world as it is. For them, the students are no more than remnants of their winning days, just like these, art works Madam had collected and piled upstairs. Like the art works, the students were the means to pursue their ideas. They students turn out to be useless, however, with the movement's failure. They are more useless than, say, Miss Emily's cabinet that can still be sold at a good price. It is indicative that Miss Emily talks to Kathy and Tommy only until the men arrive who are expected to carry the article away. Still objectified but without being useful to Miss Emily and her fellow activists, the students remain invisible as ever during their visit to Madam.

The students' invisibility, however, has often been nuanced in *Never Let Me Go*. One such example is found when Kathy, during her school days, happens to see Miss Emily rehearsing her speech in one of the empty rooms of Hailsham (45). Even though it seems they have caught sight of each other, Miss Emily is oblivious of Kathy's existence and goes on with her practice (45). The scene symbolically speaks to the invisible status of the students at Hailsham who, isolated from the human

world as much as possible, are transferred to the objects of art they produce. Only in this elevated form of art, can they claim their existence to the people outside. Madam's gallery is a space where such a claim can be made. In this special space, the activists exhibit the clones' souls through the aesthetic objects. Snaza observes how their art becomes important as evidence of their souls' existence: "your art, it *is* important. And not just because it's evidence" (222). The term "evidence," Snaza notes, originated from the Latin words "*ex* (out)" and "*videre* (to see)" (*OED* qtd. in Snaza 222). The exhibition at the Gallery, then, becomes an occasion for the outside world to examine the artists' souls and judge the validity of their claim. It is an occasion for the world to have a serious encounter with the students always in the shade. What should be noteworthy, however, is that for such an encounter to occur, the student-artists must be made into the form of an object first because, according to Miss Emily, "for a long time . . . people did their best not to think about you [the clones]" (263). Unless their souls are objectified, the organizers of the exhibition seem to imply, people would not pay attention to their existence; for the humans, the clones are merely "[s]hadowy objects in test tubes" (261). The organization of the exhibition, therefore, further conceals the artists behind the talented art works they have created. This is what really makes the cause of Hailsham as "sham." While claiming the clones' humane treatment, these activists treat them as if they are ensouled objects of their own making.

3. Humanizing Objects

I have so far shown how the human clones are objectified in terms of both body and soul, and by doing so, how they are deprived of human rights. Does Ishiguro then represent his characters merely as objects to be appropriated by the power? Does the author show no chance for them to be redeemed because in the end, their donations finalize such objectification through their helpless acceptance? These characters cannot escape their objectification because it is a far more carefully planned and networked process than they can imagine, as exemplified in the Hailsham project. Yet, the world Ishiguro portrays in *Never Let Me Go* is not so completely dark and dehumanized as the one in *1984* by George Orwell. There are some highly humane moments of empathy³⁾ in Ishiguro's novel, from which the reader can perceive the characters to be human just the same as themselves. These moments, of course, do not prevent the characters from being objectified; however, the moments reveal that they are different from humans in ways of forming a relationship with objects. If the humans recognize objects from their own anthropocentric perspective in the dichotomy between humans and non-humans, the clones find, through empathy, a new reciprocal relationship with what they are not whether it be human or non-human.

Perhaps the best example showing such a difference is the diverse interpretations of Judie Bridgewater's "Never Let Me Go" by Madam and Kathy. Since Kathy found Judie Bridgewater's album containing this number at the Sales, it has become her favorite song. Whenever she finds her time to herself, she plays the tune over and over, imagining it to be a story of a woman not wanting to part with her hard-won baby (70). Although Kathy knows this is her own imagination, she still empathizes with the woman, a human being that sterile Kathy can never be. In contrast, when

Madam happens to see Kathy dancing to the tune with her imaginary baby, she imagines it to be “the old kind world,” being rapidly replaced by a “new world” that is “[m]ore scientific, efficient,” and with “more cures for the old sickness” (272). What she sees in Kathy’s dancing is neither the original meaning of the song nor Kathy’s creation of the new meaning; what she sees is her own ideas and feelings about the changing world. Unlike Kathy, she is too self-absorbed to understand or even see others’ feelings. Representing uncaring humans, Madam shows a good contrast to the caring non-humans in the world of *Never Let Me Go*.

Over time, the students at Hailsham develop reciprocal relationships with others built upon their empathy. When Kathy loses her cherished tape, her friends try in every way to find it. When they fail to, each tries to find his or her own way to comfort Kathy. Ruth hands her an alternative tape she found at the Sale. Aside from being music, this tape scarcely bears any similarity with the lost one. Nevertheless, Kathy is overwhelmed with happiness: “I saw how Ruth wasn’t to know that – how to Ruth, who didn’t know the first thing about music, this tape might easily make up for the one I’d lost. And suddenly I felt the disappointment ebbing away and being replaced by a real happiness” (76). Kathy finds a similar happiness, but this time in more communion with Tommy, when he suggests her to find the lost tape during their trip: “That moment when we decided to go searching for my lost tape, it was like suddenly every cloud had blown away, and we had nothing but fun and laughter before us” (171). And they actually find the tape in one of the secondhand shops in Norfolk, a place the students imagine to be the lost-and-found of England. What she finds is not the realization of their childhood fantasy; she is aware that this is not the original tape but another copy of Bridgewater’s album. What touches her more than the tape itself is Tommy’s care. She explains her feeling: “I was still feeling a pang of regret that we’d found it so quickly, and it was only later, when we were back at

the Cottages and I was alone in my room, that I really appreciated having the tape – and that song – back again” (173). Such moments of mutual care entail a humanizing capacity that is lacking in Hailsham’s education. While the song’s original meaning and Kathy’s initial imagination of its meaning are not vaporized, the object acquires special meanings under their mutual care. It may have developed into romantic bonding if it were not for Ruth’s jealous manipulation. Kathy and Tommy are estranged for nearly 10 years. When they reunite, however, they not only find their bond is as strong as ever; they also find the capacity to embrace Ruth as their old friend. The object, Kathy’s lost tape, humanizes them in an unexpected way. As Kathy imbued the tape with unsought human feelings, it in turn provides them what their educators have ostensibly sought after: real humanity.

4. Lost Objects

Such rendering of humanity, of course, does not entail the full acceptance of them as human beings. Instead, the significance of humanizing capacity lies at their de-objectification. It is significant for Ishiguro’s cloned characters, who are compelled to find the meaning in their existence only from a utilitarian perspective. Indeed, it is that capacity which helps them escape from that view. For these characters who have internalized instrumentalism from their early childhood, it is natural to fear becoming useless. When the original aim of the Norfolk trip – finding Ruth’s cloned model called “possible” – fails, her disappointment explodes: “We all know it, We’re modelled from *trash*. Junkies, prostitutes, winos, tramps. Convicts, maybe, just so long as they aren’t psychos. That’s what we come from. . . . If you want to look for possible, 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 came from" (166). Ruth regards those transgressors as society's flotsam. Object lingering long after their value has been used up, trash represents her worst fear for herself. Indeed, one of the most frequent images appeared in the novel is rubbish, which signals an existential question for the human clones. In Ruth's dream about a closed Hailsham, for example, she watches all sort of "rubbish floating by under my window" in a room (225). Oddly, she senses no danger: "I knew I wasn't in any danger, that it was only like that because it [Hailsham] had closed down" (225). Where her sense of safety comes from seems a mystery. While Ruth never learns that Hailsham and its ideals are falling apart in the face of ever-changing trend of political winds, she knows that the fates of its graduates are as precarious as any of those from other institutions. She herself is waiting for her second donation. Neither donors nor even carers can escape the question of who they are once they are complete, once their use value is nil. Ruth's sense of security must come from a different source – perhaps the possibility of a donation deferral. There was a rumor of such a possibility if a couple was able to prove they were genuinely in love. In such cases, some years of deferral is allowed for Hailsham alumni. A deferral is more than a simple prolonging of their donation; it is a concession that there may be some values rise above use value, that there are other ways that their value can be validated. It is no coincidence that Ruth finds a stranded boat to be beautiful despite its being a *de facto* large-sized piece of trash out of place (224). Ruth's changing perception of rubbish suggests that she has found a gratifying answer to the existential question of who they are and what they are for.

Unlike Ruth who could not live to verify the existence of deferral, Kathy and Tommy face the truth – no deferral exists – when they visit Madam to prove their love. They also have to face the fact that they have been instrumentalized by those

who brought about their existence and by the Hailsham guardians who sought for only their political cause. Their shock at the revelation is perhaps best rendered by Tommy's long-forgotten tantrum on a steep field. According to Kathy,

I tried to run to him, but the mud sucked my feet down. The mud was impeding him too, because one time, when he kicked out, he slipped and fell out of view into the blackness. But his jumbled swear-words continued uninterrupted, and I was able to reach him just as he was getting to his feet again. I caught a glimpse of his face in the moonlight, caked in mud and distorted with fury, then I reached for his flailing arms and held on tight. He tried to shake me off, but I kept holding on, until he stopped shouting and I felt the fight go out of him. Then I realized he too had his arms around me. And so we stood together like that, at the top of that field, for what seemed like ages, not saying anything, just holding each other, while the wind kept blowing and blowing at us, tugging our clothes, and for a moment, it seemed like we were holding onto each other because that was the only to stop us being swept away into the night. (274)

The harsh environment they are exposed to – the sweeping gust and the sticking mud – figuratively speaks to their situation. Under the changed political “climate,” Miss Emily explains, the “little movement, Hailsham, Glenmorgan, the Saunders Trust, we were all of us swept away” (263). In a world that is set to shatter their existence, the students become helpless remnants of the movement, just like their art objects in Madam's house. They become lost objects. Tommy's rage, however normal it feels, is invisible and inaudible to the world. What Kathy and Tommy can do in the situation is tightly “holding onto each other” not “to be swept into the night” (274). And if they are able to not get lost, it is because of their empathic gesture toward each other. The scene, on the whole, attests to an empathic capacity they have

developed to possibly save them from their existential crisis.

Brown claims “We begin to confront the thingness of objects when they stop working for us: when the drill breaks, when the car stalls, when the windows get filthy, when their flow within the circuits of production and distribution, consumption and exhibition, has been arrested, however momentarily” (4). Such “thingness,” such a new status of objects is revealed to us. Likewise, when their use value is no more found. When their physical, and actual, loss is unavoidable in *Never Let Me Go*, their empathic capacity helps the clones recover their value in the form of memory. Yugin Teo, in his article “Testimony and the Affirmation of Memory in Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go*,” notes how Ishiguro connects lost items to memories (134). Referring to rubbish in Ruth’s dream and in Kathy’s actual vision in Norfolk, he claims that they are a “very apt visual representation of childhood memory” (135). Indeed, items such as Kathy’s newly found tape in Norfolk are turned into a memory object. Needless to say Ruth’s replacement tape, the Bridgewater copy Tommy buys for her in Norfolk loses its initial use value but acquires a new memory value. Kathy admits, “Even then, it was mainly a nostalgia thing, and today, if I happen to get the tape out and look at it, it brings back memories of that afternoon in Norfolk every bit as much as it does our Hailsham days” (173). This new function further enhances such items’ humanizing capacity because only humans commemorate their fellows. It is significant, in this sense, that Ishiguro reformulates Kathy and Tommy’s experience on a windy night into another version in Norfolk, after she loses him.

I found I was standing before acres of ploughed earth. There was a fence keeping me from stepping into the field, with two lines of barbed wire, and I could see how this fence and the cluster of three or four trees above me were the only things breaking the wind for miles. All along the fence, especially along the lower line of wire, all sorts of rubbish had caught and tangled. It was

like the debris you get on a sea-shore: the wind must have carried some of it for miles and miles before finally coming up against these trees and these two lines of wire. Up in the branches of the trees, too, I could see, flapping about, torn plastic sheeting and bits of old carrier bags. That was the only time, as I stood there, looking at that strange rubbish, feeling the wind coming across those empty fields, that I started to imagine just a little fantasy thing . . . 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. (287-88)

What the “strange rubbish” evokes is obvious (287). Tommy, now being complete and swept away from Kathy, has become a lost object. In the “lost corner” of England, however, they are lost but found objects, visualized in the objects caught at the fence. Indeed, Ishiguro’s redeployment of the fence is stunning. This item initially appears as a reminder of the atrocities in prison camps of World War II (78). A student reacts innocently to the electrified fence, saying “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). Here Ishiguro lays bare the plight of human clones under biopower in which they are barred from even deciding on their own life and death. The metaphor of fences as a controlling force, however, is presented as a thing to be overcome by the empathic capacity they have attained over time. In the scene Kathy, Ruth, and Tommy visit the stranded boat in a marshland, Kathy holds up a fence for enfeebled Ruth and Tommy to pass under (223). “It wasn’t so difficult for her [Ruth] in the end: it was more a confidence thing, and with us there to support, she seemed to lose her fear of the fence,” Kathy recalls (223). The episode showcases how the effects of fences are more psychological than physical, and therefore, to be gotten over. In the final scene of Kathy’s vision, the idea of fences is transformed again, and quite radically, into a protective device from gusty winds. Without the fence, the garbage would be permanently lost. Kathy witnesses that “All

along the fence, especially along the lower line of wire, all sorts of rubbish had caught and tangled” (287). In parallel with those lost objects, Tommy is caught and revived in Kathy’s memory.⁴ His objectification is not denied, yet in the powerful network of imagination Hailsham students acquired, he regains power for claiming his existence. Such form of a commemoration is only possible in their close connection with objects. In *Never Let Me Go*, Ishiguro explores a new relationship with objects beyond the limit of an anthropocentric view of them.

Through the portrayal of human clones’ doomed lives in *Never Let Me Go*, Ishiguro questions the ways in which humans form relationships with objects. Largely being anthropocentric, the relationships have often been utilized to persecute others. Objectification becomes a form of dehumanization by depriving the same rights of the objectified as the objectifiers. Ishiguro’s clone characters are deprived the most basic human right to life. If they are bound to die, they are not even able to decide when to die. Reduced as biological spare parts for the humans that can be, they experience the most abject form of objectification, being violable whenever the need for their organs arises. Hailsham’s aesthetic education complicates and exacerbates the situation. Their political instrumentalization of the students further ties them up in the system of exploitation as they internalize the value of instrumentalism and see themselves as tools. They learn, to a greater or lesser extent, to objectify themselves. However, Ishiguro denies the role of objects to be powerless. From Kathy’s lost tape to mere rubbish from nowhere, the objects in his novel redefine the status of these objectified characters through the empathic power they evoke. Furthermore, the empathic capacity elevates them, making them objects for commemoration as individualized and irreplaceable existence. The objects, in Ishiguro’s novel, cannot be easily explained in the dichotomic relationship with humans. They mediate a new relationship between humans and what they consider as non-humans. It is around this

new role assigned to objects, Ishiguro's project to reconsider humanness revolves. In other words, *Never Let Me Go* suggests a possibility of moving beyond the anthropocentric perspectives by showing the process in which objects attain their thingness.

Notes

- 1) Snaza draws the meaning of soul from Foucault's explanation of biopower: "it is no longer the body, with the ritual of excessive pains, spectacular brandings in the ritual of public execution; it is the mind or rather a play of representations and signs circulating discreetly but necessarily and evidently in the minds of all. It is no longer the body, but the soul, said Malby. And we see very clearly what he meant by this term: the correlative of a technique of power" (Foucault 101). The soul, according to Snaza, "names the site of the individual's production through a 'technique of power' . . . all those methods of control, regulation, and discipline that create the docile body/soul as an individual case" (226).
- 2) De Boever notices the similar detention between the World War II prisoners and Hailsham students (65). Alcalá further elaborates their shared condition, saying, "this has to do with the conditionality of these characters' existence, with its absolute dependence on the exceptional decision of the sovereign, which immediately puts it on a par with the eminently precarious life of the camp's denizens" (50).
- 3) There are much scholarly discussions on the role of empathy in *Never Let Me Go*. Shaddox, for example, points out how Ishiguro re-humanizes his clone characters through empathy. "[T]heir uniqueness as humans is acknowledged," he writes, only when "their emotional selves are recognized through empathic resonance" (453). Other scholars, such as Black, Whitehead, and Lee, have also discussed on the topic. Since this essay's focus is not empathy, however, I will not further engage with this topic here.
- 4) Whitehead also notes such a parallel: "all of these things, including Tommy and Ruth (and Kathy herself), represent a form of 'strange rubbish': not only are the clones themselves eminently disposable, but Ruth has claimed that they might also be cloned from the 'trash' of society" (80). She further draws an analogy between Kathy's narrative net and the fence that holds this rubbish (80).

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국문초록

카즈오 이시구로의 『나를 보내지 마』에 나타난 사물 되기

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『나를 보내지 마』의 사물들은 그 전통적인 개념을 벗어나 대상으로서 존재하는 복제인간들의 지위를 회복시키는 역할을 수행한다. 이 사물들은 복제인간인 헤일섬 학생들의 공감능력을 환기시키고 이를 전달함으로써 이들이 단순한 소모품 이상의 의미 있는 존재임을 보여 준다. 일례로, 캐시의 음악 테이프는 그녀 스스로와 친구들에게 공감 능력을 이끌어내어 그들이 서로에게 소중한 존재임을 확인시킨다. 이는 인간인 마담이 같은 음악을 듣고 보면서도 자신의 생각에 매몰되어 아무 공감을 하지 못하는 모습과 좋은 대조를 이룬다. 그 사용가치가 다했을 때 사물이 어떤 의미로 남을 수 있는지에 대한 이시구로의 탐색은 대상화된 복제인간들에게는 자신들이 어떤 의미를 가질 수 있는가라는 존재론적인 질문이기도 하다. 비록 헤일섬의 학생들은 인지하지 못하지만, 이들의 육체는 훗날의 장기 기증을 위해 면밀하게 감시 및 통제되고 있다. 나아가, 헤일섬의 예술 교육은 이들로 하여금 생체권력 시스템에 저항 없이 통합될 수 있도록 하는 역할을 한다. 표면적으로 헤일섬의 교육은 학생들도 다른 사람들 못지않게 영혼을 가지고 있으며 그렇기에 더 나은 취급을 받아야 한다는 인본주의적 목적을 수행하고 있는 듯하지만, 그 과정에서 학생들을 그들이 창조해낸 예술품으로 대상화시킨다. 이들은 도구로써의 자신들의 존재를 받아들여 종국에는 스스로를 대상화하게 된다. 그러나 주변의 사물이 환기시키는 공감 능력을 통해 이들은 이같은 주입된 관념에서 벗어나 자신을 유일한 개별적 존재로 인식하게 된다. 비록 장기 기증이라는 결말을 피할 수는 없지만, 사후에나마 이들은 유일한 대상으로 기억에 남는다.

주제어: 사물, 대상화, 쓰레기, 기억, 사물성

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