

ANGLICA

An International Journal of English Studies

25/1 2016

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The Clones' Apprenticeship: Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* as a *Bildungsroman*

Abstract

This article considers as a *Bildungsroman* the 2005 novel *Never Let Me Go* by Kazuo Ishiguro, which depicts the education of young clones in a boarding school in a 1990s uchronic England. It studies the main theoretical works about this type of writing in order to isolate some of its defining characteristics and then evaluate the possibility of an analogy between the fictional developments of humans and clones. It concludes that, even though the *Bildungsroman* has strong ties with the changing nineteenth-century society, it has been adapted to other – even non-existing – environments.

The success of young adult science-fiction narratives such as Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games*, Veronica Roth's *Divergent*, or James Dashner's *The Maze Runner* is evidence that a non-realist¹ genre such as science fiction can be compatible with the traditionally realist *Bildungsroman*. Many scholars actually see the *Bildungsroman* as a mode that can adapt to any genre. The science-fiction scholar Irène Langlet indeed alludes twice to the *Bildungsroman* (72–74; 199–200) in dealing with science fiction as a literary genre. Kazuo Ishiguro's 2005 *Never Let Me Go* depicts a dystopian 1990s England where scientists have managed to clone humans for the sole purpose of harvesting their organs for transplants. The narrator, Kathy H., is one of these clones; she remembers her childhood at Hailsham, a boarding school once managed by a group of people who campaigned against the clone breeding system by trying to prove that clones had the same characteristics as humans. Regardless of its typical science-fiction plot, this novel focuses less on the scientific improvement that allows clones to exist than on their everyday lives (chores, lessons and entertainment), their social interactions (with friends, lovers and guardians) and their inner worlds (their thoughts, hopes and fears). This article seeks to isolate the defining characteristics of the *Bildungsroman* through the study of the main theoretical works devoted to this concept. It then considers *Never Let Me Go* in the light of these theories and evaluates the possibility of an analogy between the fictional developments of humans and clones.

Navigating through the criticism about this concept, one realises there might be as many definitions of the *Bildungsroman* as there are *Bildungsromane*. This is illustrated by the many variations in dictionary definitions. According to shorter definitions, such as those in *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* or *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, the *Bildungsroman* describes the development of a young hero from childhood, or adolescence according to *Oxford* (35), into adulthood through various obstacles (*Oxford* 35; *Penguin* 82). *A Dictionary of Literary Terms* does not specify the hero's age but rather alludes to his (or, less usually, to her) "maturation" and *civilisation* (100): the hero "becomes aware of himself as he relates to the objective world outside his subjective consciousness" (100–101). Longer definitions, like the one in *The Routledge Dictionary of Literary Terms*, showcase some typical features of the *Bildungsroman* but also tell of its history and evolution through various countries (Germany, Britain, France and Russia) and cultural fashions (Modernism and Postmodernism).

Thomas L. Jeffers, in *Apprenticeships: The Bildungsroman from Goethe to Santayana*, explains that the lack of clear and satisfying theory about the *Bildungsroman* (even though many critics tend towards this ideal) is the main difficulty in dealing with it (5). Summerfield and Downward note that the *Bildungsroman* seems to be an untameable literary concept whose characteristics and implications are impossible to grasp all at once and whose definition is therefore still a matter for discussion among scholars (3). The way in which this theme is dealt with differs not only in dictionaries but also according to the scholars involved; while François Jost provides many keys towards an actual definition, Thomas L. Jeffers instead focuses on writings about the *Bildungsroman* through the years whilst still trying to gather defining elements. Franco Moretti gives a thematic, "over-regardful of theory, mostly Marxist" (Jeffers 5) analysis of various classic *Bildungsromane*, as he often focuses on the way they feature class conflict. Finally, Giovanna Summerfield and Lisa Downward try to evade the discussions about definition, focusing instead on two neglected aspects: spirituality and the female *Bildungsroman* (3).

The aim of this article is not to re-theorise the *Bildungsroman* but rather establish a theoretical basis upon which I can rely for the analysis of a novel whose genre would not typically be associated with this literary concept. Indeed, on the one hand, Moretti's focus on class conflicts (aristocrats, *bourgeois*, workers and peasants) shows that the *Bildungsroman* is deeply rooted in nineteenth-century culture, while Ishiguro's plot occurs at the end of the twentieth century, the beginning of the twenty-first, or even much later. On the other hand, the *Bildungsroman* is usually realist because it educates the reader, through the character's edification, about a world they both share (Langlet 72). Despite Ishiguro's novel representing a world that does not correspond to the reader's reality, this world still shares many similarities with ours, and the novel therefore still contains a high dose of realism. Moreover, Langlet wrote that the use of the *Bildungsroman* pattern was possible in a

completely unrealistic science-fiction novel because they rely on the same process: the carefully selected details given by the text must be combined with the reader's encyclopaedic knowledge. If the world of the text differs from the one which the reader knows, then this renders their encyclopaedic knowledge less accurate but not completely useless, for the text follows a minimum distance principle² which allows the reader to associate elements of the imaginary world with some of the real world. This explains why science-fiction novels are often interpreted as commentaries (and sometimes criticisms) of our own society (Langlet 200).

Never Let Me Go can already be associated with the *Bildungsroman* since it "can be placed within a tradition of boarding school narratives" (Carroll 62). Novels, like this one, happening in schools or focusing on school life, are called 'school stories.' According to *The Oxford Companion to Children's Literature*, this tradition has origins in the seventeenth century and grew during the eighteenth, but the most famous example is Thomas Hughes' 1857 *Tom Brown's Schooldays* (470). School stories are often *Bildungsromane* since they describe the *maturation* of children through adolescence and onwards to adulthood.

1. Between the *Erziehungsroman* and the *Entwicklungsroman*

The *Bildungsroman* is considered to be somewhere between the *Erziehungsroman*, which means "novel of education," and the *Entwicklungsroman*, which means "novel of development" (Jost 100, Moretti 16–17, Jeffers 49). The *Erziehungsroman* is often mistakenly taken as a synonym for *Bildungsroman* (Cuddon 81, Barnet *et al.* 100). Again, defining such categories is as complicated and subjective as defining the *Bildungsroman* itself, each scholar bringing a different approach to the definition. The focus of the *Erziehungsroman* is pedagogic (Jost 101, Jeffers 49); Moretti adds that it reflects the point of view of the educator (17). The standpoint given in *Never Let Me Go* is clearly the student's, impeding its categorisation, according to Moretti's argument, as *Erziehungsroman*. Jost also explains that, in such a story, the hero follows an educational programme and is subject to an external pressure or influence which helps shape him, for example a teacher (101). Moreover, he explains that the emergence of the *Bildungsroman* is linked to the early-nineteenth-century German preoccupation about education in which the pedagogical objective was, instead of educating children, to let children educate themselves (113).³ This could explain why, even in school stories such as Ishiguro's, the emphasis is on what students learn outside, not inside, the classroom. However, in *Never Let Me Go*, guardians and their lessons do play a role in the clones' development and education is an important focus of the novel because it is Hailsham's tool for proving that the clones do not deserve to be treated as animals. However, Kathy's personal relationships with other students (mostly Ruth and Tommy) are what shapes her for the most part.

According to Jost, the *Erziehungsroman* is more restrictive than the *Bildungsroman* (101), which is why *Never Let Me Go* cannot fully correspond to this type. For the *Entwicklungsroman*, the opposite is true: less restrictive, this genre could even encompass the *Bildungsroman*, along with a lot of other kinds of narrative, because a novel that does not follow its hero's development is a rare commodity (101). However, development or *change* of the protagonist during its progression is, according to M. M. Bakhtin, what distinguishes the *Bildungsroman* from its predecessors (the novel of ordeal, the biographical novel and the family novel). He adds that this change in character reflects the changes in eventful, late-eighteenth-century society (qtd. in Jeffers 2). In his chapter, "The *Bildungsroman* as Symbolic Form" (3–13), Moretti argues likewise: the emergence of the *Bildungsroman* corresponds with the changing youth of changing, late-eighteenth-century European society which, as will be explained below, becomes mobile and takes a sudden interest in internal feelings (4). Regarding change in protagonists, *Never Let Me Go* is no exception. Kathy obviously develops along with the plot since the reader witnesses her maturation from childhood to adulthood. Her growth is inexorably influenced by the gradual awareness of whom (or what) she is and what she will have to do when the time comes. One of the most interesting aspects regarding this study is that in regular *Bildungsromane* the protagonist learns to insert himself correctly into society, while in Ishiguro's novel, when Kathy and her friends leave school and should therefore enter general society, they instead gradually *de-socialise* themselves from the rest of the world. They leave a community where they were never set aside to lead lives of outcasts in a society that needs them as much as it fears them. The proactiveness they show in the beginning of the novel in finding out the reason of the guardians' occasionally strange behaviours eventually disappears when they obtain all of the answers they are looking for. This gives way to fatalism, acceptance, and therefore passivity. Some regard this deficit of survival instinct as proof of their non-humanity (Braun 81).

Moretti found another distinctive feature between the two "genres": a novel of education is objective (17) whereas a novel of development is subjective (16). Given that Kathy is a homodiegetic narrator, her considerations about herself and the world are very likely to be subjective, making it obvious again that this novel could be a novel of development. The *Bildungsroman* is situated between the *Erziehungsroman* and the *Entwicklungsroman* because it features some, but not all, of their characteristics. Jost, Moretti and Jeffers agree about this and enjoy this opportunity to give some elements of definition. For example, Jeffers states that the difference between the *Bildungsroman* and the *Entwicklungsroman* is that the former "is about the early childhood-to-young-adulthood stages of life" (49), while the latter concerns transition between any stages. However, regarding the *Bildungsroman* Jost disagrees, believing that the focus is on adolescence and young adulthood (103).

In this respect, if pushed to define *Never Let Me Go* one could say that it is only partly, but not entirely, a *Bildungsroman*. Indeed, Kathy H.'s memories range from the time she was a child to her thirties. Where, therefore, does the *Bildung* end? Is it when Kathy leaves her school, Hailsham? It is when she leaves the Cottages, a house where she lives with other clones until she is ready to work as a carer? Is it when she quits being a carer to become a donor? The answer is debatable and depends on personal interpretation, and on how much one wishes to stick to established theories. Possible answers to these questions will be considered in the section "The Limits of Formation."

According to Jost, who also uses the *Erziehungsroman* to define the *Bildungsroman*, the former necessarily features a conscious formative authority whereas the latter emphasises the hero/student's own will to achieve a goal.⁴ Classical *Bildungsromane* like *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* by Goethe or *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen (Moretti's *Bildungsroman* archetypes) corresponds to this description: in these, Wilhelm wants to be an actor (Moretti 182) and Elizabeth wants to marry for happiness instead of money. However, in other *Bildungsromane* the *Bildungsheld's* behaviour is much less proactive: in *David Copperfield* by Charles Dickens, the obstacles which the protagonist must endure do not appear because he has set himself a goal, nor are they orchestrated by someone else who wants to educate him. The boy lives a miserable and unlucky life in which his only goal is to survive (Jeffers 56).

The awareness of the hero in achieving his goal lies implicitly in the Jost's suggestion that he fights for a goal that he might even have set himself (101), which seems rather proactive. Such proactiveness is not to be found in Kathy H, who is very passive at both a personal and a general level. In her personal life she is nice, gullible and submissive to Ruth. At a more general level she is like the majority of the clones: she does not rebel against the system of organ donation, she does not fight to live (Lochner 231). She is even more passive than her friends Ruth, Tommy, Chrissie and Rodney who, at least, believe in a deferral system by which a couple can postpone organ donation by proving that they are really in love. However, when finding that such a deferral system does not exist, they will simply resign themselves to accepting their fate. The clones' passiveness is one of the most intriguing elements of the novel (Braun 66). Such acceptance of her fate explains Kathy's lack of goal setting; it is hard to project oneself into the future when one has no future, and people do not usually try to change what they already accept.

2. Experience Shaping Extraordinary Characters

The shaping of the protagonist through the experience of numerous obstacles one encounters whilst trying to become an adult is, according to Jost, the principal defining feature of the *Bildungsroman* (99). Moretti alludes to the same topic through

what he calls “episodes,” events that are not inherently meaningful or exceptional but to which meaning may be given afterwards by the hero (45). Moretti’s emphasis on the hero’s role (42) – a kind of “anthropocentrism” (43) – is supported by Jost’s comment that, in the *Bildungsroman*, common events happen to uncommon characters (107). This is true of Wilhelm Meister in *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* and Elizabeth Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice*, who both differentiate themselves from their peers in wanting something different from their lives, he an acting career and she a happy marriage. However, according to *The Routledge Dictionary of Literary Terms*, only in British *Bildungsromane* do the heroes feature “a certain sense of social dislocation” (19). Such an argument is corroborated by Moretti stating that the German tradition of “[t]his genre does not bother with extraordinary men” (32). The case of Kathy in *Never Let Me Go* is a bit ambiguous. The school environment in which she lives features a lot of conformism (students wear the same clothes, eat the same food, go to the same class, read the same books, etc.), which prevents her from being as non-conformist as her literary predecessors. Moreover, there is not much room left for fancy since she is drilled to serve one precise goal: to donate organs. However, while Kathy does not particularly stand out compared to her fellow students, her school stands out very much compared to other schools. Hailsham is one of the few schools where clones are educated and treated like human beings. Being part of these schools definitely influences Kathy’s identity, which becomes even more apparent after she comes into contact with people from other kinds of schools – when she becomes a carer: “I don’t know how it was where you were, but at Hailsham we had to have some form of medical almost every week” (Ishiguro 13). In this quotation Kathy is talking to an imaginary narratee, also a clone, who attended a different school from Hailsham.

Susanne Howe’s 1930 “foundational study” (Jeffers 49) also mentions experience as a central theme in the *Bildungsroman*:

The adolescent hero of the typical “apprentice” novel sets out on his way through the world, meets reverses usually due to his temperament, falls in with various guides and counsellors, makes many false starts in choosing his friends, his wife, and his life work, and finally adjusts himself in some way to the demands of his time and environment by finding a sphere of action in which he may work effectively. [...] Needless to say, the variations of it are endless. (Howe, qtd. in Jeffers 49)

Never Let Me Go broadly meets such criteria: Kathy recalls episodes of her teenage years, events that caused her to suffer but also to grow; her various guardians serve as guides to her and have different points of view (for example, Miss Emily vs. Miss Lucy on the clones’ education); due to her dominant position among the girls of the class, Ruth can also be seen as a sort of guide to Kathy; Kathy does not make any “false start,” as Howe puts it, regarding her life’s work due to the scarcity of options available, but her friendships are intermittent: her relationships with

Ruth and Tommy prove fragile; in the end, she definitely “adjusts” herself “to the demands of [her] time” by giving up her job as a carer and becoming the organ donor society wants her to become. Surprisingly, she considers herself ready, accepts her future with relative peace and thinks of it as a duty. Indeed, she says:

[...] by the end of the year, I won't be driving around like this any more. So the chances are I won't ever come across [Hailsham] now, and on reflection, I'm glad that's the way it'll be. It's like my memories of Tommy and of Ruth. 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. [...] The fantasy [of imagining Tommy alive] 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. (Ishiguro 281–282)

Throughout the novel, Kathy is nostalgic of her Hailsham years and this nostalgia is exacerbated by Tommy's death. Although she is very much afflicted, her sense of duty prevails. Even the loss of her lover does not cause her to question the organ donation system. It is interesting to consider that Kathy is not critical of the treatment of the human body as a commodity – Kathy is not critical of anything at all. As one will see, the only thing she ends up questioning is, ironically, Hailsham.

3. Inner versus Outer Lives

Moretti explains that the classical *Bildungsroman* necessarily ends with marriage, “a pact between the individual and the world” (22), and presents happiness as “the end of becoming [...], the end of all tension between the individual and his world” (23) and “the subjective symptom of an objectively complete socialization” (24). However, times have changed and marriage no longer holds as much social importance as it used to (Moretti 7). In *Never Let Me Go*, the conclusion of adolescence no longer coincides with marrying but rather becoming a carer and, later, an organ donor. Marriage is understandably not one of Kathy's concerns. Nonetheless, the ending of this novel does convey the ideas of the erasure of tension and complete socialisation achieved not through marriage but through the death of a loved one.

Jeffers sees socialisation in a light that could not be more accurate with regards to Ishiguro novel: “social relationships matter less for themselves than for the *Weltanschauung* – the “lay religion or general philosophy of life,” as W.H. Bruford says – they help articulate” (50). Kathy's social life is indeed central to the plot and has undeniable shaping power on the characters: most of Kathy's anecdotes allude to her problematic, love-hate relationship with Ruth. After suffering Ruth's constant undermining throughout her childhood and adolescence, it becomes apparent that Ruth's negative behaviours have transferred to Kathy,

whilst Ruth herself has become a better person (Stamirowska 64): on their trip to the boat Kathy openly ridicules Ruth for the first time, while shortly afterwards Ruth admits to having tried to separate Kathy and Tommy more than once, asks for forgiveness and pushes the couple to ask for a deferral. Kathy's relationship with Tommy is also important to her personal development, because it is with him that she discusses the mystery that lies, spatially and temporally, beyond Hailsham, and finally understands who – or what – she and her fellow Hailsham students really are. It is also with Tommy that she discovers the supposedly-typical human feeling of love, of striking relevance in a novel that ultimately questions and discusses the human condition.

Whilst this section has dwelled on the importance of social life in the *Bildungsroman*, most authors agree that this kind of novel focuses above all on the hero's internal development, his inner life. Jost writes that this inner life matters much more than events, turning the *Bildungsroman* into a spiritual voyage.⁵ Jeffers confirms: "An intensely Jamesian center of consciousness [the *Bildungsheld*] need not be, but a focus on the development of his inner life is nevertheless essential" (50). Thanks to this prevailing introspection, the *Bildungsheld* is rather a dreamer and an artist than a man of action (Jeffers 50). According to Moretti, the focus on inner life is typical of modern youth: in the 18th century, the emergence of the *bourgeoisie* undermines the class system; besides, there is a city exodus that splits generations – sons are no longer bound to do the same job as their fathers –, which permits spatial and social mobility that "give rise to unexpected hopes, thereby generating an *interiority* not only fuller than before, but also – as Hegel clearly saw, even though he deplored it – perennially dissatisfied and restless" (Moretti 4).

Some might consider inner and outer lives to be two sides of the same coin that is the *Bildungsheld*. However, these two sides coexist in a far from harmonious state: as *The Routledge Dictionary of Literary Terms* recalls "Goethe's attention to the gradual growth to self-awareness of his protagonist depends on a harmonious negotiation of interior and exterior selfhoods, a reconciliation that involves the balancing of social role with individual fulfilment" (18). Summerfield and Downward allude to Wilhelm Dilthey's similar conception of the *Bildungsroman*, popularised by the latter, which "traces the progress of a young person towards self-understanding as well as a sense of social responsibility" (1). Starting from Moretti's theory, Jeffers explains that the *Bildungsroman* is about "modern youth, representative of the coming democracy, [and] a self-expressive ego confronted with the community's demands for self-repression" (51). According to Moretti, the only way to cope with these demands is to internalise them: "not to 'solve' the contradiction, but rather to learn to live with it, and even transform it into a tool for survival" (10).⁶ All of these references end up mentioning a tension between the hero's interior being (his feelings, his need for freedom) and external environment (society, which imposes its limitations).

The environment of *Never Let Me Go*, a boarding school where the entire life of students is regulated, is quite repressive. Beyond the already limiting school lies a future that does not leave many choices open to the characters. The leeway given by these realities is rather small, but after a short, lacking-of-enthusiasm attempt to escape it, Kathy accepts her situation. Like the traditional *Bildungsroman* hero, she manages to stay true to herself even when confronted with society's demands however unpleasant these may be.

Nevertheless, Kathy has a counterpart who does not display such acceptance. Although Tommy cannot conform to society's demands and tries to bypass them, he ends up broken by them. The hysterical child he used to be relapses when he learns that there is absolutely no way of escaping his fate, in a heart-breaking scene in which he screams in a field at night. After witnessing this, Kathy tells him: "I was thinking maybe the reason you used to get like that [hysterical] was because at some level you always *knew*" (270), to which he answers:

"Don't think so, Kath. No, it was always just me. Me being an idiot. That's all it ever was." Then after a moment, he did a small laugh and said: "But that's a funny idea. Maybe I did know, somewhere deep down. Something the rest of you didn't." (270)

Tommy simultaneously dismisses and acknowledges his childhood intuition, just like the *Bildungsheld* expresses his unique self but at the same time wants to conform. Even if the screaming episode is a turning point after which Tommy begins to accept his fate, he does so, however, by force rather than as willingly as Kathy; reality has managed to break him and he cannot resist any longer. In the chapter that follows this extract, it becomes apparent that Tommy is resigned – he is more distant from Kathy and closer to the other donors. Besides, he displays a light and positive mood around his fellow donors, as if nothing had ever happened, and even more so when he learns that he will soon have to make his fourth donation, which is bound to kill him. This difference in acceptance has to do with the way these characters discovered the truth about themselves. If Kathy's theory is right, Tommy did learn the truth sooner than his fellow Hailsham students and by himself, instead of gradually thanks to the guardians' truncated explanations. His acceptance of the facts was thus not innate; he experienced reality sooner and more suddenly than the others and, therefore could not internalise it – he could not 'live with it' – in the way that the others could.

4. Art and Culture

Some consider culture, and subsequently art, essential to the *Bildungsroman* as it has influence on both the hero's inner and outer lives. According to Jost, intellectual and moral progress implies a quest towards an ideal in which knowledge

is essential⁷ (114). In this respect, both Moretti and Jeffers refer back to Friedrich von Schiller, one of the pioneers of *Bildungsroman* theory, and his *Aesthetic Education* (Moretti 29–32; Jeffers 40–42). Schiller considered men of his time too specialised – being either a scientist, an intellectual, a craftsman, an artist or an athlete, etc. – and that they should instead draw inspiration from the Ancient Greek model of totality, in which a man is all these things at once. Culture is the tool to rediscover this lost totality, and men must, therefore, engage in an acculturation path, which can be high – becoming “artists and connoisseurs” (Jeffers 41) – or low, for those who cannot indulge in such full-time activities; in other, cruder words, the poor who must work. Men’s “intellectual character awaken[ing]” and freedom of choice is the final destination of this low path (Jeffers 41). Since Hailsham students are privileged and still at school, they have a lot of time “to ‘play’ at thinking, forming, or writing.,” i.e. the high path and the only activity that can lead them to being human (Jeffers 41).

‘Art’ may have more than one meaning. On the one hand there is the dictionary definition, following the most general and common understanding of the term: “something that is created with imagination and skill and that is beautiful or that expresses important ideas or feelings” (*Merriam-Webster*). On the other hand there is the German conception of ‘art’ described by Wilhelm Humboldt:

Everything towards which man directs his attention, whether it is limited to the direct or indirect satisfaction of merely physical wants, or to the accomplishment of external objects in general, presents itself in a closely interwoven relation with his internal sensations. [...] In view of this consideration, it seems as if all peasants and craftsmen might be elevated into artists; that is, into men who love their labour for its own sake, improve it by their own plastic genius and inventive skill, and thereby cultivate their intellect, ennoble their character, and exalt and refine their enjoyments. (qtd. in Moretti 30)

Like Schiller with his acculturation paths, Humboldt seems to insist that the *bourgeoisie* and aristocracy should not be the only ones who can afford to access art and culture.

Set in imaginary, dystopian/uchronic world, *Never Let Me Go* contains, surprisingly, some art and culture references that belong to the reader’s world. Kathy recurrently alludes to the Victorian literary period regarding her final essay (Ishiguro 105). Hailsham guardians insist very much on student creativity and, every once in a while, the best pieces of art are collected by Madame. To the students whose art is taken away, it is always a great honour; they receive compensation and the other students’ admiration. Kathy enlarges on her friends’ art and her own, because at Hailsham, the best students are actually those with greatest artistic skills. If one cannot produce any work of art, like Tommy, they are scolded by the guardians and ridiculed by their fellow students. However, Tommy secretly begins to draw

fantasy animals when he arrives at the Cottages. Kathy feels confused about these drawings:

I didn't come up with wholehearted praise. Maybe it was partly my worry that any artwork was liable to get him into trouble all over again. But also, what I was looking at was so different from anything the guardians had taught us to do at Hailsham, I didn't know how to judge it. (Ishiguro 185)

Her reaction shows that nonconformist types of artistic expressions are not easily considered artistic among people to whom art has always been a way of establishing someone's quality. Coming back to the two definitions of 'art,' Hailsham's understanding is more traditional whereas Tommy, who produces something unexpected and unprecedented, rather corresponds to Humboldt's German idea of an artist: he puts his attention, effort, personal feelings and love into his fantasy animals, which in their turn lead him to improve his skills, his intellect and his character.

Clones being educated and sensitive to fine art is actually the reason behind Hailsham's existence. When Kathy and Tommy meet Miss Emily again years after Hailsham, Kathy asks:

Why did we do all of that work in the first place? Why train us, encourage us, make us produce all of that [art]? If we're just going to give donations anyway, then die, why all those lessons? Why all those books and discussions? (Ishiguro 255)

To this Miss Emily answers: "We took your art because we thought it would reveal your souls. Or to put it more finely, we did it to *prove you had souls at all*" (Ishiguro 255). Their plan was to change public opinion about clones so that they would not be killed for their organs anymore. Some would say they did manage to prove the clones' humanity; others would argue that the clones' resignation before death is so unnatural they might not be human after all (Braun 81).

Explaining Schiller's praise of Greek totality, Moretti writes that the *Bildungsheld* is eventually "[f]ree from that disharmonious specialization that [...] constitutes the specific curse of the 'bourgeois'" (31). The aim of the classical *Bildungsroman* is, therefore, "to create 'full and happy men' – full and happy because 'tempered,' not 'partial' or 'unilateral'" (Moretti 31). Jeffers, who also alludes to Schiller, reminds us that Goethe himself believed that such "all-roundedness" was not yet possible and that "the achievement of modern civilization depended on specialization" (Jeffers 3).

Never Let Me Go features this ambivalence towards specialisation: on the one hand Kathy's school is preparing her for a certain purpose (organ donation), and on the other hand it teaches her many other things as well. Even though the guardians know what lies ahead of the children, they insist on them having various

competences to show the world that a clone reared in a humane way is not different to an actual human.

5. The Limits of Formation

According to Jost the *Bildungsroman* is like a “préroman”: it prepares the hero for his future life. This presupposes a favourable outcome for the protagonist (99). However, to establish if the *Bildung* ends ‘happily’, one must first know when the *Bildung* ends. It is indeed difficult to decide where to place the limit between the *Bildungsroman*, Jost’s “préroman” (99), and the rest of the novel, Jost’s “roman” (99).

The most logical delimitation in *Never Let Me Go* would appear to be when Kathy enters adulthood as she leaves the Cottages to become a carer (at the end of “Part Two”): she leaves the acquaintances and the environment of her childhood and teenage years and experiences the reality of organ donation. At this point, there is no more room left for doubt, hope or change.

Some might also argue that life experiences keep on shaping Kathy *after* leaving the Cottages: she meets old friends struggling with being a carer (Laura) or a donor (Ruth), Ruth finally admits that she had been manipulating Kathy all along and then dies, Kathy starts a romantic relationship with Tommy, this couple ends up hoping to be granted a deferral that does not even exist, and then Tommy dies. After the latter event, Kathy decides it is time she fulfilled her obligation as a donor, the role for which she was, after all, created. The novel implies that the death of a loved one being a difficult and important experience, its consequences and its character-forming power are likewise important.

As explained previously, the *Bildung* might be complete if one considers that the *Bildungsroman* ends when the hero finds and accepts his role in society. However, wherever one decides to place the limit of the *Bildung*, Kathy does not reach a happy ending anyway. She leaves the Cottages out of spite for Ruth and Tommy and nothing of what follows is likely to bring her happiness. Moreover, she is bound to die and has no way of escaping her fate.

Contradicting Jost’s assertion that *Bildungsromane* must have ‘happy endings,’ Suleiman states that they can have a positive or a negative ending, the only difference being *the message they send*. Suleiman indeed sees many *Bildungsromane* as ideological novels that show the reader the path to follow – or not to follow in cases where the outcome is unfavourable to the protagonist (67).

6. Update on the *Bildungsroman*

Never Let Me Go features many characteristics of the *Bildungsroman*, though not all. The reason for this is likely to be its uncommon mix of realistic and unrealistic

elements. Ishiguro's dystopian setting is normalised through the use of a high number of familiar elements such as the boarding school (Carroll 62) or the characters' childlike and adolescent behaviours.

However, the true objective of this study is not to decide whether to label this novel as '*Bildungsroman*' but rather to explore the updating of a concept that was, at first, closely related to the context it was born in. *The Routledge Dictionary of Literary Terms* already describes how this genre has been adapted through the years and in various places: in Britain, the heroes were outcasts; in France and Russia they were sexually transgressive; Modernists exacerbated the focus on the inner life and Postmodernists took an interest in marginalised groups, i.e. women and non-white people (19). It is now the turn of science fiction to reinvent the *Bildungsroman*. In *Never Let Me Go*, the late-eighteenth-century considerations about marriage, industrial revolution or the rise of the *bourgeoisie* were replaced by considerations about the "scientific-technical revolution" initiated by this WWII (Šmihula 51). This novel brings to mind recent preoccupations about biotechnologies initiated in 1996 by the birth of Dolly the sheep, the first mammal to be cloned successfully. The nineteenth-century *Bildungsheld* looking for a place in a changing society has now turned into a posthuman looking for his own humanity in a dehumanised world.

Notes

- 1 The term "non-realist" is to be understood according to its narrower meaning as a genre that does not represent the world of its author. A convenient synonym could therefore be "fantastic" (Hellekson 3).
- 2 "principe d'écart minimal"
- 3 "au lieu d'éduquer l'enfant, il faut lui permettre de s'éduquer lui-même."
- 4 "Au lieu que dans le Bildungsroman, le héros, tout en demeurant dans son milieu naturel – social et professionnel – combat pour un but qu'il entrevoit ou qu'il s'est lui-même donné et, ce faisant, se forme; dans l'Erziehungsroman, ce héros suit un programme d'étude, un plan d'exercices" (101).
- 5 "Ce principe d'unité est plutôt à chercher dans le héros lui-même, ses attitudes devant la vie, ses victoires et ses défaites [que dans les événements]. Ainsi, le *Bildungsroman* demeure une sorte de récit de voyage spirituel: la distance intérieure parcourue donne la mesure du progrès accompli" (Jost 104).
- 6 Years before, Jost praised Wilhelm Meister's acceptance: "En fait, c'est dans un labyrinthe dont personne n'a pu consulter le plan que tout apprenti-homme se trouve engagé, et c'est par un dédale de superstitions et de mensonges qu'il s'achemine vers la lumière ou vers l'acceptation d'une certaine irrationalité du monde. Mieux que le monde lui-même, Wilhelm reconnaît sa place dans

le monde, il commence à distinguer, à pouvoir définir cet homme qu'est lui-même" (105).

- 7 "l'idée de progrès intellectuels et moraux implique celle d'une montée vers un idéal [...]. C'est ici la quintessence même du *Bildungsroman*. [...] [R]ien ne purifie comme la connaissance" (Jost 114).

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