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Elana Koehler

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Elana Koehler  
Department of English & World Languages  
*Faculty Mentor: Blaire Zeiders, Ph.D., Department of English & World Languages*

**ABSTRACT**

Among scholarly discussions of Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go* (2005), the idea of the clones’ manipulation in order to fulfill their roles in the organ transplantation system is pervasive. Many posit that the clones begin to place their sense of self and identity within their roles as organ suppliers. However, I argue that there is a lack of discussion and significance attributed to the role of the potential outlets of “escape” and their role in the clones’ submission to exploitation. I posit that the clones’ belief in the possibility of “escape” from this system, whether this comes in the form of relationships, identity, or future plans, is essential to the continued function of the system itself. Employing a Marxist lens in the form of Althusser’s ideas of ideological state apparatuses (ISA) and interpellation as described in his work *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* (1971), I highlight the ways in which the clones are distracted from the horrors of their roles in the overall system by false feelings of agency and individuality provided by these “escapes.” Ultimately, by overlooking the role of these outlets for “escape” from the ISA in the interpellation of the clones, we are in turn failing to acknowledge the ways the ISAs around us ensnare our participation by manipulating us into creating our sense of individuality and identity around the parameters of the system. While the clones form relationships and begin to characterize themselves, they do so only through their participation in the ISA and through their sense of fulfillment thereof. This in turn perpetuates the system and prevents any mass forms of rebellion, escape, or overturning of the ISA.

**Keywords:** interpellation, Marxist Theory, Clone, Ideological State Apparatuses

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*Correspondence: Elana Koehler, Augusta University, 1120 15th St. Augusta, GA 30912, LKOEHLER@augusta.edu*
INTRODUCTION

Kazuo Ishiguro’s dystopian novel *Never Let Me Go* (2005) utilizes a first-person narrative from the perspective of a clone, Kathy, to demonstrate the journey of clone children in a society which relies on them as suppliers of vital organs for research and for human recipients in need of transplants. The boarding school that composes the setting for a large portion of the novel, Hailsham, initially teaches the clone children to listen to the authority and regulations of outside society. In this way, they feel a sense of comradery in their shared experiences. But as the clones grow up and leave the school grounds, they continue to be separated by the ideological subjection of society. They are divided into “carers” and “donors” which respectively take care of the other clones undergoing organ removals and begin their organ removal surgeries until they eventually pass away or “complete” as a result (Ishiguro, 2005). This creates strife between the clones and keeps them from supporting each other in creating any form of rebellion or an uprising against the systemic apparatuses that are controlling this organ transplant system.

Utilizing a Marxist lens, particularly the concepts of ideological subjection, ideological state apparatuses (ISAs), and interpellation of Louis Althusser as represented in his work, *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* (1971), allows for a greater understanding of why the main characters in Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go* (2005) continue their roles in perpetuating a system that directly results in their harm and ultimate demise. Althusser’s (1971) ultimate argument is that “…the Ideological State Apparatuses function ‘by ideology’” as opposed to “by violence,” such as would be used in “Repressive State Apparatuses,” because of the manipulation of those within the society to “buy-in to” their part in the system (p. 80). Althusser (1971) defines this process of obeying the system and participating in one’s own role within it as interpellation and describes it as the method through which “ideology ‘acts’ or ‘functions’ in such a way that it ‘recruits’ subjects among the individuals (it recruits them all), or ‘transforms’ the individuals into subjects” (p. 86). The interpellation into this systematic way of creating clones for the sole purpose of organ transplants allows the humans in Ishiguro’s work that are not participating directly in the creation and “use” of the clones to not feel guilty for their role in the system. At the same time, this ideology enforces the idea within each of the clones that this is their purpose for existence. This form of ideology not only creates a separate role within society for clones as opposed to that of humans, but simultaneously divides the clones amongst themselves in their fulfillment of this purpose to prevent deviation from it. As Myra Seaman (2007) describes, the clones demonstrate that “they are concerned with competition” and experience “a quest for an individual identity” (p. 265), and these aspects of the clones’
experiences provides a form of escape for the clones and allows for an internalized separation from the predetermined fate they are facing. These desires also create an element of prideful need for a purpose because the clones share the same ultimate fate due to society, but the clones want a way to succeed on their own path. The way the clones demonstrate a sense of ignoring their fate as they are growing up can be considered a direct result of the ideology they are taught by the school and further encouraged through euphemism as well as isolation from any other sources of learning about the outside world. In this essay, I will make use of Althusser’s (1971) concept of ISAs and interpellation to demonstrate that the clones’ attempts to escape the system actually play a very large role in continuing to feed the system or ISA as a whole.

For Kathy and the other students, Hailsham creates an environment where they have strict rules to follow, classes to take, and competition to make the best art for the Spring Exchange and the Gallery. This can be considered their perceived purpose for the duration of their time at Hailsham, as evident by the pressure put on the clones by not only their teachers or “guardians,” but also by the other clones because “how much you were liked and respected, had to do with how good you were at ‘creating’” (Ishiguro, 2005, p. 16). The educational ISA falls among Althusser’s (1971) list of the variations of ISAs in *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*. Althusser (1971) clarifies early on in his discussion of ISAs that, “Ideological State Apparatuses function massively and predominantly by ideology, but they also function secondarily by repression, even if ultimately...this is very attenuated and concealed, even symbolic” (p. 81). In the case of Kathy and her fellow clones, the repression exists in the form of isolation from the world outside of Hailsham, as well as in the physical repression of the clones’ ability to live because of the way their donations ultimately remove their ability to function.

One method of analyzing the ways in which Hailsham and Ishiguro’s dystopian society utilizes this repression counterpart to its ideology that can be seen as “attenuated and concealed, even symbolic” (Althusser, 1971, p. 81) is to focus on the effects on the lifespan of the clones and how this affects the novel’s structure. Heike Hartung (2011) focuses on *Never Let Me Go*, as well as a few other novels, that demonstrate a bildungsroman structure but differentiate from the conventional style in featuring characters that “grow up to ‘never’ grow old” (p. 45). Firstly, Hartung (2011) emphasizes the ways the organ transplantation system in Ishiguro’s novel prevents the clones from fulfilling the traditional lifespan. She explains that “even though Kathy is only thirty-one…Kathy’s life history, though she has barely entered ‘middle age,’ entails a confrontation with death” (p. 52). Hartung (2011) cites the example of Kathy and Tommy’s attempt to meet with Miss Emily and ask about the potential “…deferral from the donations for a few years if one can prove to be part of a couple who are in love with each other” as representative of ways that the human characters in the novel attempt to console themselves.
in regard to the destruction of the clones’ for human benefit (Ishiguro, 2011, p. 55). From this encounter, Kathy and Tommy learn that there truly is no possibility of any reprieve from their future deaths as a result of organ removal and “even though Tommy and Kathy rebel against this idea, the confrontation with their ‘creators’ only reinforces the inevitability and uniformity of their end” (Hartung, 2011, p. 55).

Other scholars also highlight the creator relationship between the humans and clones that Hartung (2011) emphasizes. The language, as well as what could seem to be standard childhood experiences of this ISA also play a role in allowing the humans facilitating it to push aside feelings of guilt in relation to the clones’ exploitation. Citing Foucault, Marx, Althusser, and others, Seaman (2007) describes their methods of analyzing ideas about “posthumans” and how they each utilize “critical deconstruction of the universal, liberal humanist subject” (p. 247). Seaman (2007) describes the separation between humans and ‘posthumans’ as stemming from the idea that “embodiment always troubles the human ‘person,’ and is a highly slippery entity despite its apparently concrete givenness” (p. 247). In discussing Ishiguro’s novel, Seaman (2007) describes the view on the clones from society “...as non-humans - as mere bodies lacking deep interior selves or souls, artificial products of a human science whose sole purpose is to extend the lives of ‘genuine humans’” (p. 265). This point not only reiterates ideas found in other sources’ descriptions of the societal oppression in Never Let Me Go, but also emphasizes the binary between the clones and the humans as between posthumans and humans. I posit that this binary, as Seaman (2007) describes, is central to the foundation of the ISA because it creates division between the clones and the humans and makes the clones feel different and isolated. The clones “believe...that their love and creativity...will confirm their humanity and thus preserve them from the inhumane death” (Seaman, 2007, p. 266) The humans that facilitate this ISA, which include but are not limited to just the guardians, are able to maintain the system by only allowing the clones to find identity, or as Seaman puts it, “their desire to live” (2007, p. 266), through fulfillment within the ideology itself.

Aside from the physical limitation of the lives of the clones, the organ supplying ISA of Ishiguro’s novel begins with what Althusser would classify as “ideological subjection” on the clones at a young age by making use of euphemisms such as “donors” and “carers” that imply a sense of choice for the clones (Ishiguro, 2005, p. 3). Hartung (2011) briefly references this idea in her article, describing that in the life stories of these clones, the end is “death, which is euphemistically called ‘completing’” (p. 52). Althusser (1971) maintains that part of what allows an ideology to function and create interpellation of the subjects is “…obviousnesses, which we cannot fail to recognize and before which we have the inevitable and natural reaction of... ‘That’s obvious! That’s right! That’s true!’” (p. 85). Althusser (1971) highlights “the obviousness of the ‘transparency’ of language” as a part of this idea (p. 85). The clones are prepared throughout their time at
Hailsham to take care of themselves by avoiding smoking and any other activities that could cause their bodies harm because “…we perhaps even knew that a long way down the line there were donations waiting for us” (Ishiguro, 2005, p. 69). Though Kathy says, “we didn’t really know what that meant” (Ishiguro, 2005, p. 69), she and her fellow clones are aware, even if subconsciously, of what their roles are in this society. They are familiar with the term donation, even if they do not realize its implications at a very young age. The term carer is brought up much later in the novel, when Kathy and the others are living in the Cottages and are waiting to “start [their] training to become a carer” (Ishiguro, 2005, p. 202). Both of these imply a choice in participation which is not actually offered to the clones. It can be argued that these euphemisms are yet another facet of the ISA that benefits the humans that are allowed to use these terms to make themselves feel free from guilt. The euphemisms utilized by Hailsham are continued once the students leave and venture into the outside world, while still subjected to the same systemic roles overall. In this way, the shared language conditions the clones at a young age to accept their fate, distance themselves from it as they get older, and proves a connection between the “educational ISA” and the “legal ISA” of this outside society (Althusser, 1971, p. 80).

The role of these euphemisms goes beyond conditioning the clones to accept their fates in the future, as it also creates an environment in which the clones begin to associate these roles with their identities. Tiffany Tsao (2012) utilizes “palimpsestuous readings” of Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein, John Milton’s Paradise Lost, and Kazuo Ishiguro’s Never Let Me Go in order to illuminate the issues that arise in a “creator-creation relations” (p. 215). Tsao compares the clones’ focus on following the rules instilled in them from a young age, as well as their focus on proving themselves as carers and donors to Christianity. Tsao (2012) explains, “…for some Christian writers, the goodness of God derives not from the purpose he gives us, but his ability to love his creatures whether they fulfill their ‘purpose’ or not” (p. 226). Tsao’s (2010) argument is concerning in the ways in which “…the purpose-driven life is terrifyingly reductive and devoid of freedom” (p. 223) to be pertinent in illuminating the ways in which the clones exhibit interpellation into the ideological subjection they have experienced at Hailsham. For instance, in reference to the clones accepting their fate to “complete,” Tsao (2010) elucidates that “a clone who has finished his or her last donation is said to ‘have completed’…contributing themselves… in fulfilling the purpose for which they were created, do they consider themselves complete” (p. 224). Though the clones do not mention religion in this novel, the idea of a purpose-driven life as described by Tsao is important because it allows the exploration of the idea that the clones feel that their ultimate fates are their role or their purpose, and thus causes them to participate in the interpellation into the ISA. For example, even after undergoing organ removal surgery, Ruth still experiences interpellation into the ideology that they were taught at Hailsham, as she explains, “It felt right. After all, it’s what we’re supposed to be
doing, isn’t it?” (Ishiguro, 2005, p. 227). In this instance, it seems that she is also inviting Kathy to “catch-up” to her and to reach the same point in their destiny that she has by becoming a donor.

Emphasis on ways in which Hailsham conditions the clone children to not only accept their roles for the organ transplantation system but also to make sure that the other clones do the same, is common among discussions of Ishiguro’s novel. For example, Kelly Rich (2015) highlights the role of Hailsham in the ideological manipulation of the clone children in order to prepare them for their future contribution to the organ sale system. Rich (2015) utilizes the examples of plays, classes, and the many other ways Hailsham pretends to be different in their role of the treatment of these clone children in order to demonstrate that “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” (p. 635). Rich (2015) cites the example of the sale of the clones’ artwork as one way the authorities of Hailsham emphasize individual merit. Just as Rich pinpoints the Gallery and artwork as conducive to the systemic oppression of the clones, Shameem Black (2009) responds to the idea the art created by the clones in the novel has a use value in that it is used to show the souls of the Hailsham students, and instead argues that the art itself is yet another contributing aspect to the organ sale system. Black (2009) posits that the clones creating art with the hopes that it is chosen for the Gallery indicates that, “from a young age, children grow accustomed to the idea of handing over their ‘inner selves’ to figures of authority” (p. 794). Bruce Robbins (2007) argues a similar point. Robbins (2007) references evaluation of the clones’ artwork for the gallery as just one example of emphasizing upward mobility to the clone children in order to perpetuate their ideological subjection into the organ donation system. The author posits that the clones “...need to believe that the merit of what they are doing will be rewarded, if only by being recognized, and this entails a belief...of the authorities doing the recognizing and rewarding” (Robbins, 2007, p. 294). Ultimately, even though Hailsham offers classes, recess, and a nice place to live for these children for a large portion of their lives, “the program ensures that [Kathy] and her fellow students circulate through a rigorously controlled world-system in order to gain maximum profit from its all-too-human resources” (Rich, 2015, p. 632). While I am in agreement with the idea of the artwork created by the clones as a method of employing an upward mobility mentality within them from a young age—which in turn feeds into the ISA and creates interpellation from the clones by giving them goals and distracting them from their predetermined fates—I argue that the role of the artwork as a potential outlet of escape from the system through a “deferral” must be highlighted as to its importance in maintaining the ideological subjection of the clones.

While current scholarship surrounding Ishiguro’s (2005) *Never Let Me Go* emphasizes the idea of the manipulation Kathy and the other clones face during their time
both within and outside of Hailsham, I believe not enough focus is placed on the idea that
this ideological subjection that feeds into Ishiguro’s dystopian organ supplier system is
rooted in the clones having belief in possible escapes from the system. The aforementioned
example of the collection of the clones’ artwork not only provides the clones with feelings
of individual merit, but also conditions them to associate their worth with their role in the
ISA. Kathy explains that “for each [piece]...you were paid in Exchange Tokens- the
guardians decided how many” (Ishiguro, 2005, p. 16). The clones would then attend “the
Sales” in which they could “purchase” the other clones’ work and “[build] up a collection
of personal possessions” (Ishiguro, 2005, p. 16). In this way, it is evident that the clones
associate their art with their identity and worth, and they are only able to obtain their
“possessions” within the regulations of the ISA (Ishiguro, 2005, p. 16). This interpellation
grows deeper as the clones begin to find what they believe are their own plans for the future
and for their identities because in actuality, “what seems to take place outside is inside
ideology” (Althusser, 1971, p. 86); the clones are creating their identities with the sense of
self that the ISA allows them to have in order to maintain their role and connection to the
system, all the while believing they have a sense of agency. Althusser (1971) clarifies that
“what really takes place in ideology seems therefore to take place outside it” (p. 86) and
this is what gives the false agency the clones feel in creating their own identities and ways
of separating themselves from their destinies as clones so much importance in the structure
of the ISA.

One pertinent example of an escape from the ISA in *Never Let Me Go* is the rumor
about deferrals that Kathy, Ruth, and Tommy first hear at the Cottages. For a large portion
of his time at Hailsham, Tommy is bullied and mistreated by the other students for his
angry outbursts, as well as looked down upon as useless by the guardians because none of
his artwork was ever selected for the Gallery. But once the clones hear about the potential
to have “some special arrangement” that will allow them to live more of their lives with a
partner, Tommy begins to place importance on art because it “reveals our souls” and could
be used to “judge” if two clones are “truly in love” (Ishiguro, 2005, p. 176). Initially,
Tommy does not tell anyone except Kathy about his animal artwork. It is important and
special to him, but he also thinks that if they can track down Madame, they can use it as
proof to obtain a “deferral” (Ishiguro, 2005, p.178). Tommy’s animals become something
he uses as an “escape” both in order to prove his love for Kathy in hopes of a “deferral”
later on in the novel, as well as to have pride in his own individual project. Kathy describes
how this art project and its part in their potential outlet for “deferral” creates a relaxing,
intimate routine for them. She explains the routine of her days as Tommy’s carer: “me on
the bed, maybe reading aloud; Tommy at the desk, drawing” (Ishiguro, 2005, p. 242). In
these examples, Tommy is connecting his sense of identity and soul with his animal art,
and thus he is perpetuating his own interpellation into the system by producing these
animals in order to prove his love for Kathy and possibly escape the donations for a few years, all the while still being a donor. Another example of a potential “escape” for the clones is in imagining their “dream futures” and wondering about their models or “possibles” (Ishiguro, 2005). In looking for the “possible,” Ruth as well as the others who go on the journey with her are searching for a sense of self; they are searching for this sense of self outside of the limits of the ISA, in that they physically travelled to get there. But they are also looking for the opportunity to see the potential they might have reached had they the possibility of living out their full lives without being forced to give up their organs. For instance, when two older clones tell Ruth that they have seen Ruth’s “possible” as she was “working in a nice glass-fronted office,” which Kathy notes is “Ruth’s ‘dream future’” (Ishiguro, 2005, p. 142).

On the surface, the connections the clones form with others through romantic and platonic relationships, as well as their own internalizations of their memories of Hailsham, may seem to be pathways to identity and “escape” from the system. However, I maintain that these relationships only provide the façade of a “future” and a unique, individual life outside of the ISA. One pertinent example of this is Kathy’s continued habit of “looking” for Hailsham, even after she has left and is fulfilling her role as a carer. This is not only the case for her, but for the other clones as well, as Kathy’s encounter with another former Hailsham student demonstrates. Kathy runs into Laura, who is now also working as a carer, and they discuss the closing of Hailsham and bond over it. Though at first Kathy feels distance from Laura because she is tired from her work, “it was that exchange, when we finally mentioned the closing of Hailsham, that suddenly brought us close again...affirming Hailsham, the fact that it was still there in both our memories” (Ishiguro, 2005, p. 211). In this instance, it is clear that Kathy and Laura form part of their identities with their years at Hailsham. This is also evident in who Kathy’s donors are, in that she admits she chose “whenever I could, people from Hailsham” (Ishiguro, 2005, p. 5). Even though as a carer, her role with each of the clones she takes care of as donors remains the same; Kathy feels “that deeper link with the donor” if that donor shares the Hailsham memories that she also carries with her (Ishiguro, 2005, p. 4).

Though at Hailsham there appears to be a few arguments and some tension between the friendship triangle of Ruth, Tommy, and Kathy, they all seem to remain close until they leave Hailsham and spend time in the Cottages. Kathy and Ruth ultimately have one discussion in which Ruth tells Kathy, “Tommy doesn’t like girls who’ve been with…well, you know, with this person and that,” after which Kathy decides she wants to leave “the Cottages” and “start my training to become a carer” (Ishiguro, 2005, pp. 201-02). Later in life, when they reconnect, Ruth and Kathy’s relationship continues to be strained by their newfound roles as a donor and carer, respectively. It could be argued that this anger Ruth shows as she begins having her organs removed and given to a human recipient could be a
demonstration of her anger at the system and a form of going against the ISA; however, I maintain that this is actually a demonstration of the depth of Ruth’s interpellation. Recalling Althusser’s (1971) point that “what thus seems to take place outside ideology (to be precise, in the street), in reality takes place in ideology” (p. 86), Ruth can be seen as demonstrating this anger towards Kathy because she is further behind Ruth in terms of “completing” their purpose as clones. Ruth is a representation of the extent of the interpellation of the clones, and even though her outbursts seem to show a break in this, in reality she continues to obey what she is told to do as a donor. For instance, when Ruth, Tommy, and Kathy go to visit the beached boat and discuss mutual friends from the Cottages, Chrissie and Rodney, Ruth lashes out at Kathy for explaining that Rodney was not emotionally destroyed by Chrissie’s “completion” (Ishiguro, 2005, pp. 224-25). Ruth tells Kathy, “How could you possibly know? You’re still a carer” indicating that whatever remains of their friendship is ultimately fractured by this systemic binary (Ishiguro, 2005, p. 226).

Ultimately, Tommy grows to share this same mentality towards Kathy. By the end, their romantic relationship is too strained by the fact that they now know they cannot “escape” through a “deferral” and Tommy continues his donations while Kathy is still a carer. Tommy asks Kathy to stop being his carer because he “[doesn’t] want to be that way in front of [her],” and when she initially refuses, he references the same idea Ruth had previously: “You don’t see it because you’re not a donor” (Ishiguro, 2005, p. 280). After their carer and donor relationship and their romantic relationship end, Tommy passes away, and instead of being angry at the system for taking her lover from her, Kathy continues her work as a carer and puts all of her time and energy into it just as she has done since she began. The end of these two important relationships in Kathy’s life ultimately pushes her further into her interpellation both into her role as a carer, and eventually into her future as a donor in which she can “have a quieter life, in whichever centre they send me to” (Ishiguro, 2005, p. 287) and where she can continue to “escape” by focusing on her good memories from her time with Ruth and Tommy at Hailsham. These futile potential methods of escape, while they may provide solace for the clones and humans, in actuality provide the ultimate distractions to keep the clones within their roles in the ISA by taking advantage of the clones’ desire for the individual opportunities that humans in this dystopian world have access to as a result of the clones’ exploitation. The influence of potential escapes, whether they be our relationships with others or our own plans for the future, is critical to creating a self-sustaining system because these escapes “euphemize” the negative aspects of ISAs by providing what Althusser (1971) would classify as its “subjects” with a purpose and distraction. I posit that the interpellation into perceived individuality through controlled aspects of ISAs causes the subjects to attach their future, their identity, and their relationships to the system and to their roles within it.
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