

The Fate of the ‘Leader’ in *Never Let Me Go*: Becoming Tommy D.’s Girlfriend and a Fluid Mediator

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Summary This study scrutinises the significant concept of the ‘leader’ presented in Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go*. Departing from the external analytical approaches prevalent in the studies of Ishiguro’s works, this study rigorously employs close reading to reveal the novel’s unique and intricate structure and deepens the understanding of its universal theme. It begins by identifying the correspondence between the woman who physically positions herself at the forefront of the love triangle involving Kathy, Tommy, and Ruth, and her role as Tommy’s romantic partner. The study then explores the intersection of this physical ‘leader’ with the metaphorical ‘leader’ role depicted in interpersonal relationships. Furthermore, it focuses on human dynamics in broader contexts, emphasising the fluid nature of leadership. Specifically, an internal ‘leader’ within the group can transition and become a ‘follower’ when interacting with outsiders, and the leader’s role is inherently substantiated by the presence of ‘followers’. Finally, the discussion expands on Ishiguro’s other works and ascertains their broader relevance.

Keywords: leader, love triangle, Kazuo Ishiguro

Introduction:

The Girlfriends of ‘Thunderous’ Tommy D.

In Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go* (2005), the love triangle among the three cloned protagonists — Kathy H., Tommy D., and Ruth — is rendered with intricate subtlety. It shifts between the spheres of friendship and romantic love and appears almost chaotic at first glance. Kathy, who refers to Ruth as her ‘dearest friend’ (60), becomes entangled in this triangle after Ruth initiates a romantic relationship with Tommy. This relationship is intended to keep ‘[Kathy] and Tommy apart’, as Ruth later confesses in retrospect (92, 228). Although Ruth and Tommy separate during their school years, (92–93), prompting rumours that Kathy will become Tommy’s new

girlfriend (98–99), they resume their relationship later. This creates vicious quarrels between Kathy and Ruth (121–23, 197–99). Their rivalry endures for nearly a decade until Ruth surrenders any prospect of reunion when she ‘completes’ — the novel’s euphemism for death following organ donations — and Kathy ultimately forms a romantic relationship with Tommy. The intricacies of their triangular dynamic become clear when examined through the interpretive lens of the ‘leader’.

Research on *Never Let Me Go* has markedly increased, with many publications attempting to apply theoretical paradigms external to the novel, such as aesthetics (Black) and Japaneseness (Hu), or to interrogate concepts such as the welfare state (Robbins) and heterosexuality (Carroll). This novel is acknowledged for its potential to generate progressive dis-

cussions across various contexts. However, such approaches unfortunately preclude closer engagement with the nuances and intricacies of the text. Consequently, the understanding of the novel remains limited. In contrast to the prevailing academic practice of seeking external clues, Katsuki Takaishi enhances comprehension and illuminates the novel's unique construction by identifying clues embedded within the text. He provides an insightful analysis of the love triangle's development by examining the imaginary horseback riding game. This game, devised by Ruth at the age of seven, is played by Kathy. The scholarly debate primarily revolves around the game's themes of 'imagination' or 'fantasy' rather than the 'real world' (Duangfai 184–85; Taketomi xi). Takaishi identifies a distinct connection between the horse's rider and Tommy's girlfriend (26, *n.* 11). Ruth invites Kathy to join the game and introduces several horses, remarking, 'My *best* horse [...] is Thunder' (46). She then warns Kathy, 'I can't let you ride on him. He's much too dangerous' (46). By the end of the day, however, Ruth allows Kathy to ride Thunder: 'Eventually, she let me have a go on Thunder, her favourite' (46–47). Symbolically, Ruth's transfer of her beloved Thunder to Kathy prefigures her eventual relinquishment of Tommy to Kathy. The strength of Takaishi's argument lies in the compelling parallel between Ruth's acts of passing the horse to Kathy and ceding Tommy to Kathy. This is supported by the use of the word 'thunder' to characterise Tommy's temperament: 'Tommy [...] stared at Laura with a face like thunder' (91), 'Tommy burst into thunderous bellowing' (9), and 'Tommy came out of the billiards room with thunderous footsteps' (86). The shared fiery nature of the 'dangerous' Thunder and the 'thunderous' Tommy is not likely to be coincidental. Extending this interpretation, it is noteworthy that Tommy wears a 'polo shirt' (8, 11). This detail associates him with polo, a sport traditionally played on horseback.

Takaishi's close reading highlights the remarkable craftsmanship of the intricate love triangle in *Never Let Me Go*, providing a solid foundation for further

analysis. By refocusing on the imaginary horseback riding game, this paper considers the concept of the 'leader' in both physical and figurative dimensions¹⁾. As demonstrated by an examination referring to Edward Relph's theories on 'insideness' and 'outsideness' and Yi-Fu Tuan's exploration of space and place (Neog and Kashyap) and an analysis centred on confined space (Nie, Kaur and Mani), the novel's spatial representation constitutes a critical concern. While these analyses overlook the presence of spatial descriptions throughout the novel, the present paper shows that front-and-back relationships are expressed across the work in its entirety and examines their implications for the characters' relationships. Section I demonstrates the correspondence between the 'leader' in physical space and Tommy's girlfriend. Section II examines their relationship, focusing on the figurative sense of the 'leader'. Section III extends the discussion beyond the immediate community to consider the 'leader' within broader contexts. This study aims to present the impact of the term 'leader' on the comprehensive progression of the love triangle among the clones. In doing so, it intends to explore the fluid nature of the 'leader' and demonstrate the individual psychological representations enabled by this flexibility.

I. 'Leaders' in Physical Space and Tommy's Girlfriends

Ruth serves as the literal 'leader' during the Hailsham era (Part One) and the Cottages period (Part Two). According to *Oxford English Dictionary*, the term 'leader' originates from the verb 'lead' combined with the agentive suffix '-er'. The primary definition of a 'leader' is 'one who conducts, precedes as a guide, leads a person by the hand or an animal by a cord, etc' ('Leader, *N.* I. 1. a.'). Ruth embodies this definition. For example, in the imaginary horseback riding game, Ruth literally takes the lead: 'Ruth *led* the way through them very purposefully, always a pace or two *in front*' (46; emphasis added). The phrase 'in front' and word

'led' explicitly emphasise her leading position. After transitioning to the Cottages, Ruth continues to position herself ahead of Kathy during their strolls: 'Ruth was standing just in front of me' (144). This spatial relationship persists during their trip to Norfolk: 'Ruth just kept going, and we followed behind her' (159). Inside the car on the way to Norfolk, where Kathy, Ruth, and Tommy share the 'back' seat, Ruth's urge to lead is evident as she 'crouched forwards again, her face stuck between the two front seats' (145). Although there is a brief reversal of this spatial relationship when Ruth pauses to stare at a photo, she swiftly regains her leading position: 'Ruth suddenly stopped a few steps behind me. . . [Ruth] set off again much faster than before' (141-42). Throughout both the Hailsham and Cottages periods, Ruth predominantly positions herself ahead of Kathy in the physical space while maintaining her position as Tommy's girlfriend.

On the other hand, Kathy is typically positioned at the back during both the Hailsham era and the Cottages period. This tendency is apparent not only with respect to Ruth but also with Tommy. When Kathy and Tommy search for the cassette tape together, Tommy repeatedly admits, 'I'm not very good at shopping' (166) and 'I'm no good at shopping' (168). Although Kathy initially takes the lead, they struggle to find their destination. As a result, 'Tommy decided I [Kathy] didn't know any better than he did and announced he would *lead* the way' (169; emphasis added). Even without Ruth, who actively assumes the lead, Kathy consistently remains in the position of the follower, until she becomes Ruth's carer.

Based on this discussion, the hypothesis emerges that Tommy's girlfriend is the 'leader'. During the Hailsham era and the Cottages period, Ruth consistently occupies the front position while Kathy remains behind, with Ruth serving as Tommy's partner throughout. This hypothesis is reinforced by the reversal of this spatial dynamic between Ruth and Kathy during Kathy's carer period (Part Three), which coincides with Tommy's romantic partner changing from Ruth to Kathy.

Kathy's emergence at the forefront is particularly visible during the visit to the stranded boat with Ruth and Tommy. On the walk to their destination, Kathy narrates, 'I *led* the way to where the woods began' (218; emphasis added), and 'I glanced at my sheet and began to *lead* the way again' (219; emphasis added). These statements portray Kathy as a literal 'leader'. The front-back relationship is further underscored when she notes, 'I was suddenly conscious of Ruth and Tommy standing behind me' (218). The phrase 'behind me' recurs three more times on the same page (220), emphasising the persistence of the spatial relationship. Several additional expressions highlight this pattern: 'I [Kathy] paused on the path, waited for Ruth and Tommy to catch up' (219), 'when I glanced over my shoulder, I saw Tommy was again holding Ruth by the arm' (220), and 'Following my example, Tommy and Ruth made their way to another tree trunk, hollow and more emaciated than mine, a short way behind to my left' (220). These descriptions highlight Kathy's role in leading Ruth and Tommy. Throughout the Hailsham era and the Cottages period, Kathy is almost always a follower. However, after reuniting with Ruth and Tommy, she fulfils the role of the 'leader'. Significantly, on the day that Kathy's position at the front is repeatedly emphasised, her romantic relationship with Tommy solidifies, thereby concluding the love triangle. Therefore, the girls' spatial positioning and Tommy's romantic partners are inseparable.

II. Integrating the Physical and Figurative Senses of 'Leader'

In *Never Let Me Go*, beyond the framework of romantic success with Tommy, the physical (visible, external) front-back relationship correlates with the characters' psychological (invisible, internal) dynamics. To appreciate this connection, we return to the imaginary horseback riding scene, in which 'Ruth led the way through them very purposefully, always a pace or two in front' (46). During the game, Ruth's leader-

ship is evident as ‘she let me try’ and ‘[was] shouting all sorts of instructions’ (47). This scene presents Ruth physically leading Kathy and also demonstrates her social role as the ‘leader’. During the Hailsham era, it is explicitly stated that ‘there was no doubt she [Ruth] was the leader’ of their make-believe group, the ‘secret guard’ (49). In addition, Ruth shapes opinions within the girls’ group (15). A subtle yet telling incident at Hailsham further underscores the interplay between physical positioning and characters’ emotions. After hurting Ruth’s feelings, Kathy slows down to allow Ruth to move ahead, attempting to make amends: ‘What I [Kathy] did was to slow right down so that Ruth, coming behind me, could instead pass through the door beside Miss Geraldine’ (61–62). Furthermore, Ruth’s avoidance of being left behind is evident in conversations. During the Norfolk trip, which requires navigational assistance from the two veterans Rodney and Chrissie, Ruth is inevitably in the position of the follower. This is symbolised by Ruth sitting in the back seat, unable to sit alongside Rodney in the driver’s seat, with Chrissie in the front passenger seat. Nevertheless, Ruth attempts to assert herself by leaning forward into the veteran’s space: ‘Ruth, who was in the middle, leaned forward, put her hands on the front seats, and began talking to the two veterans’ (145). Kathy, seated beside Ruth in the back, attempts to engage her in conversation. However, Ruth ignores her and keeps her attention fixed on the veterans in front: ‘I [Kathy] tried to get something going between the three of us, but Ruth wouldn’t pick up on it’ (145). Rather than interacting with Kathy and Tommy in the back of the vehicle, Ruth prioritises joining the conversation happening in front. The concept of the ‘leader’ plays a crucial role in spaces and exerts a profound influence on the characters’ psychological landscapes in *Never Let Me Go*.

The physical ‘front-back’ relationship functions as a metaphor for interpersonal relationships. During the Norfolk trip, Ruth exhibits more than just a desire to keep up; she actively seeks to steer the conversation with the veterans. When the veterans reminisce about

their friend Martin, Ruth pretends to share their memories, despite never having met him. Kathy acknowledges their unfamiliarity with Martin, noting ‘We couldn’t follow much of it’ (147). Here, ‘follow’ is used metaphorically to convey (the lack of) sense of comprehension²⁾. However, as with ‘lead(er)’, ‘follow’ pertains to ‘physical movement’ (‘Follow *V.*’ I.)³⁾. The intellectual struggle to ‘follow’ merges with the physical front-back metaphor in this conversation about Martin. Kathy and Tommy, unable to fully grasp the veterans’ anecdotes, use laughter in an attempt to fit in: ‘Whenever they laughed, I [Kathy] laughed too just to be polite’ (147). Tommy’s awkwardness is pronounced: ‘Tommy seemed to be understanding things even less than me and letting out hesitant little half-laughs that *lagged* some way *behind*’ (147–48; emphasis added). Within the front-back metaphor, his delayed reaction suggests his difficulty in understanding the conversation. In stark contrast, Ruth reacts in a markedly different manner: ‘Ruth, though, was laughing and laughing’ (148). Although she should not be able to ‘follow’ the topic, Ruth nevertheless attempts to assert her position and place herself at the forefront: ‘Ruth gave a big laugh and signalled in our direction, as though to say to Chrissie: “Go on, explain it to them so they can enjoy it too”’ (148). This act of guiding the conversation exemplifies Ruth’s attempt to position herself ahead of Kathy, Tommy, and even the veterans. Ruth’s consistent efforts to avoid falling behind, whether in physical space or social dynamics, are clear throughout her relationship with Tommy. The front-back motif mediates the physical, psychological, and social dimensions of interaction.

Lived experiences cannot be overlooked within this front-back relationship serving as a metaphor for interpersonal dynamics. When Kathy reads *Daniel Deronda* during the Cottages period, Ruth appears to summarise the story for her. Irritated, and recalling Ruth’s past behaviour towards Tommy, Kathy expresses frustration. Ruth retorts, ‘You’ve [Kathy has] still got this idea. Us Hailsham lot, we have to stay together, a tight little bunch, must never make any *new*

friends' (122; emphasis added). She further argues, 'You're upset because I've managed to move on, make *new* friends. Some of the veterans hardly remember your name' (122; emphasis added). Ruth consistently stays one step ahead of Kathy, being the first to — read books, make new friends and establish the romantic relationship with Tommy. Ruth leads the way in many aspects of life. This trait is reflected in Tommy's analytical comment about his long-time girlfriend: 'She [Ruth] likes to pretend she knows much more than she does' (175). Ruth consistently positions herself ahead of Kathy in various spheres of life, reinforcing herself as a proactive and assertive figure.

The turning point at which Kathy begins to step forward physically occurs on the day she makes a crucial decision. After reuniting with her former classmate Laura, Kathy discusses the closure of their alma mater, Hailsham, and recalls an image of a clown holding a bunch of balloons. Kathy envisions the strings of the balloons suddenly snapping, causing them to scatter in all directions. This image that parallels the complete dispersal of her former classmates: 'And it started to dawn on me [Kathy], I suppose, that a lot of things I'd always assumed I'd plenty of time to get round to doing, I might now have to act on pretty soon or else let them go forever' (209). She realises with a sense of urgency that hesitation may result in the irrevocable loss of certain opportunities. When she encounters the clown with the balloons, Kathy is still in her habitual position at the back: 'I was walking behind him [the clown]' (208). However, after this realisation, her increased assertiveness becomes apparent. Only a few weeks after meeting with Laura, Kathy decides to visit Ruth for the first time in seven years. As discussed in the previous section, during the visit, she is repeatedly depicted in the position of the leader. The foundation of Kathy's romantic fulfilment with Tommy has two components: the reversal of the novel's recurring front-back dynamics and the process of her psychological development.

Upon taking the lead within a group, one ironically

realises that in a broader context, one remains a mere follower. When Kathy finally manages to take the lead, she finds herself once again facing the backs of others. Before Kathy and Tommy speak to Madame, they 'set off after Madame' (242). Kathy recalls, 'I was all the time afraid she'd turn and look at us, but she didn't', as though 'deliberately ignoring us' (242). This situation underscores the fact that Kathy and Tommy are positioned behind Madame, once again cast in the role of followers. A similar thing occurs in Part Two when Ruth, Tommy and Kathy, along with the two veterans, set out in search of Ruth's 'possible'. Although Ruth proceeds within the group, she follows a human woman (159–160). These episodes prompt greater consideration. The cloned protagonists copied from human beings never 'lead' humans in the novel; rather, they are destined to follow, thereby exposing a deeply ingrained hierarchical power structure based on the assumption that '[clones are] less than human' (258). The next section investigates the role of the 'leader' in broader contexts.

III. 'Leaders' as Fluid Mediators in Broader Worlds

Exploring the concept of the 'leader' requires consideration of how it is perceived in society at large. Hailsham places a strong emphasis on health, as evidenced by the school's students undergoing 'some form of medical almost every week' (13). Within this value system, when 'leaders' are associated with any behaviours that are detrimental to health, the lesson is immediately redirected with corrective instruction: 'if we were being shown a picture of a famous writer or world *leader*, and they happened to have a cigarette in their hand, then the whole lesson would grind to a halt' (67; emphasis added). It is important to note that 'leaders' can exert unexpected influences across different eras, even over individuals unknown to them. Accordingly, the concept of the 'leader' assumes a public dimension.

The public dimension of the 'leader' is distinct from

its metaphorical expressions that are visible to the public. Within the narrative, the 'leader' is compared to an actor, whereas the 'follower' is associated with the audience. When Ruth occupies the 'leader' role, Kathy describes their respective positions: 'My role, as her closest friend, was to give her silent support, as if I was in the front row of the audience when she was performing on stage' (128). Conversely, when Kathy assumes the 'leader' role in Part Three, she perceives Ruth as an observer: 'I [Kathy] got the impression Ruth had on a serious, almost frozen look, like Tommy and I were people in a play she was watching' (216). These two scenes carry symbolic significance, presenting a shift in 'leader' status and a role reversal between performers and spectators. Hence, in *Never Let Me Go*, the term 'leader' means more than merely occupying the dominant physical and/or social positions within a group; the 'leader' also functions as the representative, expected and monitored by internal group members. This metaphor observed in the small community of the love triangle among clones is applicable to broader human society. This broader dimension surfaces explicitly in Part Three, when Miss Emily reflects on her past role in the donations programme as being 'at the height of our influence' (256). She states, 'We were *the first*, along with Glenmorgan House' (256; emphasis added). This statement underscores Miss Emily's pivotal role in spearheading the initiative and highlights her conviction that her group demonstrates the significant impact of her leadership on human society.

Although 'leaders' bear responsibilities that extend beyond their immediate groups, their positions are fundamentally contingent on the presence of 'followers'. Miss Emily reflects on the collapse of their initiative, noting: 'No one wanted to be seen supporting us any more, and our little movement, Hailsham, Glenmorgan, the Saunders Trust, we were all of us swept away' (258). Drawing on 'modern psychological accounts', Shameem Black problematises 'narrow self-interest rather than altruistic obligation' (Black 794). However, advancing these arguments

requires a comprehensive analysis of the front-back metaphors deployed throughout *Never Let Me Go*. Miss Emily attributes the failure of their initiative to researcher James Morningdale, who, she remarks, '[had] taken his research much further than anyone before him, far beyond legal boundaries' (258). The leader therefore loses the capacity to attract and retain followers. In this regard, Ruth's decline illustrates that the existence of the 'leader' relies on the follower(s). Laura remarks to Kathy regarding Ruth's downfall, 'After you left, she got worse' (206). This suggests that Ruth's authoritative status as a 'leader' is sustained only as long as Kathy follows her. Once Kathy's support is withdrawn, Ruth's influence diminishes, increasing her isolation. Furthermore, Kathy's distrust of the autocratic Miss Emily is exemplified when she narrates, 'She [Miss Emily] drifted off on tangents none of us could *follow*' (257; emphasis added). Leadership does not arise from absolute, innate talent; rather, the text suggests that the authority of the 'leader' is predicated upon a relationship with the 'follower'.

Miss Emily's leadership failure is portrayed as a consequence of her arrogant blindness to its inherently volatile foundation. Although she may have temporarily captured the public's attention, Miss Emily disregards dissenting voices at the school, especially from Miss Lucy. Miss Emily trivialises her as 'an internal matter', 'a little trouble', and 'just a peripheral figure' (262). Making statements of this nature is highly imprudent for the 'leader' of Hailsham. Furthermore, her self-centredness surfaces even in her interactions with alumni Kathy and Tommy: 'You've turned out well. I'm sure you have much you could tell me to make me proud' (251). In addition, her unsuitability as a 'leader' is highlighted when she prioritises moving her cabinets above engaging with Kathy and Tommy. After the meeting with Miss Emily, Tommy declares his support for Miss Lucy: 'I think Miss Lucy was right. Not Miss Emily' (268). Miss Emily being pushed in a wheelchair (250) and requiring crutches (264) symbolises her waning leadership. The novel

portrays Miss Emily as someone preoccupied with self-assessment, and unable to bridge the gap between the public and private dimensions. In contrast to Kathy, who gains the role of the 'leader' through psychological growth, the novel portrays Miss Emily as a pitiful figure who, intoxicated by the influence of her status, succumbs to arrogance, declines, and remains unreflective.

Expanding on the above discussion, it is fruitful to extend the analysis beyond *Never Let Me Go* (2005) in relation to Ishiguro's other works. For example, the war scene in *When We Were Orphans* (2000), in which those at the forefront contact the hostile forces, provides a valuable point of comparison. This novel was completed during a hiatus from writing *Never Let Me Go* (Ishiguro *Conversation* 210–11), and both works seem to share thematic concerns. In *When We Were Orphans*, a Japanese soldier is accused of 'cowardice and betrayal' due to being 'near the Kuomintang lines' (277). The position of 'Kuomintang' is confirmed within a conversation between the protagonist Christopher Banks and the Japanese soldier, whom Banks believes to be his friend, Akira:

Akira went on listening, then shook his head.

'Kuomintang. Christopher, we now very close to . . . to . . .'

'The front?'

'Yes, front. We now very close to the front. Christopher, this very dangerous.'

(*When We Were Orphans* 258)

Being on the front line entails a constant risk of direct and dangerous contact with the enemy. Those positioned at the forefront, whether in strategic or physical conflict, are more likely to confront those who are aggressive towards them as the 'leader' is determined by relative positioning. Whether intentionally acquired or accidentally obtained, 'leaders' must be aware of their influence and responsibility. Accordingly, the issues of 'leaders' depicted in *Never Let Me Go*, set in 'England, late 1990s' (epigraph), resonate in *When*

We Were Orphans, set in 'Shanghai, 20th October 1937' (*Orphans* 201). In addition, in *The Remains of the Day* (1989), a novel set in England in July 1956 and narrated retrospectively, Mr Stevens reflects 'It has been my [Mr Stevens's] good fortune, after all, to have consorted not just with Mr Churchill, but with many other great *leaders* and men of *influence* — from America and from Europe' (198; emphasis added). This remark may be read as an embryonic articulation of Ishiguro's evolving conception of the 'leader', a notion that fully crystallises in *Never Let Me Go*.

Conclusion: Universality in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*

This study describes the intricate structure of Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* with a particular focus on the concept of the 'leader'. By adopting a perspective on the imaginary horseback riding game that differs from those of previous studies, this analysis highlights the multiplicity of meanings embedded in its details. Consequently, this study delineates this work more comprehensively than previous studies focusing on space and also suggests the possibility of connections between *Never Let Me Go* and Ishiguro's other works. In Sections I and II, the 'leader' encompasses complex spatial relationships both physically and figuratively. Section III demonstrates the novel's innovative use of this schema as a metaphor for broader societal power dynamics. Detailed descriptions significantly enhance the narrative, clearly highlighting the sophistication of *Never Let Me Go*. Furthermore, by rigorously adopting intrinsic criticism, this analysis contributes to the scholarly understanding of the aspects of human society portrayed by Ishiguro that have been overlooked in previous studies. A 'leader' can manifest in any group of two or more individuals, whether in a school classroom, among trainees, within work environments, or in broader contexts. Ishiguro's novels, set in various times and places, repeatedly return to this theme and underscore its universality.

The ahistorical and transcendent nature of the novel

is Ishiguro's essential discovery as a writer. In interviews conducted in July 2015, he noted that his works could be situated at any place or time:

I [Ishiguro] also made this discovery that stories are quite — for me, anyway, stories, you can change the setting. The setting isn't actually an essential part of the story. And after I made this discovery, I got into this problem about location hunting. It was not a problem. In a way, it's a great freedom. But latterly, in my career, this is a thing that vexes me the most. I hesitate and spend a lot of time because I know you can move stories to different settings, different places in the world, and different places in history, in time, and also, I suppose, into different genres. You could say, yes, that you can put it into a science fiction world, or into a gothic world, or into a thriller world. (Kazuo Ishiguro: *My Secret of Writing* 19: 46–20: 36)

This statement refers to Ishiguro's transition from the two novels set in Japan in 1982 and 1986 to *The Remains of the Day* set in England. The universality of his evolving portrayal of the 'leader' is evident in its application to World War I figures in *When We Were Orphans*, prominent interwar figures in *Remains of the Day*, and the communities of clones and broader human society of the 'late 1990s' in *Never Let Me Go*. This illustrates the coherence and development of Ishiguro's fictional world.

The front-and-back relationships established by the concept of the 'leader' also suggest an interpretation of the novel's title. This title (*Never Let Me Go*) begs, 'Do not sever me from the group', underscoring the importance of interdependent relationships. In particular, the word 'Go' signifies death and expresses a sense of loss, evidenced by its use to denote Ruth's passing (75) and when referring to the lost cassette tape (73, 74, 75). However, in Kathy's view, one who truly 'goes' is left behind. She perceives isolation as similar to death and acutely painful. This may explain Kathy's

subdued fear of death. Drawing on Hannah Arendt's concept of 'the Banality of Evil', Gabriele Griffin problematises the acceptance of death (657–58). However, Ishiguro suggests, 'They've been given this fate and they accept it. There is a cruelty about it, but they don't see it to the same extent' (Ishiguro *Conversation* 215). There is significance in accepting death. For Kathy, death is an act of 'following' Ruth and Tommy, reuniting with them and even with other classmates who have already 'gone'. Even though someone who is thirty-one years old and at the prime of their career can be considered fully mature, the achievements of those of the same age, even in distant places, can offer emotional support as well as motivation. The inclination to 'follow' them, whether in their successes or in 'completing' their course, is quite realistic. In accepting their mortality, the clones in *Never Let Me Go* should not be seen merely as passive victims. Rather, it is important to recognise the profound implications of their acceptance of death. Ishiguro notes, 'This is everybody's story' (*Conversation* 216), framing the narrative in a universal context.

Notes

This paper is partly based on a presentation delivered at a meeting of the Kansai branch of the English Literary Society of Japan on 17 December 2023. Since then, it has been substantially expanded and revised. A significant portion of the initial draft, focusing on pronouns and 'laugh', will be published elsewhere.

- 1) The study of the 'leader' in Ishiguro's novels is limited. Although Alexander Henry refers to Stevens's leadership as 'the head of staff' in *Remains of the Day*, his analysis of this aspect is fragmented.
- 2) 'To keep up intellectually with (an argument, narrative, train of thought, etc.) so as to grasp its sequence and meaning; to keep up with and understand (a person) as he or she speaks, reasons, recounts, etc.' ('Follow, V.' II. 12. a. i.)
- 3) 'To go or come after (a person or thing in motion); to move behind (a person or thing) in the same direction' ('Follow, V.' I. 3. a. i.)

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『わたしを離さないで』における「先導者」の行く末 —— トミーの恋人と流動的な仲介者 ——

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要旨 本稿では、カズオ・イシグロの小説『わたしを離さないで』における「先導者」(‘leader’)に光を当てる。盛んに行なわれるイシグロ研究の多くは作品外部の世界に比重を置いているが、本論はむしろ作品内部の表現を手がかりに分析を進めていき、作品独自の高い構築性を提示する。まず初めに、キャシー、トミー、ルースの三角関係において物理的に「前」で「先導する」女性が、トミーの恋人と一致していることを示す。そして、この物理的な‘leader’が、人物関係を表す際に使用される比喩的な「リーダー」とも密接に関連していることを検証する。そのうえで、広い文脈における人間関係にも着眼し、仲間内の「先導者」が外部との接触時に「追従者」(‘follower’)に転じる可能性や、「追従者」の存在によって「先導者」という役割が成立していることに言及する。最後に、他のイシグロ作品も視野に入れ、より広い世界にも通じることを確認する。

キーワード: 先導者, 三角関係, カズオ・イシグロ