

Unimaginable Largeness: Kazuo Ishiguro, Translation, and the New World Literature

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In recent debates about the new world literature—now understood as literature that circulates outside the geographic region in which it was produced—it is often assumed that texts are being translated into English and that the process of translation leads to cultural as well as political homogenization.¹ Translation leads to *cultural homogenization*, the argument goes, because readers will learn fewer languages, and because texts written for translation will tend to avoid vernacular references and linguistic complexity. (Owen 31; Spivak 18-19; Apter “On Translation” 12). It leads to *political homogenization* because the world market requires stories that everyone can share, which means fewer distinctions among political histories and social agents (Brennan 59-61). The concern is this: translation is bad for what it does to books (presents them apart from their original language and context); but it is worse for what it does to authors (encourages them to ignore that language and context). In truth, as Emily Apter, Pascale Casanova, David Damrosch, and Martin Puchner have shown, the effects of translation will depend on what is being translated and on what happens when translated books are read. Moreover, the meaning of these effects will depend on how we evaluate sameness and difference: do we assume, for example, that homogenization is always a negative outcome? There are many variables in the new world literature, and they press us to consider not only the global production and circulation of texts but also our ways of thinking about cultural and political uniqueness.

In today’s critical parlance, the “new world literature” refers to a shift both in the study and in the production of books. As a matter of study, scholars such as Damrosch and Moretti have called for a new emphasis on the “phenomenology”

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¹ See, for example, Owen, Spivak, Casanova, Damrosch, Puchner, Apter, Arac, and Brennan. Hofmeyr’s study of the transnational circulation of Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* is a strong exception to the usual discussion of translation into English.

rather than the “ontology” of the work of art, where phenomenology means investigating the form of a book’s appearance, its circulation and translation, as opposed to ontology’s interest in the nature or essence of the text (Damrosch 6; Moretti 67). The emphasis on circulation seeks to replace two older definitions: the one that designated literary *masterpieces*, those books everyone in the world should read; and the one that designated literary *underdogs*, those books produced outside of Western Europe and the United States. Whereas world literature once designated “works,” Damrosch argues, it now designates “a network” (3), and that network is the cause rather than an effect of the field.² It is because of the network, the several literary systems that share a single text, that the work can be categorized as world literature.³

Privileging networks means analyzing how a work participates not only in its “original” literary system, the system of the language in which it was composed, but also in the other literary systems in which it has a presence. Whether one emphasizes broad trends (as Moretti does) or individual case studies (as Damrosch does), the new world literature demands comparative scholarship (the analysis of several literary systems) that focuses not simply on different works from different national traditions but on different editions and translations of a single work—if it is ever “single.”⁴ Because a text’s network will continue to grow and multiply, as that text is circulated and read in numerous regions and languages, its geography and culture will be dynamic and unpredictable. It is no longer simply a matter of determining, once and for all, the literary culture to which a work belongs. “Works of world literature,” Damrosch writes, “interact in a charged field defined by a fluid and multiple set of possibilities of juxtaposition and combination” (300). In other words, because works can continue to become part of different national traditions, there will always be more comparing to do.

In this essay, I share Moretti’s and Damrosch’s interest in the circulation of texts, but I examine in addition the ways that ontology recapitulates phenomenology: I am interested in how the global translation and circulation of literature has changed the production and theory of transnational fiction.⁵ Moretti and Damrosch conceive of world literature as those texts that move from one place

² Moretti calls world literature “a problem” rather than “an object” (55).

³ Building on Goethe’s theory of *Weltliteratur*, Puchner writes in a similar vein: “world literature is not written but made—made by a marketplace” (49).

⁴ McGill’s work on “the culture of reprinting” in nineteenth-century Anglo-American literary culture reminds us that works, even when they exist only in one language, rarely circulate in a single version.

⁵ My approach here has been greatly enriched by the analysis of how circulation “begins to encroach on production” in Puchner’s discussion of the *Communist Manifesto* and Price’s discussion of George Eliot’s response to the anthologization of her novels (Puchner 51; Price, *Anthology* 106). Puchner suggests that Marx produced his text with the “world of exchange and translation” in mind: for this reason, Puchner argues persuasively, the *Manifesto*’s original language (German) was no more significant to Marx than all of the other languages in which he hoped it would circulate (51). Price argues that Eliot’s late works were “written with the expectation of being excerpted” (106).

out to many places: “literary works that circulate beyond their culture of origin” (Damrosch 4). According to Damrosch, “virtually all literary works are born within what we would now call a national literature” (283). But what of those contemporary texts, written by migrants and for an international audience, that exist from the beginning in several places? How does reflecting on unoriginality, as some contemporary writers now do, influence the ideas of community that authors—and readers—are able to imagine?

This essay takes up these concerns by turning to the work of Kazuo Ishiguro, whose novels have been translated from English into twenty-eight languages to date, and who has written throughout his career about problems of authenticity, comparison, and adequation. Ishiguro’s novels offer compelling examples of the new world literature and of what I call “comparison literature,” an emerging genre of world fiction for which global comparison is a formal as well as a thematic preoccupation. My discussion of Ishiguro’s work brings together his early novel, *The Remains of the Day* (1989), which has been analyzed widely as a book about interwar England and the postwar decline of imperial confidence, with his 2005 novel about cloning, *Never Let Me Go* (Robbins 26-30; Walkowitz 109-30; Lang; Su; Wong). *The Remains of the Day* becomes more legible as a book about uniqueness and world reading when seen in the light of Ishiguro’s comments about translation and his recent analysis of reproducibility. In both books, we find an ongoing critique of uniqueness and a persistent weighing of global paradigms such as the network, the tradition, and the scale.

It is from *The Remains of the Day* that I take my title, “Unimaginable Largeness,” which refers to the notion that any small action, including the polishing of household silver, needs to assume the same ethical and political significance as the more expansive system of actions in which it should be seen to participate (77). For Ishiguro’s narrator, who invokes “unimaginable largeness” as a dramatic intensifier, “largeness” refers both to geographic extension (beyond the local) and to social consequence (beyond the individual). Most readers of the novel hear in this phrase only Ishiguro’s ironic commentary about the emotional failings of his ambitious butler. But the novel takes seriously the idea that international, collective events can be transformed by local, individual actions. By encouraging readers to notice both proximate and distant networks, Ishiguro measures different scales of literary culture and mediates between interpretive strategies that abjure political and geographic distinctions and those that try to preserve them. In the study of world literature, thinking about unimaginable largeness has its uses. It allows us to consider how the way we understand the uniqueness of books relates to the way we understand the uniqueness of communities, and how our models of literary culture shape what we need to know about the nature and scale of social lives.

In turn, we might allow new ways of thinking about the nature and scale of social lives to change fundamentally our models of literary culture. Since the disciplinary protocols of English literary studies are rooted “in a particular national *ethos* and *ethnos*,” Simon Gikandi has suggested, scholars are likely to analyze even transnational Anglophone texts according to national principles and objectives (632-33). Gikandi asks: “What are we going to do with these older

categories—nation, culture, and English—which function as the absent structure that shapes and yet haunts global culture and the idea of literature itself?” (633). I will not suggest here that Ishiguro’s global work eludes this kind of “absent structure”; on the contrary, I will propose that it invokes absent structures over and over again. Yet, by imagining a largeness constituted by books rather than by texts, by copies rather than by originals, Ishiguro forces categories such as “nation, culture, and English” to operate comparatively. He challenges us to see that a new conception of “global culture,” if it is to be something other than an enlargement of national culture, will require a new “idea of literature itself.”

The Geography of the Book⁶

Kazuo Ishiguro’s novels function as world literature in two principal ways. As objects, they are written, printed, translated, circulated, and read in several places. As narratives, they organize local anecdotes into global networks and then consider the ethical consequences of that process. Ishiguro’s novels offer an opportunity to consider the relationship between the ontology and the phenomenology of world literature because, apart from being translated, they are *written for translation*. Ishiguro composes his novels with the knowledge that they will be published in several languages almost simultaneously.⁷ Since winning the Booker Prize in 1989, he has been an avid participant in international book tours, which he says have made him more self-conscious about the cultural and linguistic diversity of his readers (Adams, Moore). Thinking about how and where his books will be read, Ishiguro claims, has led him to focus on “shape, structure, and vision,” or what he calls “architecture,” rather than on “sentences” and “phrases” (British Council).⁸ In many ways Ishiguro has been writing for translation all along. Born in Japan and raised in England from the age of five by immigrant Japanese parents, he has described his effort, throughout his career, to create English novels that appear to be adapted from another tongue (Adams).

⁶ Price writes of “the geography of the book” in a 2002 survey of current trends in book history. For examples of new work on “the geography of the book,” see Moretti, Damrosch, Puchner, Joshi, and McGill.

⁷ Ishiguro has spoken of this (Adams, Moore), but the publishing history of his novels is also telling. Within six months of its first printing, *Never Let Me Go* was published in UK (March 3), Canadian (March 8), Dutch (March 15), U.S. (April 11), Spanish (June 30), German (August 31), Finnish (September 1), and Swedish (September 1) editions. By the end of the calendar year, editions in Portuguese (October 15) and Polish (October 25) had appeared; French and Japanese editions followed in March and April 2006. Further discussion of the translation history of Ishiguro’s novels will be part of a book project, in which I will consider more broadly the multilingualism of contemporary international fiction, a comparative history of translations from English into other languages, and the ways that Ishiguro and other writers have responded to new conditions of production, circulation, and collaboration.

⁸ Ishiguro acknowledges that his emphasis on “drama” rather than “poetry” (these are his distinctions) in his novels has made him more translatable than such writers as John Banville, Salman Rushdie, and Martin Amis (British Council). However, he also suggests that his reception as an international novelist has led him to use simpler diction in his novels, so that his words would better “survive translation” (Adams).

Let us for a moment think of Ishiguro alongside J. M. Coetzee, and even J. K. Rowling: all three writers know that the books they are producing will circulate beyond a single nation and in near-immediate translation into many languages.⁹ Ishiguro and Coetzee have acknowledged the long history of “collaboration” in which their novels take part and from which they have benefited; and they seem to accept and to appreciate that their novels will exist in several languages and become part of several literary traditions. In a recent essay about translation (“Roads”), Coetzee tells of helping his Chinese translator with a reference to “the Summer Palace” (144), which appears in his early novel *Waiting for the Barbarians* (UK edition, 1980; Chinese editions, 2002, 2004). The translator had asked whether the phrase alludes to “the Old Summer Palace in Beijing.” Coetzee suggests that this question may be understood in two ways: as a question about intention (did he intend that allusion?) or as a question about effect (do the words generate that allusion?). Ultimately, he reflects, “[a]s for whether the words in question do refer to the palace in Beijing, as an author I am powerless to say. The words are written; I cannot control the associations they awaken.”

Now, one may assume that Coetzee is simply invoking the “death of the author,” acknowledging, *pace* Barthes, that the meanings of his words will proliferate willy-nilly in the minds of readers. But Coetzee is proposing something more specific and, indeed, more limited: the readers he is thinking about are translators and those who read translated works; and the future “associations” he imagines for those works are not only, or not entirely arbitrary. Translators, he explains, have the power to “nudge” readers (his word) towards one allusion or another, and phrases will have more resonance in some cultures than in others. This attitude about translation, with its patent equanimity about variation and collaboration, is quite different from worries about a single “world literature” or about source languages infiltrating or overwhelming target languages. Like Damrosch, Coetzee emphasizes a network of traditions. Elsewhere in his essay, Coetzee describes the advice he gave his French translator, who had asked for his help in choosing among several equivalents for the English word “darkness.” To find the word that best conveys the meaning of his original text (his memoir *Youth*), Coetzee reports, he sent the translator to French versions of D. H.

⁹ Coetzee discusses his correspondence with the French, German, Swedish, Serbian, and Korean translators of his work in a recent essay (“Roads to Translation”). Although J. K. Rowling’s overall sales are far greater than Coetzee’s and Ishiguro’s, her books appear in non-English editions less quickly because she releases them to translators only when she releases them to consumers (Italie). In its first month on the market, between late August and early October 2005, Coetzee’s *Slow Man* was published in seven different languages—Dutch, German, Spanish, Catalan, Greek, Swedish, and English—and in at least eight different editions. My thanks to J. M. Coetzee and his agents for providing this information. In contrast, Rowling’s sixth “Harry Potter” novel, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, was published worldwide in English on July 16, 2005, but there is a gap of more than two months before the translations begin to appear. When they do appear, however, there are many, including Vietnamese (September 24), German (October 1), French (October 1), Ukrainian (October 6), Danish (October 15), simplified Chinese (October 15), Portuguese (October 15), Swedish (November 9), Afrikaans (November 15), Greek (November 15), Dutch (November 19), Norwegian (November 19), Portuguese-Brazil (November 26), Estonian (November 26), and Hebrew (December 22). Source: publishers and booksellers.

Lawrence. Since he meant his use of “darkness” to evoke the tone of Lawrence’s fiction, he explains, the French translation of his novel should above all sound like the French translation of Lawrence’s novels. Recommending analogy, Coetzee follows Walter Benjamin, who argues that translations “must lovingly and in detail incorporate the original’s mode of signification” (78). Coetzee’s anecdote helps to show that Benjamin’s strategy can have the effect of both localizing and globalizing a text: localizing, because Coetzee’s Lawrentian tone is preserved; globalizing, because Coetzee’s Lawrentian tone is preserved—but only by conforming to a tradition of Francophone translations. We could say that past translations have established the conditions for the future of Coetzee’s original.

This paradox is suggested by Apter’s *The Translation Zone* (2005), whose preface appears as a list of “Twenty Theses on Translation.” The list begins with the statement, “Nothing is translatable”; it ends 19 theses later with the statement, “Everything is translatable” (xi-xii). Coetzee’s anecdote suggests how, in the history of a single novel, both of these statements can be true at the same time. Coetzee proposes that his text in translation relies on not one but two kinds of collaboration: the collaboration between himself, his French translator, and previous French translators of Anglophone fiction; and the collaboration between himself and previous Anglophone writers such as D. H. Lawrence. The collaboration between writers and translators can be seen as an extension of, rather than a deviation from, the normal production of literature. World literature may require a special kind of collaboration, both for study (so that scholars can see how a text circulates in many languages) and for production (so that writers can produce books in many languages), but all scholarship involves some kind of collaboration, since, as Damrosch reminds us, “texts come to us mediated by existing frameworks of reception and interpretation” (295). And all literature, too, involves some kind of collaboration, in more visible (editing, publishing, printing, distributing) and less visible (building on previous representations, uses of language) ways. This is not to detract from the strenuous, often global collaborations that world literature may require, but rather to note that translation makes literature’s status as a collaborative, often global enterprise more difficult to miss.

Ishiguro has made a similar point about translation’s networks: in an interview with Polish journalists at the end of 2005, he acknowledges the influence on his work not only of Dostoevsky, Chekhov, and Tolstoy but also of *the translator* of Dostoevsky, Chekhov, and Tolstoy. He claims,

I often think I’ve been greatly influenced by the translator, David Magarshack, who was the favourite translator of Russian writers in the 1970s. And often when people ask me who my big influences are, I feel I should say David Magarshack, because I think the rhythm of my own prose is very much like those Russian translations that I read. (British Council)

Ishiguro values not just any Dostoevsky, but Magarshack’s Dostoevsky, and one begins to suspect that he rather likes the idea that his own novels are imitating translations.

We generally assume that some works of art have multiple iterations (plays, films, books) while others are unique objects (a painting or a sculpture). But, as Ishiguro's comments suggest, a book can be a unique object, too, both because translations create several versions of a text and because personal history distinguishes the social itinerary of one version from another. Recall that Marcel, in the last volume of Proust's novel, tells us that he values above all "the first edition of a work," by which he means not one of many copies from the publisher's first imprint but the single version of the book in which he read the text for the first time (6: 287). In making this distinction, Marcel emphasizes what he calls the history of his own life rather than "the past in general." The book Marcel read in his youth is a unique object, of which there are not even copies in the same language. And yet, his experience is in some ways universal, since every other reader of that work will also have his or her own first edition. Today, each person can have his or her own first edition of a work, but it may not be the edition first printed by the publisher, or one whose language corresponds to that in which the work was originally composed. Indeed, it may be more correct to say that a work of world literature exists in many original languages, especially if we don't want to say that it exists originally in none.¹⁰

The distinction between "tokens" and "types" that Peter McDonald uses in his discussion of literary editions can be useful here. In McDonald's account, tokens refer to instances of a work (my own copy of a book) while types refer to the intellectual content of the work. Building on Noël Carroll's theory of artworks in mass culture, McDonald compares book editions to two other kinds of "multiple instance or type artworks": film and theater (qtd. in McDonald 223). Carroll groups books with films, because their circulation relies on a "template" (the print), but McDonald groups books with plays, because their circulation depends on much more than a template (on the decisions of directors and actors, in the case of plays; on the decisions of editors, cover designers, and typesetters, in the case of books). McDonald regards book editions as "separate artworks," because they are produced by "a creative process, involving interpretive decisions that effect and constrain meaning" (224). Editions in translation, while they surely depend on a printer's template and on the creative acts of designers and typesetters, further complicate the type-token dynamic: translations are tokens of a single type (the work), however mediated by the printer's template, and also tokens of different types (the work in different languages). If we allow that the creative process includes the "social, political, critical, and institutional histories" of a book's publication, as McDonald claims, as well as the personal histories of readers like Marcel, as Proust, Barthes, and Ishiguro claim, then the distinction between "multiple instance or type artworks" and "singular artworks" (the example McDonald gives from Carroll is "a site-specific sculpture") begins to seem

¹⁰ See Puchner's discussion of the translations of the *Communist Manifesto*, in which he suggests that Marx and Engels's work should be understood to have an autonomous existence in several languages (51-52).

less apparent (223). Legally, of course, translations are one more instance of the type; but practically they can operate as originals and copies at the same time.¹¹

Ishiguro and Coetzee have made the literary conditions of uniqueness and comparison a principal concern of the novels they are now writing; but let us return for a moment to the case of J. K. Rowling. Her “Harry Potter” novels, which have prompted a range of consumer practices, now appear in more than sixty-five languages (including such so-called dead languages as Latin and Ancient Greek). In this respect, they contribute to linguistic diversity, even if this was not their author’s chief intention. Of course, the value and consequence of linguistic diversity should not be taken for granted. Variation is not in itself democratic or liberal if the demand for authenticity and distinctiveness does not facilitate but rather impinges upon freedom (Appiah 104-05). Homogenization, the process of creating sameness or similarity, fits the logic of uniqueness as well as the logic of comparison.

Ishiguro well understands this forked potential. Whereas his interviews show him thinking about the production and circulation of world literature, his novels display a more indirect approach: they present global comparison as *story* and *discourse*, as something that characters do to assess the value and consequence of their actions, and as something that readers do—or need to do—to reflect on those assessments and to consider the various ways that value and consequence can be determined. I have written elsewhere about the trope of the echo in Ishiguro’s work: the way that later scenes or phrases will sound like, or almost repeat, earlier scenes or phrases, and the way these repetitions will in retrospect seem to have preceded or motivated what appeared to be the originals (127-30). Ishiguro uses comparative devices like the echo to introduce complex patterns of world circulation. His comparisons link together a variety of international themes, but they also prompt us to examine the shape and scale of that variety.

For this reason above all, I associate Ishiguro’s work with a genre of world fiction that I am calling “comparison literature.” With this term, I mean to consider the relationship between the writing of world literature and the reading protocols we bring to those texts. And I mean to draw our attention to the traditional distinction between the disciplines of national literature, which typically refer to what books are, who wrote them, or where they were produced, and the discipline of comparative literature, which typically refers to what we do with books. “Comparison literature” implies both of these projects, asking us to understand comparison as the work of scholars, to be sure, but also as the work of books that calculate, as Ishiguro’s do, the transnational contexts of their own production, circulation, and study. I propose here that some contemporary novels trump an ignoble “translatability” not by resisting translation but by demanding it.¹² They ask to be read across several national and political scenes.

¹¹ Legally, this has not always been so, but today international copyright law regards translations as “derivative works” rather than works based on new or collaborative authorship (Venuti 55).

¹² See Apter’s discussion of “translatability” as the condition of objects that can be too readily consumed across “linguistic, cultural, and social contexts” (“On Translation” 1).

The Copy, the Clone

Never Let Me Go, published in 2005 in Spanish, Danish, Polish, English, German, and several other languages, is a book about the value of unoriginal expression. The novel, set in some kind of alternative England of the last decade, offers us a collection of bad copies and eccentric interpretations: there is a cassette tape that plays a monotonous pop song called “Never Let Me Go” whose lyrics the narrator adapts to her own story (70, 271-72); there is a mediocre television program whose sitcom relationships the adolescent characters take as role models for adult behavior (121); there is a magazine insert whose glossy image and cheerful rhetoric (“Are you the dynamic, go-ahead type?”) the narrator’s friend appropriates for her ideal future (144); there are the drawings of metallic animals, which are said to look “laboured, almost like they’d been copied” (241); and there is of course the narrator and her friends, all of whom are human clones brought up to be organ donors for—what shall we call them?—non-cloned, original humans.¹³ The narrator, Kathy H., recounts her experiences as a child and adolescent in a special school she attended before she understood the role she would play in society; and she tells of her experience as “a carer,” one who takes care of other clones (including her former schoolmates, Tommy and Ruth) as their vital organs are harvested and before they die, usually in their late 20s or early 30s. Three non-clone adults feature in the story: Miss Emily, the school’s headmistress; Madame, a visitor to the school who carries away the best examples of the children’s art; and Miss Lucy, who tells the clones, called “students,” that they should know more than they do about the future that is planned for them, though she does not ultimately provide that information. The novel is disturbing because of its premise, and all the more so because our knowledge of Kathy’s role, her existence as a future organ donor and an unwitting accomplice to the organ donation system (as a carer, she tells us, she’s good at keeping other clones “calm”), is obscured by the aleatory style and vague diction of her narration (3). That narration, which encompasses the entire novel, seems to be a carrier of the unoriginal expression that Ishiguro wants us to value. In Kathy’s speech, there is a kind of doubling between the novel’s story and the novel’s discourse. And insofar as one critic, no less than Frank Kermode, has faulted the novel’s discourse for its “familiar, chatty style” (21), Kathy H.’s unoriginality seems to be Ishiguro’s too.

It is arguable that Ishiguro has written *Never Let Me Go* as a critique of anthropocentrism, the idea that it is ethical or acceptable to sacrifice non-human animals to the needs and desires of human life. At many points in the text, we are asked to notice that an unquestioned hierarchy, in which humans are distinguished from animals, makes the donation system possible. Tommy’s drawings are telling about how that distinction is preserved. They suggest that strategies of

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Page numbers refer to the U.S. edition.

abstraction allow us to see some bodies as mechanisms and others as individuals. Looking closely at Tommy's pictures, Kathy is unable to see "animals" at all:

The first impression was like one you'd get if you took the back off a radio set: tiny canals, weaving tendons, miniature screws and wheels were all drawn with obsessive precision, and only when you held the page away could you see it was some kind of armadillo, say, or a bird. (187)

The donation system functions because the humans see the clones as non-individuated organisms, like radios or spiders, and because the humans fail to see themselves, too, as radios or spiders (35). The failure to see is a failure to compare: the humans think that individuality is the highest value, and they convince themselves that they are "not like" the clones—"not like," because as a group they possess a quality that they believe the clones do not have (individuality) and "not like," because they believe they are incomparable (only a clone is "like" someone else) (263). From the beginning of the novel, likeness is both the apex and the nadir of value: while it is "natural," Kathy H. claims, to establish and prefer "your own kind" (like some and not like others), it is also "natural" and desirable, she argues, not to be the same as other people (exactly alike) (4, 122-24). For Kathy, to be human is to be a type rather than a token.

The donor program continues because the humans believe that clones lack inferiority, which is measured, according to all of the characters, by the capacity for genuine love, authentic expressivity, and artistic originality. The disdain for "copied" things—the novel is studded with this word—is ubiquitous: if the children admire a friend's poem, they are not happy to "copy it down" but want instead to possess the manuscript (17); Kathy criticizes Ruth for "the way you copy everything they [the older clones] do" (124); the clones think of themselves as having been "copied at some point from a normal person" (139); and so on. In contrast, Kathy and Tommy think that if they are "really, properly in love," they will have earned the right to have their donations deferred by a couple of years (153); Kathy thinks that the clones, to be more like "normal" humans, should aim for social mannerisms that are spontaneous rather than imitated (120); and Miss Emily believes that, by producing works of art, the clones will show that they are more than physical matter (body parts), that they are "as sensitive and intelligent as any ordinary human being" (261). In some ways, Kathy H. and her friends fail to meet these standards. They are, literally, copies—they speak often of finding their "possibles" (the humans whose DNA they match)—and most of them seem to lack intellectual complexity, exceptional artistic abilities, or even ideas of love that depart from sitcom banality. In addition, the case for the clones' originality is made most strenuously by Miss Emily, whose methods—she tries to rally sympathy for her clone-students by organizing public art exhibitions—seem comic and on some level unconvincing. When Kathy and Tommy come to visit Miss Emily late in the novel, she explains: "We took away 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*" (260). Miss Emily's efforts, like her argument, only go so far: while they do improve conditions for the clone-children, by creating schools like

the one Kathy and Tommy attended, they do not alter or really aim to alter the donation system.

But the novel's critique does not focus on the limits or hypocrisy of Miss Emily's improvements. Rather, it focuses on the logic of originality and Romantic genius that undergirds the beliefs of Miss Emily, of those who control the donor system she tentatively opposes, and of the clones themselves. Kathy H. seems naïve in her insistence that people "in normal life" don't derive their mannerisms from popular culture (124). Seeing clones as humans is not the point. Instead, we are urged to see humans as clones. That is, we are urged to see that even humans produced through biological reproduction are in some ways copies; and that human culture, full of cassette tapes and television programs and rumors and paperbacks of *Daniel Deronda*, is also unoriginal. It is by seeing the likeness between human originality and the novel's unoriginal objects—Kathy H., the cassette, the song, the television program, the narration—that we recognize the large networks of approximation and comparison in which individuality functions.

One of the novel's final episodes involves a discussion about the eponymous song, "Never Let Me Go." Kathy and Madame recall an episode in Kathy's childhood, in which Madame had seen Kathy holding a pillow to her breast and swaying to the music of a tape recording. At the time, Madame had imagined that the lyrics ("Never let me go. Oh, baby, baby. Never let me go...") express the fear of losing an "old kind world" to the advance of new technologies (272). For her part, Kathy had imagined that she was singing to a baby whom she held in her arms (70, 271). Neither "version," as Kathy calls her interpretation, seems to correspond to the song's "cocktail-bar" genre, but Kathy doesn't mind (271, 70). She explains:

Even at the time, I realised this couldn't be right, that this interpretation didn't fit with the rest of the lyrics. But that wasn't an issue with me. The song was about what I said, and I used to listen to it again and again, on my own, whenever I got the chance. (70)

Madame makes much the same point in her conversation with Kathy: while she knew her interpretation "wasn't really you, what you were doing," it was what she "saw" nevertheless (272). For Ishiguro, the point is not simply that art can mean anything—that it is what you say or see—but rather that the content of art will be transformed by expansive circulation and by the local interpretations that readers impose. Like Kathy H., Ishiguro seems to prefer phenomenology to ontology. David Damrosch says of world literature, "[a]ll works cease to be the exclusive products of their original culture once they are translated; all become works that only 'began' in their original language" (22). In his novel, Ishiguro suggests that works of art, like people, should be valued for the social life they help to establish.

For this reason, we need to understand the title of the novel not simply as the name of a song or as the expression of a sentiment that characters interpret but as a reference to a material object: the cassette-tape recording, which is also one of

the novel's preeminent "copies." Early in her story, Kathy distinguishes between two different tapes of the song: "the actual cassette, the one I had back then at Hailsham" and the "copy of that tape... the one Tommy and I found in Norfolk years afterwards" (64). Later, she will acknowledge that "there might be thousands of these [copies] knocking about" (172). In truth, Kathy does not know whether the Hailsham and Norfolk tapes are different objects or the same: whether they are different, because the found tape is not "the first edition" that she possessed at Hailsham; and whether they are the same, because both tapes are "tokens" of a single album or perhaps even the same token (the Norfolk tape may be the Hailsham tape). It depends, to be sure, whether it is the cassette or the album that Kathy values most. It would seem that she, too, is uncertain. She recalls, after the Norfolk trip,

I really appreciated having the tape—and that song—back again. Even then, it was mainly a nostalgia thing, and today, if I happen to get the tape out and look at it, it brings back memories of that afternoon in Norfolk every bit as much as it does our Hailsham days. (173)

The tape can bring back memories of Norfolk because it is a singular object; and it can bring back memories of Hailsham because it is a clone of the edition she possessed as a child. She has the tape "back again" and also has a new tape. As a token, a cassette is one of many copies, perhaps one of thousands. And it is a copy of a copy: the cassette was "originally an LP" (67); and the LP was originally a "recording" of the performer Judy Bridgewater's voice; and the voice is an interpretation of the song, "Never Let Me Go."

Instead of thinking about the novel's comparison between humans and clones, we could think about its comparison between humans and cassette tapes. The novel introduces two different ways of thinking about uniqueness: one that is attributed to people and sometimes to works of art such as poems and drawings, and one that is attributed to objects such as cassette tapes and desk lamps. The first model assumes that uniqueness depends on sincerity and consistency. According to Kathy H., the clones believe that "when you saw the person you were copied from, you'd get *some* insight into who you were deep down, and maybe too, you'd see something of what your life held in store" (140, original emphasis). In this model, individuals have an ontological existence that defines what they are and what they will be; copies simply inherit that existence. The second model attributes uniqueness not to a prior existence but to social embeddedness and the capacity for new contextualization. Consider the "four desk-lamps, each of a different colour, but all the same design" that Kathy keeps in her bedsit and how she enjoys herself in new towns by "looking for a shop with another lamp like that in its window—not to buy, but just to compare with my ones at home" (208). Kathy doesn't value the desk lamps for what each one normally does (shed light). Instead, she values them because they constitute a group, because they allow her to contemplate similarities and differences, and because they provide an occasion for new comparisons. Kathy's desk lamps are part of a group, but that group is incomplete, and each desk lamp has the potential to join other

groups—those defined by, say, color rather than by design. Consider, also, Kathy's cassette tape from Norfolk, which has become one of her "most precious possessions" not because she listens to it but because it reminds her of at least two occasions: the afternoon she spent with Tommy, when they found the tape in a second-hand store, and her childhood at Hailsham, where she was absorbed in a song-inspired fantasy (64). She values the Norfolk tape in much the same way as she values another cassette tape, the one of dance tunes given to her by Ruth to replace the lost tape of "Never Let Me Go." Because "the music has nothing to do with anything," Ruth's gift is more important to Kathy as "an object" than as a token (a recording); it is one of Kathy's "most precious possessions," a term she repeats twice in the same chapter to refer to two separate tapes (76). In the novel, the preciousness of both tapes is an effect of the social experience—we might say the network—forged by the tapes' circulation.

If there were any doubt that the novel privileges the second model of uniqueness, we might consider the Japanese edition, which features a book-sized image of a cassette on its cover (Figure 1). That cover differs from the cover of every other edition of the novel to date, most of which display an image of a young woman or of part of a young woman or of several children playing.¹⁴ The Japanese cover, in its apparent singularity, invites several questions, including: Why might one wish to privilege, as an icon for the novel, the image of a cassette tape over the image of a person? To begin, we might return to Miss Emily's logic, her idea that the work of art conveys the soul of its creator and moreover affirms that its creator has a soul or, as Kathy would put it, some quality "deep down" (140). In Ishiguro's novel, the work of art has no "deep down": its meanings are collaborative and comparative, and thus affirm, instead of a soul, various social networks of production and consumption. Ishiguro suggests that a song or a novel or a person can be a singular object as well as a multiple-type object. In so doing, he proposes that uniqueness depends not on an absolute quality or a predetermined future but on the potential for comparison and likeness: all art is a cassette tape, for better or for worse. Only by appreciating the unoriginality of art, Ishiguro suggests, can we change the idea of culture itself.

The Series, the List

I want now to bring *Never Let Me Go's* emphasis on replication and circulation to bear on one of Ishiguro's more familiar texts, *The Remains of the Day*, which is usually discussed as an allegory about one of several world-political themes: the shrinking of Britain into England, the commodification of English heritage for American tourists, and the hypocrisy of English liberalism in the face of colonial exploitation abroad and anti-Semitism at home. For reasons of space and also of strategy, I'll say very little about these themes, and focus instead on the ways that

¹⁴ The only other edition that does not display an image of a person is the Dutch translation, which displays an image of discarded refuse in a field.



Figure 1

the novel arranges them. *The Remains of the Day* approaches the project of uniqueness by asking us to consider the relationship between individual anecdotes or actions and what the voluble narrator Stevens calls “unimaginable largeness.” This phrase and the ideal of uniqueness it represents will occupy me for the remainder of this essay. At the end, I’ll return to the question of whether world literature leads to homogenization, and I’ll try to suggest what cultural and political homogenization might look like in the context of Ishiguro’s work.

By presenting individual anecdotes as versions or explanations of more dramatic, collective experiences, such as colonialism and the Holocaust, *The Remains of the Day* invokes the principle of enlarged thinking—and in many ways supports it. Stevens promotes a Benjaminian analysis of history: his stories show how unnoticed, almost invisible labors facilitate well-known achievements; and they display the past actions and processes that have led to present-day events (Benjamin 256). The ideal of enlarged thinking also corresponds with Benjamin’s sense of translation: his belief that a work of art will have an “afterlife” in another language, which its author can neither predict nor realize (71); or his conceit that translation preserves the original by helping it to mature (73).

Stevens introduces enlarged thinking as the enrichment, rather than the abstraction, of ordinary actions. Preparing for the arrival of German, British, American, and French statesmen in March 1923, Stevens says he was “only too aware of the possibility that if any guest were to find his stay at Darlington Hall less than comfortable, this might have repercussions of unimaginable largeness” (76-77). This idea, that ordinary actions could have extraordinary consequences, is articulated in the text on at least two prior occasions: once when the housekeeper Miss Kenton reminds Stevens that household errors “may be trivial in themselves” but still possess “larger significance” (59); and once when Stevens’s employer, Lord Darlington, asks Stevens to remove his ailing father (Stevens senior) from public duties because an accidental fall during the dinner service “might jeopardize the success of our forthcoming conference” (63). Stevens at first attributes the concern about “larger significance” to Miss Kenton, but he later acknowledges that it may have been Lord Darlington’s phrase (60). In any case, this way of thinking structures all of the anecdotes that Stevens presents, in which we are asked to see single actions in the context of more pervasive or more collective consequences. The model here is the scale rather than the network: serving dinner points directly and uniquely to negotiating peace.

Some of the time, Ishiguro’s novel takes enlarged thinking seriously and seems to admire its critical impulse. We learn that the meeting organized by Lord Darlington is intended to convince the British and especially the French to relax the terms of the Versailles treaty. For readers—who know that this fictional visit will soon be followed by the Second World War—Stevens’s worry about failed hospitality and unhappy guests intimates two possible “repercussions”: the collapse of Darlington’s efforts to bring economic stability to Germany, and the subsequent growth of German unrest, militarism, and the Holocaust, an unimagined largeness signaled in the novel by an anti-Semitic incident that imposes its ethical and emotional weight on many other incidents in the text. Given this history, the

novel does in fact ask us to see both analogy and contiguity between the act of polishing silver and the act of negotiating peace treaties. In a general way, welcoming guests is important because it sets the stage for other aspects of social interaction; in a more specific way, welcoming guests to talks about international peace takes on the ethical significance of alleviating poverty, preventing war, and extending sympathy across national borders. The stakes of alleviation, prevention, and sympathy are large, and Stevens transfers this quality onto the functioning of his employer's household.

The novel is especially persuasive in its support of enlarged thinking when it offers examples that reflect poorly on Stevens and when Stevens seems least aware of that outcome. Good household service may lead to peace treaties, but it may also lead to military aggression or political appeasement. While Stevens's early conversation with Lord Darlington about the "larger significance" of the dinner service precedes the 1923 meeting, a later conversation about polishing silver refers to a meeting between Lord Halifax and Herr Ribbentrop (Hitler's ambassador to Britain) in the middle of the 1930s (135-36). Lord Darlington tells Stevens, "By the way, Stevens, Lord Halifax was jolly impressed with the silver the other night. Put him into a quite different frame of mind" (135). From this, Stevens concludes, "the state of the silver had made a small, but significant contribution towards the easing of relations between Lord Halifax and Herr Ribbentrop that evening" (136). Enlarged thinking is vital, Ishiguro seems to suggest, because it allows us to see that Stevens's actions were in part responsible for the friendship between Hitler's agent and the British foreign minister. Stevens knew at the time that this was a significant occasion, but only in retrospect can he (and we) know what that significance would be.

Moreover, when Stevens eventually claims that some actions, including his dismissal of two Jewish maids in the early 1930s, are simply "trivial"—that they have no "larger significance"—readers know to think otherwise. Recalling the circumstances that caused him to fire the maids, Stevens refers to a "brief, entirely insignificant few weeks" when Lord Darlington was influenced by British fascists and acknowledges "one very minor episode... which has been blown up out of all proportion" (145, 137). Of course, blowing things up out of all proportion is just what enlarged thinking requires, and it is Stevens who has taught us how to do so. Stevens fires the Jewish maids because he thinks he is acting in the service of Lord Darlington's larger European project. He fails to see or even really to evaluate the quality of that project; and he fails to see that his action has its own significance, especially for the maids and for his relationship with Miss Kenton. Finally, he fails to see that this episode sheds light on the significance of several previous anecdotes about model butlers who ignore or placate offensive masters. With the story about the Jewish maids, Ishiguro seems to imply—I am overstating only slightly—that self-abnegation and incuriosity lay the groundwork for genocide.

And yet, it is important to notice that Stevens's call for enlarged thinking is not to be taken seriously or to be admired all of the time: that is, Ishiguro is making fun of his character's overblown rhetoric and absurd formality while he is nevertheless constructing a novel that seems to follow the logic of Stevens's

grammatical claim. Put another way, the novel takes “unimaginable largeness” seriously by valuing in Stevens’s anecdotes both the sublime and the ridiculous. It is ultimately the ridiculous, Ishiguro suggests, that allows for new networks of responsibility to emerge. In the novel, the ridiculous is signaled by the practice of “bantering,” an activity and style of activity that generates inconsistency, playfulness, and surprise. Importantly, bantering appears not as the opposite of Benjaminian historicism but rather as its supplement: by recognizing paradox, absurdity, and metaphor in the structure of Ishiguro’s novel, readers can see the several large networks in which each of Stevens’s anecdotes takes part. For example, in Stevens’s mind, firing the Jewish maids is like polishing the silver: both acts are meant to facilitate Lord Darlington’s political maneuverings; Stevens sees them as part of that largeness. For us, however, these acts are also part of other kinds of largeness: two Anglo-Jewish maids losing their jobs in a climate of anti-Semitism; or a national strategy of political appeasement. Just as for Coetzee a single text can operate in several literary cultures, for Ishiguro polishing silver can be part of several political histories. It is not a matter of choosing between scale and network but of recognizing the networks, of varying scales, in which a single action may participate.

Bantering introduces several networks of meaning, but it also focuses attention on the process of communication. At the end of the novel, Stevens considers that “in bantering lies the key to human warmth,” though this is not because of what people say but because of how they say it (245). Stevens notes earlier that bantering requires a kind of speech that is not “safely inoffensive” (15-16). In fact, the success of one’s banter is measured by its ability to cause surprise; for this reason, there has to be something inconsistent and risky in bantering’s style. Like Kathy H. in her interpretation of “Never Let Me Go,” those who banter refuse to be constrained by the consciousness of larger meanings or by the sense that there is only one larger meaning. Because he values the vagaries of talk, one might say that Ishiguro has added Wilde to Benjamin, but as the prefatory wit of Apter’s “Twenty Theses” implies—“Everything is Translatable”; “Nothing is Translatable”—Benjamin’s historicism may have always involved a little more Wilde than we have in the past been able to notice.

From beginning to end, *The Remains of the Day* is structured by a series—or perhaps a list—of anecdotes. The series and the list are significant, since these forms might be said to solicit, respectively, Benjaminian and Wildean readings of the text. The novel constitutes a *series* insofar as it follows the chronology of the narrator’s four-day travelogue and the story he tells about the meaning of his anecdotes. It constitutes a *list*, however, insofar as it contains the potential for many different series, chronologically as well as thematically arranged; insofar as it gestures to future comparisons that have not yet been imagined; and insofar as it allows each anecdote to have its own momentary life. Understood formally, the plot of Ishiguro’s novel inheres in the difference between the professional largeness that Stevens sees and the many qualities of largeness—personal relationships, anti-Semitism, colonialism, political appeasement, the death of a family member—that we see but that he does not even apprehend.

Stevens applies to his anecdotes a theory of comparison that is somewhat different from the one that the novel asks us to adopt. The first theory, articulated by Stevens and reaffirmed at the end of the novel by the nativist liberal Mr. Harry Smith, proposes that every person must imagine his or her actions as part of a larger, unified whole. This theory allows Stevens to assert that his willingness to tolerate slights and ignore his personal feelings contributed to the forging of international alliances. It allows Harry Smith to assert, conversely, that his willingness to speak plainly contributes to a more democratic, egalitarian England. Both of these assertions are in some ways valued in the novel, but they are also criticized for their rigidity and for their singularity of scale. Stevens fails to notice that his professional restraint contributes not only to international alliances but also to anti-Semitism, political appeasement, and emotional isolation. Harry Smith fails to notice that his speech is premised on the silence of Britain's colonial subjects, whose independence he wishes to suppress while advocating his own. The largeness that Harry Smith can recognize ends at the borders of Britain. He claims repeatedly to have "done his part" (fought in the war, made his opinions known, urged others to participate in democracy), but it is in his commitment to a whole that extends only as far as the nation that his conception of largeness matches the conception that Stevens promotes (189). The novel thus articulates a theory of comparison that emphasizes the largeness to which each incident contributes but also refuses the wholeness in which each incident might be contained.

Harry Smith's comments at the end of the text recall an anecdote that Stevens tells at the beginning about a butler serving in colonial India. According to Stevens, the butler displays professional dignity by protecting his employer's guests from the knowledge that a tiger has entered the dining room. The butler is able to alert his employer, kill the tiger, and report his success with such discretion that the guests never learn of the tiger's removal, or even of its presence. Stevens is especially pleased by the butler's unflappable manner and by his command of euphemism, which allow him to report blandly in the earshot of his employer's guests that "dinner will be served at the usual time" and without "discernible traces of the recent occurrence" (36). Surely, we can see—it's almost a cliché—that there is something strongly allegorical about Stevens's story: the British ruling classes used servants and other subalterns to separate their lives from the proverbial tiger in the dining room that had to be killed, but softly, so that afternoon tea could continue uninterrupted in the parlor. Stevens offers this anecdote as an example of what we might call professional formalism: an ideal of grace under pressure, which means maintaining one's role under any condition, no matter how alarming or dangerous. And while the repercussions of this ideal will become increasingly visible over the course of the novel, we learn right away about the butler's small role in the largeness that was colonialism. It is a key aspect of the novel's theory of largeness that Stevens will only ever recognize one context for his anecdotes, whereas the novel will always intimate several. The problem with Stevens's ethos of enlarged thinking, Ishiguro suggests, is not that he homogenizes every action and every story, but that he fails to homogenize enough.

In the novel, Stevens calls this kind of persistent homogenization “forever reappraising,” and it is an activity he resists because it seems to him impossible to follow a path and evaluate its direction at the same time. It seems “misguided,” he explains, for “a butler with serious aspirations ... to be forever reappraising his employer—scrutinizing the latter’s motives, analyzing the implications of his views,” testing whether “one’s skills were being employed to a desirable end” (199-200). But this is what the novel’s structure requires from its readers: that is, a movement between inside and outside, or between text and book, if you will. On the one hand, we read with Stevens, enlarging his anecdotes into more expansive systems; on the other hand, the more we read as Stevens reads, the more we encounter systems whose meanings are obscured by a strategy of symptomatic interpretation. Largeness, which usually promises depth or latent content, appears in this novel as a perennial surface. Sharon Marcus has suggested that all symptomatic reading, because it emphasizes what is absent or invisible, tends to devalue or often simply miss what is present. This is certainly the problem that Stevens often faces, or indeed does not face, as when he identifies his father’s housekeeping mistakes as signs of a peace treaty that might be ruined rather than as signs of ailing health. Put another way, Stevens thinks of his life as a series, whereas we have to see it as a list. A series privileges one action over another and situates each action in terms of an outcome or referent. The list, like a group of clones, implies equivalent objects, even if the arrangement and circulation of those objects might allow distinctions to emerge. Ishiguro asks us to compare several outcomes (the Holocaust, Americanization, imperialism) by treating each anecdote as part of a list that can be arranged in several ways and whose meanings will change according to future arrangements.

The novel’s structure allows us to think about the relationship between text and book, as I’ve suggested, because it proposes that enlarged reading—reading globally—changes not simply the meaning but what I have been calling, after Benjamin, the life of a novel. Texts, once translated, become many different books; they become, like Stevens’s anecdotes and Kathy H.’s cassette tape, part of several series—originals not only in their own culture but in several cultures. If thinking about largeness can promote acts of comparison that lead to new, micro-networks of significance, as it does for the reader of Ishiguro’s novels, it can also prompt, less retrospectively, new kinds of objects, as it does for the writing of Ishiguro’s novels today. Anthony Appiah makes a related point when he remarks in his book on cosmopolitanism that the expansion of U.S. products into world markets can have a variety of dynamic effects, including reverse assimilation, such that U.S. products have to accommodate the desires and preferences of a variety of world consumers (109-13). In the case of Ishiguro, I don’t think he is accommodating consumers so much as he is challenging our sense of what it is that consumers consume: What is the work that we are reading? What is the difference between the work and the book? What is the appropriate scale for our reading? And what is the relationship between the enlargement of ethics and the enlargement of geography?

My essay has focused on the ways that Ishiguro has engaged with these questions, but my larger project, if I can still use this adjective, will involve an account

of several other writers and of other kinds of geographic calculation. That project will need to consider how protocols of reading and classifying and teaching have been shaped historically by national paradigms of literary culture and how those protocols might best respond to the globalization of contemporary fiction in English. Thinking about globalization, as I've tried to do here, does not mean always thinking on a planetary scale, but it does mean acknowledging the many scales that recent globalization has helped to produce. Scholars of U.S. multilingualism such as Werner Sollors, Marc Shell, and Joshua Miller have made this point about American literature, as has Harsha Ram, a Slavacist who shows how Russian translations of Georgian literature contributed to Soviet internationalism. These projects suggest that it is not a single "distant reading," to use Franco Moretti's phrase, but a transnational comparison of close readings, that the new world literature may require (56-57).

From his first novel about Japan to his most recent novel about cloning, Ishiguro has implied that it is inadequate, and even unethical, to treat uniqueness as the defining quality of art, culture, and human life. In *Never Let Me Go*, valuing uniqueness leads to killing clones and preserving people. But *The Remains of the Day* suggests a modification of that argument: rather than seeing uniqueness as a property of singular masterpieces or anecdotes or even cultures, we are asked to see it as the property of a work's appearance, as translation, edition, anthology, or excerpt. Ishiguro proposes that comparison, while it elides uniqueness in the service of a larger paradigm, also generates uniqueness, but uniqueness of a different kind: the uniqueness of a translation, the uniqueness of a cassette tape, the uniqueness of an allegory about political appeasement.

I have been offering, really, two accounts of comparison: an account of world literature, in which translation and global circulation create many books out of single texts, transforming old traditions and inaugurating new ones; and an account of Ishiguro's novels, in which a principle of unoriginality expands the horizon of social relationships, figuring new networks of local and global largeness. Ultimately, Ishiguro's calculation comes to this: uniqueness can persist in the world but only in comparative forms—in the shape of the echo, the clone, the list, the series, and the translation.

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