Cristina Teixeira: Second Place Fall 2006
A Clone’s Reflection

When Kazuo Ishiguro wrote Never Let Me Go, he created characters that are used as a foil to our own humanity. They are clones and therefore from the very start are different from a normal human being. His novel raises the question: What defines humanity? As we watch the clones struggle to answer this question themselves, we as readers realize that in order to be human one must recognize humanity within oneself. The clones have difficulties being seen as human because they do not see themselves as such.

Many of us are taught to define our humanity and that of others, based upon our upbringing. Here is the first snag for the clones; they were never “brought up” in the traditional sense. Never were Kathy and the others nurtured or loved; they were just raised, taught, and trained. As cerebral creatures, we mimic behavior that is shown to us. The clones attempted to do this as well, but neither love nor caring was actually shown them. Kathy recalls that “We all felt it; it was like we’d walked from the sun right into the chilly shade. Ruth had been right: Madame was afraid of us. But she was afraid of us the way someone might be afraid of spiders (p.35).” The clones are feared and distance is kept from them; there is no love and closeness with any of the adults they are taught to look up to for guidance. When the Guardians speak to the clones, or discuss them, the clones are referred to as creatures. No longer are they human; by definition they are creatures, which is defined in the dictionary as one dependent on or subservient to another. They are only taught to see fear and to read the emotions of others. This forced mentality, as it is all they know, has skewed their emotional palette, as well as how they view themselves. These clones are not able to define themselves as humans and develop a true sense of humanity because the clones have such a confused and negative self image. Kathy and the others have always been told they are different, and this has ingrained itself in a tremendous way through all their time at Hailsham. The clones’ training at Hailsham traps them in that mentality, preventing them from seeing their own humanity and “escaping”.

Once the clones figure out they are destined to die, they do not want to see their own humanity any more. It becomes much easier to die when one feels there is nothing to live for. If the clones continued to see themselves as not human, but as new creatures created, and designed for the purpose they were fulfilling (organ donating), they could be content with that as a predetermined fate that had a reason. They choose not to see themselves as human nor do they even have the beginnings of seeing themselves as such and needing to prove it. To define themselves as human would bring up a slew of questions relating to justice, ethics, and morals. Namely it would cause them to question this predestined fate they felt they had no control over, and no possibility to escape. It even seems at times in the novel that this situation is a result of the fact that they are afraid of the outside world, “because somewhere underneath, a part of us stayed like that, fearful of the world around us, and-- no matter how much we despised ourselves for it- unable to
quite let each other go (120).” The clones fear the outside world, the unknown, and their own humanity.

The actual humans in their circle encourage this stagnant mentality and in a more removed way, to the clones at least, so does all of society. All of society is being self-centered and allowing these beings to be used and killed. It is either that they or their loved ones will die, or these clones. Thus, if the clones are inhuman and separate creatures, it is far easier to justify their deaths.

In the beginning of the novel, Kathy describes the recovery rooms, which is where the story of each clone culminates, and her description sums up the clone’s existence:
Everything [in the recovery room]-- the walls, the floor-- has been done in gleaming white tiles, which the centre keeps so clean when you first go in it’s almost like entering a hall of mirrors. Of course you don’t exactly see yourself reflected back loads of times, but you almost think you do. When you lift an arm or when someone sits up in bed, you can feel this pale, shadowy movement....(p.17-18)

This description parallels the clones’ struggle and the end result. Every clone from Hailsham is kept in pristine conditions: they are educated, they are kept healthy, and they are taught to recognize their fate. There are no other possibilities for them; the surrounding tiles are all blank. Their humanity is never exactly true; it is never reflected back in any way they can really see, just as the tiles simply reflect shadowy images. The clones can never clearly see themselves, and therefore can not see their humanity. As a result they are merely shadows of humans.