

Never Let Me Go & The Fountain: Reflection/Discussion Questions, Part II

- 1) One of the most notable aspects of life at Hailsham is the power of the group. Students watch each other carefully and try on different poses, attitudes, and ways of speaking. Is this behavior typical of most adolescents, or is there something different about the way the students at Hailsham seek to conform?
- 2) Does the novel examine the possibility of human cloning as a legitimate question for medical ethics, or does it demonstrate that the human costs of cloning are morally repellent, and therefore impossible for science to pursue? What kind of moral and emotional responses does the novel provoke? If you extend the scope of the book's critique, what are its implications for our own society?
- 3) The novel takes place in "the late 1990s," and a postwar science boom has resulted in human cloning and the surgical harvesting of organs to cure cancer and other diseases. In an interview with *January Magazine*, Ishiguro said that he is not interested in realism. In spite of the novel's fictitious premise, however, how "realistically" does *Never Let Me Go* reflect the world we live in, where scientific advancement can be seemingly irresistible?
- 4) The teacher Lucy Wainwright wanted to make the children more aware of the future that awaited them. Miss Emily believed that in hiding the truth, "We were able to give you something, something which even now no one will ever take from you, and we were able to do that principally by sheltering you... Sometimes that meant we kept things from you, lied to you... But... we gave you your childhoods" (268). In the context of the story as a whole, is this a valid argument?
- 5) Critic Frank Kermode has noted that "Ishiguro is fundamentally a tragic novelist; there is always a disaster, remote but urgent, imagined but real, at the heart of his stories." How would you describe the tragedy at the heart of *Never Let Me Go*?
- 6) In a recent interview, Ishiguro talked about *Never Let Me Go*: "There are things I am more interested in than the clone thing. How are they trying to find their place in the world and make sense of their lives? To what extent can they transcend their fate? As time starts to run out, what are the things that really matter? Most of the things that concern them concern us all, but with them it is concentrated into this relatively short period of time. These are things that really interest me and, having come to the realization that I probably have limited opportunities to explore these things, that's what I want to concentrate on." How do these remarks relate to your own ideas about the book?
- 7) *The Fountain* emphasizes cycles and circles in its dialogue, plot points, and imagery. What is it getting at? What do you think they mean?
- 8) Which other themes and motifs do you see reinforced in the film? How are they featured? Why are they significant? (Some places to begin: light, love, loyalty, denial, defense, fear, etc.)
- 9) Would you drink from the Tree of Life? Would you choose to live forever?
- 10) How does *The Fountain* relate to our curriculum? In other words, how can you connect it to our literature and ideas? (First- and second-semester connections are equally valid.)