Ignorance Is Strength: Kazuo Ishiguro's and Graham Swift's Argument against Knowledge

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Abstract
This article discusses the opposition of knowledge and ignorance in Kazuo Ishiguro's Never Let Me Go and Graham Swift's Shuttlecock. While the protagonists of both novels seek knowledge, the value of knowledge is ultimately challenged. The article argues that, despite their tendency to show the pitfalls of insufficient knowledge in their stories, in these two novels Ishiguro and Swift make a case for the ethical benefits of ignorance.

Keywords
Kazuo Ishiguro, Graham Swift, *Never Let Me Go*, *Shuttlecock*, quest for knowledge, contemporary English novel

The most noticeable convergence between the fiction of Kazuo Ishiguro and Graham Swift is their protagonists' preoccupation with the past, their struggle with memory, as well as a confrontation with self-knowledge and knowledge about others. In both writers, there is a strong implicit insistence on the fundamental importance of self-understanding; yet, although their protagonists seek – or appear to seek – comprehension, the novelists also point out its potentially detrimental effect. In her overview of Ishiguro's work, Cynthia F. Wong comments that "Ishiguro develops his broad concern for the way people seek truth in their lives, but who then find multiple ways of dismantling access to it, because of the painfulness of truth itself."[1] This article will focus on *Never Let Me Go* and *Shuttlecock* as illustrations of the dangerous potential of knowledge and will argue that in these novels both authors make a serious claim about the ethical value of ignorance.

The narratives of Ishiguro's and Swift's novels are at least partly set in the past, since it is in the past that the causes of the protagonists' present problems and dilemmas must be sought. Memory forges a link between past and present, and the disjointed, often unreliable nature of recollections testifies to its dynamism: what happened does not always correspond to what is remembered, and furthermore what is remembered may not be faithfully reflected in what is narrated. In both writers' fiction the disjunction between past reality and accounts thereof is ascribable both to the natural deficiencies of memory and to the protagonists' deliberate misrepresentation of what they remember. The narratives tend to be constructed on a pattern of gradual revelation, of which the reader is the ultimate and often the only beneficiary. Their narrators typically envisage a narratee in their stories, but this narratee may remain unspecified (e.g. "you" in Stevens's record of his reflections in Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*) or may be unable to receive the story (e.g. the sleeping children in Swift's *Tomorrow*). Although the revelatory mode of narration requires an audience, these stories are effectively addressed to the speaker himself or herself. The impulse to disclose the past is prompted by a specific incident, but in most cases does not entail the acquisition of new knowledge. Stevens in *The Remains of the Day* knows his past well enough; what poses a problem for

1 Cynthia F. Wong, *Kazuo Ishiguro* (Plymouth: Northcote House, 2000), 21.

him is the need to assess his life and in particular to come to terms with the decisions he once made. The gaps and discontinuities in his narrative are not caused by insufficient knowledge, but, on the contrary, by the oppressive nature of the knowledge he already has and his inability to acknowledge the truth about himself, which he evidently intuits even at the outset of his narration and invariably tries to suppress. Likewise, Paula in *Tomorrow* is the only one in her family in possession of all the facts; now she faces the problem of selecting them, communicating them to her children and excusing herself in the process.

Never Let Me Go and *Shuttlecock* chart a different kind of revelation. Both are stories predicated on the protagonist's quest for knowledge. *Never Let Me Go* is a retrospective narrative, at the beginning of which Kathy H. knows all she can ever find out; indeed, her life is coming to an end. This awareness of finality represents the ultimate knowledge she has acquired – by the time she has embarked on her narration she has discarded all hopes and delusions. Her narrative, however, goes back to her childhood and chronicles her growing understanding of her identity and the purpose of her brief life. Kathy and her friends are clones, created to supply vital organs to prolong "normal" people's lives. This stark fact is not given to the clones straightforwardly; instead, the guardians impart it by hints and oblique partial disclosures. Kathy's narrative focuses in particular on those episodes through which her initial ignorance gives way in stages to knowledge. The protagonist of Swift's *Shuttlecock* is an archivist in a dead crimes department, professionally engaged in the uncovering of old secrets. His professional and private lives intertwine when one of the archival mysteries turns out to concern his own father. Two conflicting versions of his father's past emerge. The plot is driven by Prentis's desperate, almost obsessive search for the truth. As Del Ivan Janik notes, he embarks on his story "without knowing where the tale will lead him."[2]

In line with the predominant mode of Ishiguro's and Swift's fiction, present reflections co-exist with and are often difficult to disentangle from the labyrinth of recollections, but what differentiates these two narratives from the majority of each novelist's output is the fact that the revelation involves a discovery of previously unknown facts. Each narration depicts the protagonist's slow progress from ignorance towards knowledge. Therefore both plots may be said to be driven by a genuine quest for knowledge, but in both works the value of knowledge is eventually put in question.

To argue that ignorance may be beneficial is a highly debatable proposition. In George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, to which the title of this article alludes, depriving citizens of knowledge of the true state of affairs in the country and the constant interference in records of the past is one of the basic mechanisms of control and manipulation. The Ministry of Truth, so named in contravention of its actual goals but quite in accordance with the totalitarian misuse of language, deals in propaganda, lies and other elaborate methods of indoctrination.

Condemnation of the manipulative use of knowledge has been at the core of several critical interpretations of *Never Let Me Go*. Critics who follow this line argue that the clones have been brainwashed into passively accepting their prescribed course of life. A commonsensical – and superficial – question often asked about the characters in Ishiguro's novel is why they do not try to escape. In her article on the scientific discourse in *Never Let Me Go*, Liani Lochner challenges Ishiguro's evocation of fate in his interviews

2 Del Ivan Janik, "History and the 'Here and Now': The Novels of Graham Swift," *Twentieth Century Literature* 35:1 (1989), 79.

about the novel.[3] Instead, she refers to Pierre Bourdieu's concept of habitus to claim that the characters' lack of resistance is a direct consequence of their consciousness being conditioned by their social context: habitus "generates dispositions that are compatible with social conditions and in a sense pre-adapted to its demands."[4] Lochner claims that the clones "misrecognize" the conditions created by society as natural, indeed as their fate – a situation which precludes the notion of self-determination and induces unquestioning submission to what has been misleadingly represented to them as the norm.[5] This interpretation entails an unequivocal condemnation of the school where the clones were educated and brought up. The Hailsham teachers imparted information to the students in carefully measured doses, introducing them to the prospect of "donations" (a euphemism for the removal of vital organs to save the lives of others) but withholding from them the full implications of what they were created for.

The Hailsham school differed from other establishments for clones in that its residents were treated in a humane way and offered a measure of normal life. Lochner acknowledges the benevolence of Hailsham but, paradoxically, uses it as an argument against the project: "The irony of Hailsham is that the greatest harm to the clones results from its very efforts to shelter them." Following Bourdieu's theory Lochner contends that the school exerted "soft violence" and is effectively responsible for the clones' "lack of agency."[6]

The inference of Lochner's argument is that full knowledge as well as less humanitarian conditions would have awakened the clones to the stark realisation of their situation, which in turn would have prompted resistance. This line of reasoning is, however, undermined by the fact that the other clones in the novel, although reared in much worse conditions, likewise display no desire to escape and are equally passive about their predetermined future. In fact, they envy the Hailsham students their past and wish at least to share their memories. Kathy reports that a "donor" who is close to "completion," i.e. death, seeks comfort in her recollections of her own school:

> *What he wanted was not just to hear about Hailsham, but to remember Hailsham, just like it had been his own childhood. He knew he was close to completing and so that's what he was doing: getting me to describe things to him, so they'd really sink in, so that maybe during those sleepless nights, with the drugs and the pain and the exhaustion, the line would blur between what were my memories and what were his.*[7]

Some critics' and readers' bewildered response to the characters' passivity misses the obvious fact that, whether a clone or a naturally conceived human being, everyone is ultimately confronted with the inevitability of death, no matter what euphemisms or strategies of evasion are available. And the characters are not completely passive – they cling to the hope of deferral; Kathy and her lover make a great effort to investigate this possibility. For Wai-chew Sim, this quest for a deferral is "the closest

3 Kazuo Ishiguro: "I was interested in the human capacity to accept what must seem like a limited and cruel fate." Quoted in Liani Lochner, "'This is what we're supposed to be doing, isn't it?': Scientific Discourse in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*," in *Kazuo Ishiguro. New Critical Visions of the Novels,* ed. by Sebastian Groes and Barry Lewis (Houndsmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 226.

4 Lochner, "Scientific Discourse," 232.

5 Lochner, "Scientific Discourse," 232.

6 Lochner, "Scientific Discourse," 232-233.

7 Kazuo Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go* (London: Faber and Faber, 2005), 5.

equivalent in the novel to a plot."[8] While this is not an adequate summation of the entire novel, it is true that once the rumour reaches the former Hailsham students, they are motivated and sustained by this hope: Kathy and Tommy want to prove that they are truly in love and Tommy desperately tries to demonstrate that he is "creative" because according to the rumour these are the conditions for applying.

Ishiguro has repeatedly explained that his intention was to find a metaphor for the human condition, and therefore the status of the characters as clones is of secondary importance, its primary aim being to convey the brevity of human life.[9] It must be noted that in the last part of the book, where key questions about the ethics of knowledge and ignorance are asked, the former students and the head teacher of Hailsham, Miss Emily, are all in the last stage of their lives despite the age gap. From this perspective, the only difference between the clones and ordinary human beings is that for the former, whose lives are unusually compressed, a full realisation of the necessity of their demise is concurrent with the fulfilment of this prospect.

In a study issued before the publication of *Never Let Me Go*, Wong emphasises the co-existence of the desires for self-deception and self-protection in Ishiguro's narrators.[10] The truth about their past errors and misdeeds is intuited by the narrators but, if fully acknowledged, might prove unbearable, which is why they resort to various strategies of evasion. In this novel, however, the narrator has no guilty secrets; it is the guardians who both deceive and protect. The Hailsham students are being prepared for their future lives outside the school, but not told how brief this future is destined to be; they are trained to take special care of their health, although it is not clearly explained to them why; they are informed about "donations" but not about the obvious consequences of being marked out as an organ donor. The euphemistic language (which the mature and by now informed narrator continues to employ) helps to disguise the stark facts. As the rebellious teacher Miss Lucy declares to them, "you've been told and not told. You've been told, but none of you really understand …"[11] Miss Lucy's revelation is not fully grasped at the time, and her dismissal prevents further disclosures.

The characters live with partial knowledge, at first having only very vague ideas about the world outside the school and, later, even when living independently at the Cottages, remain lost and confused. Sebastian Groes argues that the setting depicted in the novel serves as an objective correlative to the characters' mental condition. The "featureless" landscape of East Anglia reflects the haziness of their knowledge, its horizontality supposedly linked to the lack of proper *anagnorisis*. Groes claims that "the absence of detailed description itself […] becomes a poignant comment on the regressive consciousness of the clones and the undifferentiated landscape."[12] He draws attention to episodes such as the characters' visit to a café on the coast, in which the talk is about

8 Wai-chew Sim, *Kazuo Ishiguro* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), 84.

9 Ishiguro in an interview: "I was never tempted to set this story in the future. That's partly a personal thing. I'm not very turned on by futuristic landscapes. Besides, I don't have the energy to think about what cars or shops or cup-holders would look like in a future civilization. And I didn't want to write anything that could be mistaken for a 'prophecy'. I wanted rather to write a story in which every reader might find an echo of his or her own life." ("An Interview with Kazuo Ishiguro," *Book Browse*, n.d. Accessed June 20, 2015. https://www.bookbrowse.com/author_interviews/full/index.cfm/author_number/477/kazuo-ishiguro)

10 Wong, *Kazuo Ishiguro,* 19.

11 Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go*, 79.

12 Sebastian Groes, "'Something of a Lost Corner': Kazuo Ishiguro's Landscapes of Memory and East Anglia in *Never Let Me Go*," in *Kazuo Ishiguro. New Critical Visions of the Novels*, ed. by Sebastian Groes and Barry Lewis (Houndsmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 216.

love, "completion" and deferral, and yet the potential for vision is damaged by the "misty windows."[13] Because Norfolk was not visually represented in their geography lessons, it has become a fantasy land in which their feeble delusions are allowed to grow, but whose flatness reflects the vacuity and lack of progress in the characters' lives.

Nevertheless, it would not be true to say that the characters fail to experience any moment of recognition. They do, but, like the metaphorical landscape, it is remarkably flat and has very little impact on their lives. The crucial scene in the novel is Kathy and Tommy's visit to their former teachers, in which some of the mysteries of their school years are clarified and the myth of deferral dispelled. The prospect which this disclosure opens up is drearily bleak and confirms rather than modifies their previously partial, nebulous knowledge.

During the confrontation with Miss Emily and Madame – the clones' only links to the enigmatic "them" from whom summons for donations come – the belief that true love or artistic creativity may prolong life is dismissed as a delusion. Such beliefs, incidentally, are by no means specific to clones; on the contrary, these are the most conventional, basic human defences against transience. But the problem that Miss Emily is compelled to answer and which is at the heart of the ethical impact of the book is whether the clones should have already been told the whole truth at school and so whether they should have lived their brief lives with this information.

The answer to this dilemma is partly implied in Kathy's questions, which suggest that the knowledge would have induced a sense of the utter meaninglessness of any effort: "Why did we do all of that work in the first place? Why train us, encourage us, make us produce all of that? If we're just going to give donations anyway, then die, why all those lessons? Why all those books and discussions?"[14]

Miss Emily admits that the teachers asked themselves the very same questions. Since there can be no self-evident answer, the policy of protective ignorance implemented at Hailsham was a matter of conscious decision, taken on uncertain grounds but pursued unwaveringly, so much so that when Miss Lucy decided to impart the grim facts, she was quickly sacked. Far from being just a manipulative measure (although this motivation should not be excluded), the leaders of the Hailsham project justify the decision to keep the students in the dark by the wish to let them have a happy childhood, and thus to gain memories to cherish in the future, and to let them have hopes and delusions. Untimely knowledge that their lives must run the course that had been set for them would have confronted the students with utter purposelessness:

> *Yes, in many ways we fooled you. I suppose you could even call it that. But we sheltered you during those years, and we gave you your childhoods. […] You built your lives on what we gave you. You wouldn't be who you are today if we'd not protected you. You wouldn't have become absorbed in your lessons, you wouldn't have lost yourselves in your art and your writing. Why should you have done, knowing what lay in store for each of you? You would have told us it was all pointless, and how could we have argued with you?*[15]

Kathy and Tommy leave these arguments unanswered. Kathy's tacit assessment is a tentative approval of this policy: "maybe, after everything else, we wanted to thank [Miss Emily], I'm not sure"[16]; Tommy thinks Miss Lucy rather than Miss Emily was

13 Groes, "Kazuo Ishiguro's Landscapes of Memory," 221.

14 Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go*, 254.

15 Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go*, 263.

16 Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go*, 264.

right.[17] However, his immediate reaction after the visit is an outburst of rage and despair – which demonstrates an appropriate response to the unmediated, complete knowledge of the meaninglessness and brevity of life. Kathy describes Tommy's flare-up: "I could make out in the mid-distance, near where the field began to fall away, Tommy's figure, raging, shouting, flinging his fists and kicking out […] his jumbled swear words continued uninterrupted."[18]

Living with such awareness would be unbearable, which seems to prove Miss Emily rather than Miss Lucy right. Without settling the issue definitively – after all, the characters themselves refrain from doing so – it may be argued that Kathy's entire narrative is an indirect apology for ignorance which shelters, and for illusions which sustain the individual confronted with personal transience. It is crucial to note that at the time she tells her story, completely alone and preparing to die, her strategy of guarding against despair is to turn to memories. Her best recollections are those of her school years, as yet unshadowed by the thought of death, because she was both deceived and protected.

In a striking parallel, a debate between antagonistic characters concerning the opposition between knowledge and ignorance also functions as the turning point in Graham Swift's *Shuttlecock* and precedes its dénouement. The interpretation to which this novel most readily lends itself centres around the narrator's deeply troubled relations with his father, wife and sons, or, as Daniel Lea put it, "the power dynamics at work in family life."[19] Lea's reading of *Shuttlecock* foregrounds the importance of fathers in Swift's novel. Apart from filial relationships, the story also explores Prentis's relations with his boss Quinn, who is quite explicitly characterised as yet another incarnation of the father figure.[20] His own father and Quinn are the only two people Prentis respects, and while he cannot communicate with Prentis senior, who is speechless and completely unresponsive as a result of a breakdown, he has several disturbing conversations with his superior. The final and decisive meeting between Prentis and Quinn is engineered by the latter, as it turns out primarily to test Prentis's capacity to succeed him as head of the department. Although the protagonist badly needs to come to terms with his various family roles and above all with the two father figures in his life, the resolution of his dilemmas ultimately depends on what stance he adopts regarding the value of knowledge. This aspect of the novel may be said to be at least as important as the question of family dynamics.

Even though the conversation – at times a confrontation – between Prentis and his retiring boss concerns the narrator's father, it also has a direct bearing on Prentis's professional life. What is at stake here is the harmful potential of knowledge, compared with which selective ignorance appears to be an ethically valid option. This episode functions as the culmination of two strands in Prentis's life which are finally proved to have been interlaced from the start.

Prentis's job is to store the records of unsolved crimes, or other cases no longer being investigated by the police. Working in offices situated underground (an obtrusively metaphorical location), Prentis and his colleagues deal with crimes which – to use a Freudian framework – have been relegated to the unconscious but are not entirely

17 Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go*, 268.

18 Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go*, 269.

19 Daniel Lea, *Graham Swift* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 41.

20 Prentis says: "I realized I was talking to Dad as if I were talking to Quinn." In Graham Swift, *Shuttlecock* (London: Penguin Books, 1982), 72.

forgotten and may resurface under certain circumstances. David Malcolm comments that "Prentis's department itself is like a huge institutionalized memory."[21] The narrator points out the dual and in fact contradictory aims ascribed to the dead crimes department: information should be stored even if there is an infinitesimal chance it may become useful in future investigations; on the other hand, the department ensures the files are kept secret:

> *What a relief from responsibility, what a weight off the official mind it would be if half the files in our office could be instantly destroyed. But they cannot be destroyed. And the police are aware of what possible harm might be done – not in the sense, of course, of direct incrimination, but in the damage done to reputations, livelihoods, personal trusts and confidences – if the contents of these files were revealed to the wrong people. We sit in a strong-room of secrets. We are custodians.*[22]

And when during the crucial confrontation Quinn proposes to destroy certain files in order to "preserve" Prentis's father while emphasising that the department's job is the *preserving* of information,[23] Quinn exploits the ambiguity inherent in the act of preserving knowledge, or being a custodian of secrets. It may mean storing them or, on the contrary, preserving them from reaching the public – and the surest way of such preservation is by destruction.

Until the final meeting with Quinn, Prentis's actions in the preceding few months have been driven by a search for truth. His exploration of the tantalisingly incomplete files at work is mirrored by a parallel, obsessive examination of another problematic record: his father's book about his wartime exploits. In an attempt to achieve some communication with his mute father, Prentis scrutinises his story and, having the advantage of professional expertise, detects questionable areas in the account. Quinn corroborates Prentis's suspicion that the files he has been asked to examine pertain to his own father; moreover, Quinn casts further doubt on Prentis senior's supposedly heroic past. A suspicion arises that, rather than bravely resisting his Nazi captors in occupied France and escaping from the Gestapo, the man broke under torture and betrayed his comrades.

In a distant echo of the Ministry of Truth in which Orwell's protagonist Winston Smith works, the system which includes the dead crimes department in Swift's novel is based on the obvious link between knowledge and power. By having access to dark secrets, the archivists have the tools to damage the reputation of the dead and the living; the more knowledge one has, the more power one can wield. But the reverse is true as well: a higher position in the hierarchy gives the individual more knowledge. Quinn embodies not only fatherly attributes, but also the prerogatives of the head of an obscure system of power (there is no indication in the novel if Quinn is subordinate to anyone above him) and even implicit divine powers. These three aspects are of course perfectly compatible.

Prentis correctly senses that by providing him with incomplete files and concealing some information Quinn is playing games with him. His superior's ability to manipulate and perplex Prentis stems from his superior knowledge; as Lea notes, "Quinn's totalitarian leadership of the department is exercised primarily through limiting access to information."[24] It later turns out that Prentis was being tested by Quinn

21 David Malcolm, *Understanding Graham Swift* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 58.

22 Swift, *Shuttlecock*, 16.

23 Swift, *Shuttlecock*, 197.

24 Lea, *Graham Swift*, 53.

and the paradox is that he successfully passes the test by refraining from acquiring complete knowledge of what the archives contain.

Knowledge and power, perceived as inextricably connected, is what Prentis has yearned for all along. Early in his narrative the character confesses:

> *I wanted [Quinn's] job. I wanted to sit in his leather chair. I wanted to look down, like him, through his glass panel, at the underlings I had once worked beside. And yet it seemed (and I still feel this now) that what I wanted was not so much the promotion itself, but to be in a position where I would know; where I would no longer be the victim, the dupe, no longer be in the dark.*[25]

If Quinn's leadership of the department may be described as "totalitarian," then Prentis himself displays an obsessive need to exercise control over others. At home, his wife and two sons are the victims of his tyrannical tendencies, but Prentis also guiltily recollects his childhood pet, the hamster Sammy, whom he used to torture and terrorise, for the sake of enjoying his mastery over the helpless creature. The narrator has enough self-understanding to acknowledge that his pathological behaviours are indirectly related to his ambivalent attitude to his father and his inability to live up to the ideal represented by his parent. As a boy, Prentis used to admire his father but at the same time opposed him, which created a tension-ridden atmosphere of power struggle at home.

Now, when previously unknown facts from the father's past appear available, Prentis has to redefine his attitude to him. Using his position of knowledge and power, Quinn tempts Prentis with the possibility of destroying the father's heroic image. The file which may contain the vital clues needed to connect the disjointed pieces of information from the other accounts is offered to Prentis during their final conversation.

But before he makes his decision, Prentis learns about a third element which accompanies the fusion of power and knowledge. He realises that Quinn's "omnipotence within the department […,] closely tied to his perceived omniscience,"[26] is modified by self-limitation in the ownership of knowledge. Quinn confesses to Prentis that his "little half-baked scheme to save the world"[27] involved the destruction of some of the records he was responsible for storing. Paradoxically, a concealment of the truth from potential victims for the sake of shielding them from harmful knowledge is also represented as exercising power:

> *[…] I believed I could get rid of knowledge on other people's behalf – before it became their knowledge. I used to sit at that desk of mine and think of all those people who – were within my power. I started to take files from the shelves. I started little inquiries of my own – from the reverse end. I started to destroy information. I used to think: here is such and such an individual – just a name in a file – who will now never have to know some ruinous piece of information. He'll never even know his benefactor. I used to think I was actually ridding the world of trouble. Good God. And the motive behind all this – was nothing but the desire for power.*[28]

Quinn does his dubious good deeds in secret, not knowing whether the people concerned would in fact be grateful. The case of Prentis's father also becomes a test case for Quinn. Prentis's decision to stop short of fulfilling his quest for knowledge is

25 Swift, *Shuttlecock*, 71.

26 Lea, *Graham Swift*, 53.

27 Swift, *Shuttlecock*, 181.

28 Swift, *Shuttlecock*, 178.

interpreted by the god-like figure as both a confirmation of the rightness of his own actions and as a testimony to Prentis's suitability for the same position. Prentis has proved that he is capable of curbing his desire for omniscience and omnipotence. Given the dénouement of the narrative, it also seems that this is the moment when he belatedly achieves maturity. As Janik observes, Prentis seeks understanding not only of his father but also of himself.[29] The character's *anagnorisis* is, paradoxically, a recognition that he does not desire full knowledge: "And then suddenly I knew I wanted to be uncertain, I wanted to be in the dark"[30] although the feeling of liberation is normally associated with "the enlightenment brought about in the moments of recognition."[31] Another paradox is that this choice stems from an enhanced understanding of himself, his father and his boss.

Both Ishiguro and Swift foreground epistemological issues in their fiction. Given that they create characters who suffer from the consequences of their limited knowledge, insufficient self-understanding and errors of judgement, *Never Let Me Go* and *Shuttlecock* must be treated as exemplifications of an important caveat on the writers' overall commendation of knowledge. The beneficial effects of Hailsham depend on the students' ignorance of their future; Prentis's continuing attachment to his father and his own final "balance"[32] is determined by his acceptance of uncertainty. Both novels depict situations in which knowledge itself is painful or potentially harmful to oneself and others, and is likely to have no positive influence on anyone's actions. That is why the two novels may be said to make a case for the ethical value of ignorance – under certain conditions. It should at the same time be noted that ignorance does not equal innocence or naiveté; in each story insufficient knowledge is a matter of choice, motivated by the good of others, even if those others have no say in the matter.

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29 Janik, "History and the 'Here and Now,'" 80.

30 Swift, *Shuttlecock*, 199.

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