“Shadowy Objects”

Empathizing with the Posthuman in Kazuo Ishiguro’s Never Let Me Go

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Abstract

This thesis is an exploration of the clones in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* and, most importantly, their proposed humanness. The first part of the thesis establishes the genre of science fiction and its history, dystopias, and posthumanism. After this follows, an exploration of the novel's science fiction elements and its critical reception. The main part of the thesis consists of an analysis of the novel. It is built around three key themes: the clones' status as subhuman in their own fictional world, whether their passivity makes it impossible to consider them truly human, and finally, how the reader is invited to consider the clones as human through empathic sentiment and identification.

The thesis concludes that, though categories of the human are exclusionary by nature, the clones must be considered human. Neither their inability to oppose their fate nor the fact that they were created in a lab mean that they should be labelled differently. The narrative's creation of empathy ultimately plays a large role in truly cementing the clones' humanity.

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Table of Contents

1 Introduction

Never Let Me Go was published in 2005, and quickly became one of the since Nobel Prize-winning Kazuo Ishiguro's most popular novels. The novel's popularity rose, even though it, in many ways, was a departure from Ishiguro's earlier works and instead leant towards the genre of science fiction. The critical and popular reception meant that the novel successfully spawned a film adaptation directed by Mark Romanek in 2010.

Never Let Me Go portrays a dystopian society wherein humans have institutionalized cloning in order to provide body parts for their own medical needs. When they come of age, the clones are stripped of their vital organs which are then used to replace the failing ones of normal humans. This necessarily results in the death of the oppressed clones.

This thesis argues that, despite their creation in a lab, the clones are human beings and should be recognized as more than shadowy objects. To argue this case, I will explore three key themes in my analysis of the novel. First, I will explore the clones' status in their own fictional world and engage with suggested categories of the human in order to see whether any of these categories would include them in their idea of the human. Second, a lack of any inclinations to rebel against their fate has been highlighted as an argument against the clones' humanity. The thesis will explore why the clones remain docile in the face of a certain and premature death, and what this means for their status as humans. Finally, I will investigate how Ishiguro invites the reader to recognize the clones as humans through empathic sentiment and identification. Through these three key themes, which will be explored across three separate chapters, the idea that the clones are human and distinct individuals deserving of rights, should become apparent. Before this, I will explore the novel's generic status and critical reception. My choice of topic is motivated by the fact that the question of humanness is a very urgent ethical issue in connection with the technological advancement of biotechnology and the genre of science fiction, but also in relation to the countless groups of people who have been treated as subhuman throughout our history. In *Never Let Me Go,* Ishiguro provides a very compelling argument for how we should denote humanness and provides especially interesting insights pertaining the virtue of empathy.

In the remainder of this introductory chapter, I aim to cover and examine the genre of science fiction (SF) and its history, as well as theories regarding genre and literature that are relevant for the analysis of *Never Let Me Go* and its depiction of artificial human beings. It is necessary to establish a definition of the genre and its history in order to have a discussion regarding the novel's themes and literary techniques. Likewise, having an overview of relevant theories will ultimately strengthen the analysis of the novel's representation of human nature and dystopian elements.

1.1 Science Fiction - The Problem of Definition

The quest to formulate a decisive and unified definition of science fiction became a challenge for early scholars of the genre. As Rob Latham notes,

> The problem for science fiction studies for much of its early history as an academic discipline essentially involved determining the nature and boundaries of its putative object, deciding what counts as science fiction (SF). (Latham 2014, 1)

Whether they should give precedence to, for instance, setting and characters or formal characteristics, were just some of the questions science fiction scholars had to account for, and this inevitably led to much disagreement. In the process of legitimizing the academic studies of science fiction, a theoretical framework nevertheless became necessary. But the search for a conclusive definition of science fiction either goes on or has been abandoned completely, depending on the approach and the scholar, which unfortunately means that there is still no one clear-cut definition of the genre.

Some attempts at formulating a definition have nevertheless had greater influence than others. Darko Suvin's definition in *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction* (1979) was very influential during the early decades of the theorizing of the genre, and it was even, by many, regarded as definitive. He argued that science fiction is "a literary genre whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition", and this estrangement was chiefly to be achieved through "a fictional 'novum' (novelty, innovation) validated by cognitive logic" (Latham 2014, 2). In other words, science fiction literature's objective was to create a sense of estrangement, presenting readers with ordinary things in an unfamiliar way in order to challenge their usual assumptions of reality (Nodelman 1981, 24). In this way it would provide readers with a critical perspective on their own reality, which

should be achieved through the presence of fictional innovations (novum). However, the novum of any given SF novel had to adhere to logic. Otherwise, it would be magical and fantastical rather than logical, and make science fiction indistinguishable from the genre of fantasy, of which Suvin was notoriously dismissive (Bould & Vint 2011, 17). Yet, he was critical of those who claimed science fiction had to conform to "a real possibility", meaning "that which is possible in the author's reality". Instead he favoured "ideal possibility", that is "any conceptual or thinkable possibility the premises and/or consequences of which are not internally contradictory" (Bould & Vint 2011, 18). The latter is vastly more enabling when it comes to the scientific concepts and novums that can appear within the genre of science fiction. It needs to be mentioned, however, that according to Suvin, it would be foolish to talk about every story with new technology as SF. In order to truly be science fiction, the novum had to be "so central that it determines the whole narrative" (Bould & Vint 2011, 18).

Its compelling vision of SF no doubt helped make Suvin's definition so influential. He presented the genre as "a literary form that functioned to defamiliarize, critique and/or satirize present-day reality through the projection of alternative worlds" (Latham 2014, 2). The definition moved the debates away from plot and setting by stressing formal characteristics, mainly estrangement and novum, but also SF's political potential inherent in the ability to criticise and satirize our own world by presenting alternatives. Its undeniable importance and early influence aside, Suvin's definition is neither without its faults nor critics. Perhaps the most common criticism that his definition has received, is that it is far too narrow. For instance, Jules Verne's works, which includes *Journey to the Centre of the Earth* (1864), regarded by many as a landmark in the genre, are deemed unworthy of the science fiction label by Suvin. He argues that Verne imitates real science fiction "but lacks its critical and socially transformative vision" (Bould & Vint 2011, 17). To have any scientific value there must be some limits to and some understanding of what actually counts as science fiction, but it becomes problematic when a definition of science fiction rules out most of the works published under the label (Latham 2014, 2).

Contemporary science-fiction scholars have mostly moved away from Suvin's definition. Though Suvin's influence remains apparent, particularly regarding the emphasis on an estranging novum linked to technological development (Latham 2014, 5), other aspects are now less readily accepted by scholars. In the 1990s, *Science Fiction Studies*, an academic journal, modified Suvin's definition by opening up for a broader canon, as well as by

disregarding his insistence that SF had to be critical, while retaining an emphasis on the centrality of the estranging novum (Latham 2014, 5). Nevertheless, many competing perspectives remain on what science fiction is, and as texts and theory continue to shape each other, these divisions appear likely to continue (Bould & Vint 2011, 17). Any proposed definition of SF seems to betray an investment in a certain field of interest within the genre. This bias is exemplified by Suvin, who as a Marxist was predominantly interested in the social and political aims he saw at the core of the genre. Thus, science fiction scholars generally struggle to reach an agreement on what the genre entails.

Whereas the problem for science-fiction criticism initially was to decide what counted as SF, the question now has rather become *what does not* count as science fiction (Latham 2014, 5). Science fiction's scope and influence have never been greater than in recent years. In addition to its countless sub-genres, the influence of SF can today be seen across a vast variety of media and even in other genres. "Its images, ideas and techniques are commonly now found outside of traditional venues", while SF writers "draw increasingly on other genres, including literary fiction," Mark Bould and Sherryl Vint note (2011, 202). Thus, literary developments have meant that aspects that previously were unique to science fiction, have started to appear elsewhere. Inevitably, the boundaries between the genres now oscillate. Furthermore, the technological advances we have experienced today mean that much of what was science fiction fifty years ago, now has become reality. Characteristics that traditionally belonged to science fiction, are used by all types of literature to portray the society that has emerged, and the challenges that comes with it. In light of this, Csicsery-Ronay argues that SF has moved beyond art and literature to become less of a genre "than a way of thinking about the world" (2014, 6). In similar ways, these recent developments have led many critics to argue that, for better or worse, science fiction is disappearing, "its images diffusing into contemporary culture and the boundaries that once kept it 'pure' and 'separate' eroding" (Bould & Vint 2011, 182). However, it must be noted that massive franchises and texts across film, literature and videogames, to mention a few, are still marketed as and engaged with as science fiction. Therefore, although vague, there exists an understanding among the public of what science fiction is. Ultimately, the term might be more useful as a marketing tool than a precise instrument for literary criticism. There is no *one* such thing as science fiction, instead it is a collection of characteristics and elements that are seen as science fictional and that are continuously being negotiated in a mutual relationship and dialogue between critics, texts and readers.

As there are so many competing perspectives, detailing *the* definition of science fiction is impossible. However, though there is a sound argument to be made that there is no such thing as SF, for the intents and purposes of this thesis, I will appropriate Suvin's definition, but allow a few modifications. As with the definition detailed in the *Science Fiction Studies* journal, I will retain Suvin's emphasis on the importance of an estranging novum but distance the definition from his narrow canon and the demand that SF has to be critical. The requirement of an estranging novum, a technical innovation that differentiates the fictional world from ours, would seem a crucial denominator across every understanding of the genre. It is the most crucial element in determining sci-fi-ness.

1.2 Histories of Genre

Today, Science Fiction is a widely known and popular genre across countless different media. However, behind the genre as it is encountered today lies a rich history. As its history is long and ever-evolving, and due to the difficulties scholars have in finding a conclusive agreement about what the label of science fiction entails, this summary, while retaining some of the major and general generic changes, will be focused mostly on developments and sub-genres that are relevant to Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go.* As with a definition of the genre, any selected snippet of history necessarily betrays a field of interest. The genre, and its history, is simply too vast and complicated for it to be condensed down to a few pages. Furthermore, both the history and the definition of the genre are continuous processes, never stagnant or fixed.

To start at the beginning, there is some disagreement among scholars as to when science fiction first appeared. Though the term is first recorded in 1851 by William Wilson, it was not until the 1930s that it became widely used (Bould & Vint 2011, 1-2). This was in no small part due to Hugo Gernsback, who after losing control of the SF pulp magazine *Amazing Stories* in 1929, used the term "science fiction" to describe the stories printed in a rival magazine that he established (Bould & Vint 2011, pp.1-2). Thus, the term and the idea of science fiction as a distinct genre entered the public sphere. Features that are deemed fundamental to SF today, however, can be traced much further back in time than Gernsback and Wilson. Some scholars look as far back as to the "speculative literature and myths of Ancient Greece" (Evans 2014, 50) and the dystopian cities of the Bible, such as Sodom and Gomorrah. That science fiction-like traditions existed long before the genre of SF was

established, therefore, appears evident. Though both Biblical and mythical texts have certain aspects in common with SF, without being entirely SF, texts that would seem to be truly science fictional also existed before the turn of the 20th century. Regardless of Suvin's dismissal of his works as SF, Jules Verne has, together with H. G. Wells, commonly been called the "fathers" of SF (Evans 2014, 50). This is so despite the fact that Verne's most influential novels were written and released before the term science fiction was invented. Furthermore, in the 1970s, Brian Aldis suggested that Mary Shelley's 1818 novel *Frankenstein* was "the original urtext for all SF" (Evans 2014, 50). Similarly, in the Nordic countries, we have Ludvig Holberg's *Nils Klims reise til den underjordiske verden* (Niel's Klims Underground Travels), which was released in 1741 and is considered the first Nordic SF novel. Thus, concluding that SF originated around 1880, creates a narrow image of an infinitely more complex history.

Some SF scholars have questioned whether texts can be considered science fiction if they were written before the concept of the genre existed. Among them are Mark Bould and Sherryl Vint, who admit that there were SF-like traditions before the 20th century, but nevertheless argue that "it is problematic to label any of these texts – or the traditions they exemplify – as 'SF' since it is only as the name and idea of the genre were introduced that actants began, retrospectively and inconsistently, to understand them as belonging, at least potentially, to SF" (2011, 35). Undoubtedly, traditions have varied over time, and so have the contexts in which these texts were written and understood. The context for contemporary readers of these pre-20th-century texts are obviously vastly different after the introduction of SF, since that allows the readers to read the texts as SF, with certain genre expectations. However, it is reductive, and to value the intent of the author over the reader's interpretation, to deny contemporary readers the possibility of interpreting a text as SF because of a lack of conscious intent from the author. Authors who wrote the texts before the fixed name of the genre even existed, obviously had no means to knowingly produce a text as SF as we know it today. Though it is a tendency in some strands of literary theory and among certain scholars to place emphasis on the author's intent, other critics stress interpretation. So, even though the genre was named and established between the late 19th and early 20th century, science fictional literature has existed in one form or another since long before then.

In order to explore the genre's history of engaging with themes of what it means to be human, I will look at one of these texts that were written before the genre was firmly established: *Frankenstein; or, the Modern Prometheus*. The gothic, the literary period in which the novel is prescribed, is in itself a sort of precursor to science fiction. Both genres share an interest in "interrogating the limits of the human" as "The haunted and the haunter, and the robot and its inventor, share alike the quality of a human identity tested, observed, and ultimately valorized through empathy and identification" (Hughes 2014, 463). Portraying "the Other", in both the gothic and SF, is thus often a tool used to explore what it means to be human. This is particularly true in the case of *Frankenstein*, which can be said to tie the literary period and the genre of science fiction together. The emphasis on science differentiates *Frankenstein* from earlier gothic works. It has an estranging novum in the form of a creature that is based on medical science, not the supernatural. Therefore, it is as much a work of science fiction as it is of the gothic, and the presence of a novum based on science is one of the main reasons why many argue that it is the first SF novel. Thus, the themes of exploring "the limits of being human" can be traced back to the very start of the genre and have remained a prevalent feature in SF ever since. Some works that have explored similar themes in more recent history includes: *Blade Runner 2049* (Villeneuve 2017), *Ex Machina* (Garland 2014), and *Westworld* (Joy & Nolan 2016-).

1.3 Dystopia

Dystopian fiction is a relatively recent invention, having "first emerged as a literary form in its own right in the early 1900s" (Brooke 2012, 129), but it now has a strong history within science fiction. Prior to the introduction of dystopias, utopian fiction had already been an established literary convention. "Utopia" comes from Greek, meaning "no-place", and was first used by Thomas More in his novel *Utopia* (1516). Dystopian literature established itself in opposition to this utopian tradition and is often defined in conjunction with the latter. Whereas utopian fiction details and searches for an ideal future society, dystopias warn of the dangers inherent in such societies, especially pertaining to the individual and its individuality. M. Keith Booker defines dystopian literature as:

> Dystopian literature is specifically that literature which situates itself in direct opposition to utopian thought, warning against the potential negative consequences of arrant utopianism. At the same time, dystopian literature generally also constitutes a critique of existing social conditions or political

> systems, either through the critical examination of the utopian premises upon which those conditions and systems are based or through the imaginative extension of those conditions and systems into different contexts that more clearly reveal their flaws and contradictions. (1994, 3)

In this definition, dystopia is not so much a specific genre as a particular kind of critical and oppositional energy or spirit (Booker 1994, 3). This is a spirit that can be present even though the text as a whole might not be considered 'traditionally dystopian', and it is, I will argue, present in *Never Let Me Go.* However, Booker's definition has certain flaws. This is particularly so for its dependence on utopias as the other of which dystopia can be defined in opposition to. Lyman Tower Sargent points out that "dystopianism is more than an anti-utopian impulse" and that it is a literary exercise separate from utopianism (Brooke 2012, 132). He thus argues that Booker creates a narrow image of dystopia as utterly dependent on utopias. Nevertheless, Booker's definition of dystopia is widely regarded and functional, and furthermore includes the most important aspects of the term. Notably, he stresses the intent of warning against the dangers in potential future societies, which often are based on contemporary developments or difficulties. I will therefore rely on this definition in my thesis.

1.4 Posthumanism

As a critical and theoretical methodology, posthumanism is highly relevant for the analysis of *Never Let Me Go.* It is a field that is occupied with several of the novel's major themes. "Post-human SF deals with the next stages in human development", Tony Ballantyne observes (2012, 174). It questions what comes after the human as we know it today. The category of the post-human can refer to a wide range of beings that are presented as the "Other" or which the category of "human" can be mirrored and defined against. This can include cyborgs, artificial intelligence, monsters and much more, but, and principally relevant for this thesis, also clones. Large sections of the science fiction genre, in the process of exploring "the post", attempt to explore and question what it means to be human. By exploring this subject matter, they often discover that the idea of the "human" is flawed, and that isolating the "human" from the Other becomes impossible.

Traditionally, the human has been defined as a "subject (one who is conscious of his/her self) marked by rational thinking/intelligence, who is able to plot his/her own course of action depending on his/her needs, desires and wishes" (Nayar 2014, 5). However,

throughout history there are many instances and examples of people who have been treated as subhuman, whether due to gender, ethnicity, religion or otherwise. In a traditional sense, therefore, the human has been presented as white and male. Additionally, the human has been seen as universal, dominant and as separate from other species. Posthumanism rejects these ideas. Rather than having developed independently, as the centre of all things, all human "abilities, qualities, consciousness and features are evolving in conjunction with other lifeforms, technology and ecosystems" (Nayar 2014, 5). This is similarly accentuated by Donna Haraway, who argues that the human is not based on the exclusion of the Other, but instead "is inextricably always … linked to, dependent upon, and supportive of the Other (2008, 4). Thus, posthumanists argue that the belief that humans are unique, dominant and exceptional to other species is wrong, and instead emphasise the evolutionary interdependence of species. As Haraway puts it, "to be one is always to become with many" (2008, 4).

The next step of human evolution can potentially take many forms. In science fiction, there are predominantly two registers behind the development of posthuman beings: biological and technological. The former entails beings who have evolved from humans over time, through drastic physiological changes, while the latter, posthuman in a technological sense, focuses on "the synthetic, engineered successors of humanity" (Milburn 2014, 524). Frankenstein's creature is therefore an example of a posthuman based on technology as it was created in a lab, not a result of evolution. In a similar vein, Haraway sees technology as something "that has the emancipatory powers to free humanity from rigid categories", such as gender, racial identities and more (1991). Nonetheless, the posthuman remains a vast category. R2-D2 from *Star Wars* is an example of a being that is arguably posthuman. Despite being a box-like construction of metal and unable to speak, R2 shows "bravery, rebellion and cheek" (Ballantyne 2012, 184), very human characteristics that make him recognizably human, in fact, maybe too human in some instances. He is not free from the rigid categories outlined by Haraway, seeing as he has even been given a gender. As such, it can be argued that he is posthuman in a physical sense but remains human in many other ways.

The final aspect of posthumanism presented here, is the belief that human nature is a social construct. Posthumanist scholars argue that "nothing is innate to the human", rather the qualities we deem to signify humanness have developed over the centuries through our interactions with the environment (Nayar 2014, 11). Therefore, posthuman beings are used in

many literary works to explore our constructed criteria for humanness, or, our beliefs of what it means to be human. Often, social constructs of humanness will clash, for instance when an alien species, or a human-made creature, share vital traits of humanness, but are treated as subhuman or are completely different in other areas. When done well, it forces readers to question their own views regarding what it means to be human, and potentially exposes human nature as a social construct. Posthumanist writers are often concerned with exposing these constructs and with ending the notion of the human as distinct and self-contained. By doing so, they prepare the ground for a new form of the human to emerge, the posthuman (Nayar 2014, 29).

2 Story, Reception and Genre

In this second chapter, I will commence on the analysis that will constitute the major portion of this thesis: a study of Kazuo Ishiguro's novel *Never Let Me Go*, with particular emphasis on its contribution to the debate on human essence. The overall analysis will mainly be split into three major themes: first, I will apply theories of the human to the clones and examine their position in Ishiguro's fictional world and whether they can be considered human; second, I will examine what makes them docile and unable to rebel; and, finally, I will discuss how the novel invites the reader to regard them as human. Before I engage with these themes, however, I will examine the critical reception the novel received on its publication, whether it can be classified as science fiction or not, and briefly present some of the central components of the story.

2.1 Plot and Characters

The novel opens with an introduction from its main character and narrator Kathy H, who presents herself as a 31-year-old "carer", an occupation she has held for 11 years (Ishiguro 2005, 3).[1] Although Kathy's narration is nonlinear, the novel is divided into three main parts: The students' early years at Hailsham, their time at the Cottages and, lastly, Kathy's time as a carer. After a brief, initial introduction, the action moves to Hailsham, a school where Kathy spent her childhood years. Especially the early years at Hailsham are idyllic, but there are several elements that differentiate the students' lives from ours. Several strange terms, customs, and, not the least, complete isolation from the outside world raise questions regarding the true function of Hailsham. Eventually, it is revealed that the students are clones, created to become involuntary organ donors for "normals" and, as a result, die as they are stripped of their vital organs (80).

Kathy's time at Hailsham is spent mostly in the company of Ruth and Tommy. Tommy is a bit of an outcast early on, he is teased and bullied by the other students for not putting enough effort into his art projects, a vital part of the daily life at Hailsham. His response to the bullying is to throw tantrums that further ostracize him in the eyes of the other students. However, Kathy ends up befriending him and he eventually learns to control his temper. Ruth, on the other hand, can be both commanding and manipulative. She and Kathy

[1] When referring to the primary text, *Never Let Me Go* (2005), I will only give page references.

have several falling outs throughout the novel, but despite this, consider the other their closest friend (126). To many students' surprise, Ruth and Tommy become a couple during their later years at Hailsham.

After their time at Hailsham, the students are moved to other allocated institutions, but the main trio of Kathy, Tommy and Ruth are sent to the same location, the Cottages. The freedom and accommodations they receive at the Cottages closely resemble those commonly associated with a regular college life. Here they spend two years while they prepare to become carers, a profession all clones are required to perform before they eventually become donors. A carer is a person who takes care of their assigned donors and makes sure they don't become agitated. At the Cottages, the students from Hailsham live with clones that come from numerous different institutions. As a result, they learn that growing up at Hailsham is seen as a privilege by the other clones, who have grown up in infinitely more deplorable conditions. However, during the last year at the Cottages the trio of Kathy, Tommy and Ruth increasingly drift apart. This makes Kathy decide to end her stay at the Cottages prematurely and instead begin her career as a carer before she has to.

In the third and final part of the novel, Kathy has already worked as a carer for several years. After learning of Ruth's struggles to recover after her first donation, Kathy decides to become Ruth's carer. The two initially struggle to reconnect, but after a road trip on which they also invite Tommy, the trio become close friends again. During the road trip, Ruth apologizes for keeping Kathy and Tommy apart, claiming: "It should have been you two" (228). Now, however, she makes them promise that the two of them together will try to get a deferral. In asking this from them, she refers to a rumor that couples from Hailsham can postpone their donations if they can provide proof of true love. When Ruth dies after her second donation, Kathy pulls some strings to become Tommy's carer. The two become a couple, acknowledging that they should have become so sooner, and begin the preparations to get their deferral. The deferral turns out to be a false rumor, however. Instead, they learn that Hailsham was created by people who wanted to give the clones a more humane upbringing, but the attempt ultimately failed and the school has now been closed. They return to their daily routines, but as Tommy draws closer to his final donation, he asks for another carer because he does not want Kathy to see him during the final phase (275). As the novel ends,

Kathy has learned of Tommy's death and knows that she will soon become a donor herself. She is looking out over a field in Norfolk, imagining that everything she had ever lost is washed up there and that, if she but waits long enough, Tommy will appear too (282).

2.2 Critical Reception

To study how the novel was received upon its release, I have chosen to look more closely at a handful of substantial reviews collected from different sources. According to Robert Dale Parker, reception studies is "studying the horizon of expectations that surrounds a literary work" (2008, 344). The selected reviews range from academic journals, represented by James Bowman for *The New Atlantis,* Frank Kermode for the *London Review of Books,* and Daniel Vorhaus for *The American Journal of Bioethics,* to the British newspapers *The Guardian* and *The Independent*, whose reviews were written by Michael John Harris and Andrew Barrow respectively. Sarah Kerr's and Louis Menand's reviews for *The New York Times* and *The New Yorker* have also been included.

Never Let Me Go is Kazuo Ishiguro's eighth novel and was published in 2005 to praise and acclaim from most critics. In the selected reviews, the novel received generally positive responses, especially in the British broadsheets. Harrison writes that the novel is "extraordinary and frighteningly clever" (2005), while Barrow hails Ishiguro as a "master storyteller in a class of his own" (2005). However, as could be expected, the novel is not universally praised. This is also reflected in this selection of reviews. Frank Kermode is especially critical and writes that the novel is a failure "by the standards Ishiguro has set himself" (2005). In particular, he blames this on Ishiguro's choice of writing style, which he labels as "dear-diary prose" and deems to be less interesting than the prose in the author's earlier works (Kermode, 2005). Nonetheless, while opinions naturally differ, the general response that can be derived from this selection of reviews must be considered positive.

Something that becomes apparent through these reviews, is the variation in the reviewers' field of interests. In short, they tend to focus on entirely different aspects of the novel. Most touch upon the romance and Kathy's narrative voice, but apart from that, what is seen as the novel's most important features vary greatly. Louis Menand mostly emphasizes how the novel, despite its bleak subject matter, is weirdly humorous, an effect he credits to the way in which "real people act like wind-up toys" (2005). Sarah Kerr argues that Ishiguro's

intention with the novel is to capture that which is unmistakably human (2005). Daniel Vorhaus, while acknowledging the theme of human essence, claims that the novel at its core "is a love story" (2007, 99). These arguments and reviews are not inherently wrong, or even contradictory for that matter. I think they do tell us, however, that the novel lends itself to a plethora of different readings.

Furthermore, having been a successful writer for over a decade at the time of *Never Let Me Go's* publication, there are necessarily also many expectations towards Ishiguro's authorship. These expectations are particularly palpable in Barrow's and Kermode's reviews. The former spends a lot of time pointing out the similarities between *Never Let Me Go's* and Ishiguro's earlier works. He lists stylistic and thematic similarities, and compares the novel to *The Remains of the Day* (1989) and *When We Were Orphans* (2000). "Over-simplicity and sly flash-forwards" are among the traits he considers to be trademarks of Ishiguro, and that appear in *Never Let Me Go*, thus agreeing with what he has come to expect from an Ishiguro novel (Barrow, 2005). Frank Kermode is equally concerned with Ishiguro's bibliography in his review. Instead of locating similarities, however, he demonstrates how Ishiguro's earlier novels succeeded where, he argues, *Never Let Me Go* fails. Whereas he claims Ishiguro previously evoked a Kafkaesque and dreamlike effect through his style of writing, he considers the writing in *Never Let Me Go* dull (2005). Through their reviews, they both give the impression that their expectations towards the novel, particularly to its author, have informed their reading to some extent.

2.2.1 Genre Expectations

An interesting commonality between most of the reviews, however, is a tendency to either undermine or criticize the science-fiction elements of the novel. This, I believe, is connected with genre expectations. Or, to be more precise, with a clash between the set of expectations towards the genre of science fiction and towards Ishiguro as a more literary writer. Kerr, in her review, wonders whether "one of our subtlest observers" have gone pulp by transitioning to science fiction, but concludes that Ishiguro's intentions must have been more literary (2005). Menand, meanwhile, goes as far as to argue that certain key scenes push *Never Let Me Go* "over into science fiction", almost accidentally, and that "this is not, at heart, where it

seems to want to be" (2005). Both reviewers express initial confusion about the fact that *Never Let Me Go* contains traditional science fiction features and Menand even goes far in assuming that this is unintentional from Ishiguro.

The genre continues to be an important issue in Bowman's review. He is generally less enthusiastic about the novel than some of his colleagues, and claims that "Ishiguro admits defeat", in terms of his dystopian vision, by setting the novel in the past, the 1990s (2006, 108). This, he argues, makes it less of a warning for the future and instead firmly roots the novel as a fantasy and/or dream (2006, 108). Nevertheless, the choice of placing the setting of the novel in the 1990s does not inherently rescind any dystopian warning. Rather, as noted by Amit Marcus, "This transgression from the norms of science fiction highlights the anxiety of authors over the possibility that human cloning can be—or has already been—clandestinely practiced by some recalcitrant scientists" (2012, 406). It adds a sense of urgency and relevance to the warning, rather than rendering it void.

In a similar vein, Barrow and Harrison share an insistence that the novel is not SF and that it, in fact, "is not about clones and cloning at all" (Harrison, 2005). Thereby they in effect undermine the novel's science-fiction aspects. They do not present this as critique, however, but rather praise Ishiguro for using SF conventions to write a novel that, in their eyes, has nothing to do with science fiction. Interestingly, The British Science Fiction Association viewed the matter differently, and *Never Let Me Go* was in 2006 shortlisted for the Arthur C. Clarke Award, an annual award given to the best SF novel. What this makes clear, is that at the time of its release, the horizons of expectations that surrounded *Never Let Me Go* were at odds with each other in some instances. For some critics, the different expectations, particularly towards an Ishiguro novel and a science fiction novel, were incompatible. Part of the strength of *Never Let Me Go,* though, is that it is both. It is a personal science fiction narrative about clones that raises moral and ethical questions about the practice of cloning. But it is also a text about racism and other discriminatory practices, and about the innocence of childhood, that retains Ishiguro's most notable literary concerns despite leaning towards a new genre.

2.3 Science Fiction and Dystopian Characteristics

In light of some of the questions regarding genre that were raised by the reviews in the previous subchapter, I will now argue, based on the definition of the genre that was established in chapter 1, that *Never Let Me Go* indeed is science fiction.

Even though I will argue that the novel is SF, there is no denying that it deviates from the norm, both as a dystopia and a science fiction novel. First and foremost, Ishiguro is not concerned with the science of this literary world and the reader is never given any insight as to how exactly the clones are made, other than the fact that they are created. The one comment that could be made to refer to the creation of the clones, comes from Miss Emily: "…that's largely all you were to most people. Shadowy objects in test tubes" (256). However, it is unclear whether this is supposed to be the public's factual observation of their creation, that the clones were created in test tubes, or a more rhetorical device. In many ways, this proves the point of Ishiguro's lack of emphasis on the science of the clone's creation. It is not important how it actually works, but how the public choose to view it. For some, this lack of emphasis on the actual technology is enough to claim that the novel isn't science fiction. Instead, they have classified it with cumbersome labels such as "Quasi Science Fiction" or "science fiction without the technology" (Shaddox 2013, 449).

A further discrepancy in relation to the SF genre comes from the fact that *Never Let Me Go* initially is very subtle in its sci-fi-ness. From very early on in the novel, Ishiguro creates a sense of estrangement through the use of terms, as well as customs and habits that are unfamiliar to the reader, but the full confirmation of the students' origin and purpose does not come until much later. In fact, it is not until page 80 that Miss Lucy reveals both that the students were artificially created and the truth regarding the donations (80). This appearance of the ordinary is further reinforced by the novel's setting. Peter Stockwell writes that "while it is hard to find one single unifying aesthetic, the genre's key feature is awe-some-ness, a sense of wonder" (2014, 35). This is a description that remains a far cry from the English countryside and the idyllic boarding school aesthetic of Hailsham, with its duck pond and rhubarb patch (25). Rather, though the settings oftentimes appear forlorn, especially in the latter half of the book, the novel's general aesthetic appears quite ordinary. The most exotic setting, as described by the students, is an office building they admire during their trip to Norfolk (156-157). Although this might seem to be going against classifying the novel as SF,

its slow unveiling of science-fiction elements and instantly recognizable setting strengthens the sense of wonder and estrangement derived from the novel's plot. According to Tony Ballantyne, "Everything is more posthuman when seen in contrast to the everyday life on earth" (2012, 174). Every little difference in the students' lives becomes that much stranger by their proximity to our own experiences and shared locations.

What truly cements the novel's position as science fiction, however, is the presence of the students. The narrative is explicitly about clones. Ishiguro himself describes his reasons for moving towards SF as follows: "If you happen to actually live in a country that you think won't actually provide a broad enough setting to address what you see as the really crucial issues of the age, that inevitably means you start moving away from straight realism" (Goh 2011, 45). To engage with the themes he desired, it was necessary to create a science-fiction setting. As noted in chapter 1, SF has increasingly "moved away from the fringes" to also influence writers who traditionally did not write SF (Goh 2011, 46). The novel's focus on the clones, instead of on the technology that created them, emphasizes ethical and moral questions over technological ones (Whitehead 2011, 61), but it does not make the novel any less SF. The presence of an estranging novum is the key feature that science fiction shares, and thus would seem to be its most central qualifier. The technological innovation that functions as *Never Let Me Go*'s estranging novum, mankind's ability to create clones, may be conspicuously absent throughout the narrative but remains the basis for the estranging effect. Ishiguro achieves this estranging effect not due to the fact that the main characters are clones, but because of the way they are treated on the background of being clones. The estranging novum is so central to the novel that it determines the whole narrative, not by its presence in itself, but because it fully informs the lives of all the clones who are treated as lesser beings solely based on the fact that they were artificially created.

Correspondingly, though the novel also deviates from many norms of dystopian literature, it retains a dystopian spirit. In many ways, it closely resembles clone narratives, a subgenre of science fiction (Marcus 2012, 406), but the aspect that differentiates it from most such narratives, and the overarching genre of dystopias, is the absence of any form of rebellion towards the dystopian systems. The individuals in *Never Let Me Go,* even though they go through a transformation from innocence to increased knowledge (Stacy 2015, 238),

never attempt to escape or otherwise thwart their fate. I will delve more into this later, but for now, it is enough to note that this passivity is a break from dystopian norms, where individuality typically is associated with resistance (Mullan 2009, 106).

Despite this deviation, *Never Let Me Go* still displays the dystopian spirit in warning of arrant utopianism. A key feature in dystopias is the tension in how close it can be to utopianism and vice versa. The novel portrays a society which from certain angles could appear utopian because people can use technology to ensure that their loved ones have extended lives and remove the threat of most lethal diseases. However, it comes at a high price, and it is through the focus on the moral and ethical atrocities that make the perceived utopia possible that the society is unveiled as dystopian. Ishiguro portrays a bleak alternate society that implores readers to avoid making the same mistakes that are on display in the novel. The setting in time in fact further strengthens the novel's dystopian spirit. It does not eradicate the essential dystopian warning by placing the dystopian society in the past, as Bowman claims in his review (2006, 108). As Marcus has argued, the setting instead succeeds in creating a sense of urgency (2012, 406). Ishiguro creates this sense of urgency by showcasing just how close we are to, or how narrowly we have avoided becoming, a society like the one portrayed in the novel. The necessary technology is available, maybe not on a similar scale to what is performed in the novel, but cloning has successfully been performed on farm animals. The familiar world and time period therefore introduce an urgency to the novel's warning that its readers' must ensure that a similar situation will never come to pass in our own reality. As such, the novel clearly inhabits a dystopian spirit in its warning against "the dehumanized normalization of the ethical atrocities biotech may prove capable of" (Tsao 2012, 220).

3 Defining Humanness

One of the major themes of *Never Let Me Go* is the question of human essence, or which abilities a being must exhibit to be considered human. This theme will also be my main focus in this analysis. My analysis will be divided across three chapters in which I attempt to establish that the clones are indeed human and examine how the novel invites the reader to view them as such. First, in this third chapter, I will study how the clones are viewed in the fictional society they inhabit, and apply theories of the human to see whether these would include the clones in their proposed category of the human. Secondly, in Chapter Four, I will question why the clones do not escape or in any way rebel against their oppressors and what this means to their suggested status as human beings. And, finally, in Chapter Five, I will explore exactly how the novel champions the view that the clones are human.

3.1 Notions of the Human

In *Never Let Me Go*, society is built upon a discriminatory system where "normals", those biologically born, exist as superior to the artificially created, but otherwise identical, clones. The clones exist as the subhuman to the normals' human. This is a circumstance mirrored in every stage of the clones' existence. Kathy and her friends are raised at Hailsham in isolation from other children and from the outside world that views them as nonhuman (Whitehead 2011, 65). Their brief adulthood is similarly spent removed from the world at large. They become deprived of their right to personhood, shunned and raised in isolation as they are, and their existence is perpetuated only so they can be used as spare parts for any ordinary human who might require it. Their lives are reduced to that of experimental animals, and there are several dark allegories that point out the similarity to animal husbandry. For instance, after leaving Hailsham the clones end up at the Cottages. This accommodation has been converted from an old farm, and in its current condition is virtually falling apart (114). They are thus literally living in barns and stables. Furthermore, early in the novel, when Ruth and Kathy discuss one of Tommy's recent tantrums, Ruth calls him a "mad animal" (12). The significance of this slur is more apparent on a second reading, when the mystery regarding the students has been revealed and also just how similar their future will be to that of farm

animals. They will be reared in captivity until they reach maturity, and then harvested for parts with a lethal outcome. The clones' status as subhuman beings in their own fictional world is therefore quite obvious.

However, even those who are supportive of the clones' rights, struggle to see them as equal and human. While at Hailsham, Kathy and Ruth are taken aback by Madame's reaction to the students: "she was afraid of us in the same way someone might be afraid of spiders" (35). Later it is revealed by Miss Emily that, in fact, all the guardians, not just Madame, feel repulsed by the students: "We're *all* afraid of you. I myself had to fight back my dread of you all almost every day" (264). What exactly it is that makes even the guardians, who belong to a group of people dedicated to giving the clones better lives, so fearful of their students, is not explained. It could be a number of different things, such as a fear of a potential future where superior artificially created humans have removed ordinary people from the top of the hierarchy, or simply stem from the knowledge that the clones are, at some level no matter how minuscule, different. On account of the fact that this is the sentiment even among the guardians, the fundamental fear of the clones and the view that they are inferior to normals seem to be entrenched in every level of society.

This point is particularly interesting considering that there is no visual distinction between the clones and ordinary people. According to John David Schwetman, "the lack of markedness" between clones and normals should work against the normalization and acceptance of discriminatory practices towards the clones (433, 2017). Yet, in *Never Let Me Go*, this is not the case. People continue to shudder at the very sight of the clones, in spite of the fact that they are indistinguishable from ordinary humans. But, in the sole instance when the clones interact with a normal person outside any of their institutions, who therefore have no knowledge of their origin, they are treated as equals. When visiting an art gallery in Norfolk, Kathy and her friends' seeming interest in art excites the owner, an elderly lady who is thrilled to have an audience and happily gives a lecture on several of the paintings (161). With no prior knowledge of their background, the lady has no way of telling exactly what her visitors are or reason to believe that they are different. It is the knowledge of their difference that makes the discrimination of the clones possible, as seen in the example of the visit to Norfolk. If a normal has no prior knowledge of the differences that the clones represent, they might as well have been the same.

That is how the clones are viewed in their own fictional world, but I will also attempt to consider how real-life theories of the human would label them. As noted in Chapter One, the human has traditionally been defined as a "subject (one who is conscious of his/her self) marked by rational thinking/intelligence, who is able to plot his/her own course of action depending on his/her needs, desires and wishes" (Nayar 2014, 5). The clones are as human as any when it comes to the first part, "marked by rational thinking/intelligence", but, to a large extent, are not able to follow their own needs, desires or wishes, and would thus appear to be something different than human by this definition. This would also be true of the countless groups of people throughout our history who have faced oppression, been held in captivity or who differ from the majority, and, as a result, have been excluded from the category of the human. It is not a lacking inherent quality in the clones that makes them unable to act, thus excluding them from this definition of the human, but rather a number of fundamental rights that have been denied them. However, this is but one of countless constructed images of the human that have been rejected by many, including posthumanists.

The clone's status can be linked to Giorgio Agamben's theory of the *homo sacer*, "or the identity of one whose entire existence is reduced to a bare life stripped of every right by virtue of the fact that anyone can kill him without committing homicide" (Black 2009, 789). Even though the penalty for killing a clone is never discussed in the novel, the clones are taught from an early age that any form of injury to their bodies is a disaster. The guardians emphasize that the students cannot smoke and that they must be careful to avoid damaging their organs in any other way (68). This is not because of the gravity of any damage done to a clone in itself, but because this would be to damage someone else's property, their potential future organs. Thus, there is a clear connection between the clones and Agamben's *homo sacer*. They are both denied any semblance of individual worth and, therefore, their loss of life or limbs would be far less noteworthy than that of any ordinary humans. To categorize the clones as *homo sacer* rather than human, however, is problematic. I would argue that one such categorization is not inherently about the clones themselves, but how they are treated by the normals. As with the traditional view of the human, to shape the distinction between human or nonhuman on the basis of whether a being is currently receiving basic rights, is exclusionary and highly suspect. One such distinction would enable people to deny others personhood or humanity solely by the virtue of them being stripped of their basic rights, and, vice versa, give someone the opportunity to strip someone else of their rights in order to deny them humanness. So, even though there are parallels between the way the clones are treated

and the loss of individual worth connected with Agamben's *homo sacer*, to label a being as *homo sacer* is problematic in that it categorizes them as subhuman on the basis of the way they are treated.

In Ishiguro's novel, the guardians have devised a plan to expose the clones' humanity through their ability to create art. While at Hailsham, the clones spend much of their time in the classroom working on their artwork. The best art they produce is regularly collected by Madame and displayed at art galleries and events around the country to influence important people. To the guardians, this is all the proof that is required. Art would reveal the clones' rich inner lives and, by extension, the presence of a *soul:* "Look at this art! How dare you claim these children are anything less than fully human?" (256). Friedrich Nietzsche similarly argued for the humanizing power of art. According to him, "Technology oversimplifies the infinitely strange nature of the world" and he, like the guardians, wanted to use "art as the weapon of choice against dehumanizing technology" (Booker 1994, 36). In the eyes of the guardians, art would function as the index of humanity that would help combat the dehumanizing presence of biotechnology in the clones' creation. However, this approach is questionable. What would such a view mean for the individuals, like Tommy, who are less proficient at creating art? Granted, Tommy develops stronger artistic sensibilities throughout the novel, but not in a way that makes him any more or less human. He does not become a higher being, nor do the other clones who largely abandon their art after Hailsham, become any lesser. Since art neither displays the ability to save the clones from their futures as donors nor, in any meaningful way, increases their humanness, there must be some other factor that functions as an index of humanity.

When faced with the revelation from Miss Emily that the art was collected to prove that the clones had souls, Kathy responds: "Why did you have to prove a thing like that, Miss Emily? Did someone think we didn't have souls?" (255). Kathy is aware of her own self and thus the presence of a soul is apparent to her. The same goes for the reader who has followed her narrative. This is in line with René Descartes' ideas, as when he suggested that "after having reflected well and carefully examined all things, we must come to the definite conclusion that this proposition: I am, I exist, is necessarily true each time that I pronounce it, or that I mentally conceive it" (1641/1996, 9). If we are able to question our own existence, we cannot doubt that we exist. Thus, the question of the clones having a rational inner self, or soul, is never in doubt to the reader who has been given access to Kathy's own memories and

emotions, to her interiority. Paradoxically, as they are presented by Kathy, “the clones have more human feelings than their creators” (Whitehead 2011, 68). Miss Emily backs this up, claiming that the guardians through the Hailsham project were able to prove that “if students were reared in humane, cultivated environments, it was possible for them to grow to be as sensitive and intelligent as any ordinary human being” (256). For all intents and purposes, the clones are human as they are presented to the reader. They are distinct individuals with complex emotional and rational inner lives. The discrepancy between the individual characters as the reader gets to know them and the way they are treated in their society, encourages the reader to question the limits of what we consider to be human as well as discriminatory practices in our own society.

The discrimination against the clones is founded on their very bodies, on the background of them being created in a lab. But there is no inherent contradiction between being created in a lab and being deserving of basic human rights. Neither are there any signs that the clones are in any way less human than the normals who created them. Ironically, though the clones are treated as lesser creatures, bodily lines become blurred as normals incorporate artificially created organs into their bodies when their own falter. With every donation, the receiver becomes a little bit more artificial. This begs the question of whether there is a limit to how much of one’s body can be made out of artificially created organs before becoming nonhuman, a point where a person in Ishiguro’s fictional society ceases to be human and instead is demoted to the same status as the clones. Such a point or threshold is never mentioned in the novel, nor is it likely to exist. However, it becomes clear that the discrimination levelled against the clones is built upon a faulty premise. It is not the absence or a certain percentage of artificially created organs in our bodies that defines us as human. This is further made clear by the fact that the receiving bodies accept these new organs as compatible. To the human body, though the clones are grown in a lab, there is nothing that separates these body parts from those they replace. They are readily accepted as human.

4 Going Gently into the Good Night

Many have questioned the passivity of the novel's clones in the face of their bleak and predetermined futures as donors. Shameem Black draws attention to Harper Barne's review for the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, wherein he asks: "wouldn't you decide at some point, 'This is a really bad deal, and I'm moving to France'?" (Black 2009, 791). However, the clones never attempt to escape or rebel against their oppressors. As previously noted, this is a deviation from the norm when it comes to both dystopia and clone narratives, where the protagonists typically rebel against the oppressive structures of their society (Stacy 2015, 238). The absence of any form of revolt is particularly peculiar in *Never Let Me Go*, as there are very few concrete safety measures put in place by the normals that hinder such an uprising.

There is "a lack of obvious, coercive disciplinary power" that is designed to keep the clones in check, Stacy notes (2015, 239). An example from the novel that demonstrates this, is when Kathy and her friends are searching for Ruth's possible in Norfolk and are looking in through an office window. When the group is noticed by the office employees, they run off. However, there is no apparent threat of violence or other consequences because of this transgression. Even though they are at the risk of disrupting the everyday lives of a group of normals, an expected serious transgression considering the efforts that have been made to isolate the clones from the outside world, they run away in a state of "giggly panic" (157). The clones are not afraid of punishment because the threat of punishment does not exist. In the thrill of being caught in an act they know they should not commit, they seem more concerned with what is appropriate.

It is later revealed that the freedom and comparatively humane upbringing the students received at Hailsham, for the most part, was unique to them. Other clones are hesitant to talk about their childhood and Miss Lucy reveals that there occasionally are terrible accidents elsewhere where clones are gated in by electric fences (77). That clones live in worse conditions elsewhere is backed up by Miss Emily, who later warns Kathy and Tommy that "you'd not sleep for days if you saw what still goes on in some of those places" (260). As such, these children, who grew up in institutions other than Hailsham, are subjected to more rigorous disciplinary power from childhood. Nevertheless, in adulthood, the clones are sent to institutions where they enjoy more freedom. These institutions are not exclusive to the students from Hailsham but accommodate students from all over the country. Kathy, Tommy,

and Ruth live at the Cottages with clones from many different backgrounds, though most are unwilling to talk about the conditions under which they grew up. With the amount of freedom handed to them, moving to France or any other more tangible means of escape would certainly seem to be an attainable option. This point is strengthened by the trip to Norfolk. Judging by the reactions from the office employees and gallery owner, who are entirely oblivious to the fact Kathy, Ruth, and Tommy are clones, slipping away to live a normal life does not appear at all unfeasible. To the reader, the seeming ease of a possible escape grows in accordance with the clones' imagined freedom. At no point is it greater than when they become carers and are required to roam the country in order to visit donors at different recovery centers with little or no supervision. No security force that would hunt them down if they ever decided to go missing on one of these travels is mentioned. What it is that stops the clones from rebelling or escaping in the absence of any obvious disciplinary power, thus becomes an urgent question and, crucially, the reader may well wonder whether this makes the clones something other or lesser than human. According to Sigmund Freud's pleasure principle, inherently "men are so concerned with pleasure in a most fundamental way" that they have no choice but to pursue happiness (Barnhart 1972, 113). According to this principle, the clones' inability to quest for their own happiness would appear to be at odds with them being considered human. In this chapter, I will continue by exploring what the different processes are that keep the clones docile and what this docility means to their potential status as human.

4.1 External Conditioning

One of the main reasons behind the clones' failure to oppose their fate, is the different ways in which they have been conditioned by their guardians and their society since their creation, to believe that they have a different fate and purpose than that of other people. By conditioning, I refer to an internal indoctrination and normalization of concepts that pertain to their being and future as donors. As a result of this conditioning, the clones never question the morality or justice of their treatment and fail to bear witness to the true nature of the predicament they are in.

These processes of normalization that enable apparent discrimination and atrocities are evident not least in the language the clones are taught. On the novel's very first page, Kathy is proud of her record as a carer because hardly any of her donors "have been classified as

agitated" (3). The use of the word 'agitation' is ridiculously understated. In *Never Let Me Go,* it does not denote nervousness or restlessness, but the absolute dread and helplessness that are perfectly understandable sentiments when being slowly and deliberately murdered on an operating table. The use of 'agitation' takes the attention away from the fear, anger, and hopelessness that would be more natural terms with which to describe such a situation. Instead, it makes the whole act seem less dire, like a trifle in comparison, and makes the source of any anxiety harder to trace. An expressed dread or fear of becoming a donor would be much more damaging to the conditioning of the clones. This is in opposition to 'agitation', which makes any anger or opposition sound like an overreaction, a fault which lies with the victim.

'Agitation' is just one of many terms whose meaning had to be repurposed to accommodate the need for a non-threatening terminology in relation to the clones and the processes that came with them. Most notable perhaps are the terms that are most frequently used: 'carer' and 'donor'. During the opening two pages, 'carer' is repeated no fewer than nine times (3-4). There is a duality to the way that it is used in the novel. As a carer, one's job is to make sure that donors don't become agitated, that they spend the rest of their soon to be prematurely ended lives in relative peace. As such it is a professional, but also necessarily affectionate relation of care (Whitehead 2011, 60). On the other hand, the carers are at least partly complicit in the act of keeping donors docile and keeping them from rebelling. A carer is there for a donor in cases where they need comfort, but just as much a tool to repress their anger and rebellious spirit when that is needed. This second function is hidden behind the guise of care.

Similarly, there is an element of deceit in the use of the word 'donor'. 'Donor' has typically signified a voluntary contribution from a generous giver, but this connotation of the word is far removed from the one displayed in the novel. It has pretty much been twisted to denote the exact opposite. In *Never Let Me Go,* the term 'donor' describes the final stage in a clone's life where he or she is involuntarily harvested of their vital organs. The use of the word 'donor' as opposed to a more accurate description plays a part in the general deception at play in the language. The inherent agency in the word 'donor' gives an impression that the donors are active, and not the passive victims of atrocities. It is much more difficult to discover that they are victims and captives when they imagine themselves to be active and partaking in these processes.

These are but a few examples of how language is used in the novel to normalize concepts that are discriminatory and immoral at best. A more literal example of language as a tool to keep the clones in check, is how the ghost stories told at Hailsham create a virtual electrical fence around the school (Schwetman 2017, 431), as students become afraid of venturing into the woods. Ultimately language serves as a core part of the conditioning to which the clones are subjected. It governs the way in which they view themselves and their intended future and stops them from acknowledging their own enslavement and thus the necessity and possibility of rebellion.

Another way in which the clones have been conditioned is through the way they have been indoctrinated to believe in the absolute importance of a purpose-driven life. Tiffany Tsao notes that "our obsession with finding purpose" has been transferred to the clones (2012, 226). She argues that this search for purpose is misguided and furthermore that "Ishiguro's novel asserts … that the purpose-driven life is terrifyingly reductive and devoid of freedom" (2012, 223). It is, nonetheless, a major factor in the conditioning designed to ensure the clones' passivity. To briefly place the spotlight on language again, the term used to describe death as a result of donations is 'completing'. Similarly to how the meaning of other terms has been twisted to hide what really happens, instead of describing grizzly deaths, 'completing' denotes a sense of success and fulfillment of purpose. It becomes an accomplishment. The emphasis on purpose, however, becomes even more palpable in several of the clones' interactions with each other. Kathy describes "an odd tendency among donors to treat a potential fourth donation as something worthy of congratulations" (273). After a fourth donation, the body has lost as many vital organs as it possibly can handle, and it thus inevitably results in the death of the donor. A clone has therefore performed well at their taught purpose since they have maximized the amount of resources they yield by surviving to make their fourth. By surviving to their fourth donation, they have provided as much use to the normals as they possibly can.

This purpose of yielding a maximum amount of resources is not something that is inherent to a clone's existence, but rather something that has been indoctrinated into their being during their early years. As seen at Hailsham, Tommy argues that because of his fitness "when it's time for donations, I'll be able to do it really well" (106). To the reader, the idea that a person can do well at being forcefully stripped of their vital organs, and even that they desire to be good at it, is absurd. Even in cases where there is no expressed desire to succeed,

they nonetheless go willingly to meet their fate. Ruth, who is less adamant about her wish to perform well, still admits that "I was pretty much ready when I became a donor. It felt right. After all, it's what we're *supposed* to be doing, isn't it?" (223). As she reveals, it feels right because it is what they have been taught that they are supposed to do. It has been established that their life worth is tied to the fulfillment of a purpose. The indoctrinated belief in the purpose-driven life thus limits the possibility of resistance or other rebellious actions because any such actions would mean failure in succeeding at the purpose they have been given. It is quite apparent, then, that the stress that is placed on finding purpose, under the guise of it being the meaning of life and the metric that discern their life worth, keeps the clones docile and unable to question their conditions.

Tsao concludes that "If we perceive purpose as the only feature that gives our lives worth, we are in danger of imposing the same narrow definition of 'worth' on any life that science and technology have enabled and will enable us to create" (2012, 226). The clones did not suddenly appear, they were created for a reason, and their worth has been demoted to center around that reason. They are made from biotechnology, which becomes problematic when definitions of biotechnology tend to emphasize usefulness and applicability. In the definition from the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity, biotechnology is defined as "... any technological application that uses biological systems, living organisms, or derivatives thereof, to make or modify products or processes *for different uses*" [emphasis added] (Tsao 2012, 226). The clones are created for one specific use, to provide organs. Their creation alone is not immoral, their lives are worth as much as any. It becomes immoral when they are created for other people's purposes, as they will be tied to this purpose from their creation. Together with their conditioning this will condemn them to a purpose-driven life devoid of freedom. Only when they are created for no reason whatsoever but to exist in and of themselves, can they be free. However, the purpose behind their creation is not something that is inherent within the clones' consciousnesses. It must be carefully normalized as a fundamental truth through conditioning. Normals are not only "in danger of" enforcing the processes that Tsao describes, but deliberately impose their own image of life-worth upon the clones in order to ensure passivity.

This argument is of course in line with Immanuel Kant's theories on autonomy and agency. According to Kant, "the concept of a rational will is of a will that operates by responding to what it takes to be reasons" (Johnson and Cureton, 2004). If you act according

to you own internal principles, or set of rules that are self-determined, you are autonomous. Your actions then obey your own will, not that of others. However, through conditioning, the guardians have indoctrinated the clones to conform to internal principles that do not follow their own best interest. Notably, the belief that the clones exist to serve a purpose, which is to provide usefulness to the normals, is one such indoctrinated principle. Freedom, according to Kant, does not consist in not being bound by any laws, but in being bound by "laws that are in some sense of one's own making" (Johnson and Cureton, 2004). One's will is free when one acts according to one's own self-determined principles, which are not affected by external physical or psychological pressure. Yet, some of the principles that guide the clone's decisions are clearly the result of the guardians' conditioning. This is perhaps most obvious in the expressed desire among many clones to become 'good' donors (106) and the accompanying need to act appropriately. Altogether, this means that when the clones make decisions based on their enforced idea of purpose, for instance, even though they believe these decisions are freely made, they are not autonomous or made of their own free will. Their conditioning consists of processes that deliberately impose these principles through indoctrination to deny the clones' agency and autonomy.

Indeed, the very purpose of Hailsham would seem to be to facilitate this conditioning, "to install the powerful mechanisms of self-repression and denial that will keep them steady and reliable from one donation to the next" (Harris 2005). The guardians teach their students that fulfilling their purpose is more important than their individuality and they use terms that suppress the horror of the students' futures. Miss Lucy says about their future that the students "have been told and not told" (79). They have been told that they are special, about donations and more, but only when they were too young to truly understand the magnitude of these concepts. Again, this is, of course, no accident but a part of deliberate conditioning. Tommy even realizes this many years later: "the guardians had … timed very carefully and deliberately everything they told us, so that we were always just too young to understand properly… But of course we'd take it in at some level, so before long all this stuff was there in our heads without us ever having examined it properly" (81). When they finally understand more about their condition and their future, they have already become internally normalized components of their reality.

Having looked at how the clones are conditioned by the people around them, I will now very briefly explore how Ishiguro, arguably, conditions his readers by availing himself of some of the same techniques. When the terms ‘donor’ and ‘carer’ are first presented, they are not explained but presented as the most natural of things. By the time the true meaning and horror of these terms are revealed in their entirety, the fact that Kathy and her friends will end up as carers and donors has already been long established. As the mystery is unraveled through Kathy’s narrative, there are few moments of genuine shock and surprise, even as the full extent of the wickedness leveled against the clones comes to light. Rather, Ishiguro evokes a sense of futility and hopelessness as the clones slowly, without notable resistance, move towards a known outcome. Their lack of ability to fight for a different conclusion is perhaps the most shocking aspect, but at the same time, their fates are transparent from the start. Ironically, Kathy is admired for “having guts” (102) by Tommy. ‘Guts’, in this sense, refers to Kathy’s ability to stand up for herself and to challenge others. Just like the rest of the clones, however, she is unable to challenge her fate in any meaningful way. Through conditioning, her guts have been taken from her figuratively, in her loss of an ability to fight back, just as they ultimately will be removed in a literal sense. This shows to what extent the conditioning has worked, when even Kathy, an inherently spirited and determined person, is unable to act against her fate in the same way that she can, for instance, challenge Ruth’s tall tales.

Summing up, the clones have been conditioned at Hailsham through the use of language, stress on the importance of purpose and the deliberate withholding of information. The effectiveness of this regime shows in the way that Ishiguro similarly distills a sense of futility and hopelessness to the general mood of the novel by using the same techniques. These techniques include the deliberate withholding of information and a careful selection of terms to describe ominous processes in a less threatening way. A long time before they learn what the term actually entails, the readers have been told, and come to terms with, the fact that the main characters will become donors. Later when everything is laid on the table, this instills a sense of having known all along, rather than shock. For the clones, the conditioning has indoctrinated the beliefs that they are different and have a different purpose than normals. Before a rebellion can become a tangible possibility, the clones need to realize that they are indeed victims, that their purpose is a construct which does not determine their worth, and that they are deserving of better.

4.2 Internalized Conditioning and Complicity

Building on from the idea that the clones are victims of an external conditioning, this section illustrates that they also, in some ways, are complicit in facilitating their own passivity. Though the external conditioning plays an undeniable part in laying the foundation for the absence of resistance, the clones are not entirely passive and guileless in this matter. Their futures and individual worth are aspects of a conscious life that are deliberately and cruelly taken from them, but they are themselves complicit in strengthening the processes of denial that causes failure of witnessing, and thus undermine the possibility of a revolution. One of the features in Hailsham's conditioning program is a slow and measured destruction of hope, which accounts for some of the external pressure that ensures passivity. However, the clones have developed denial as one of the defense mechanisms that they use to combat these processes. Without the hope of escape or any betterment to their situation, they construct fantasies and illusions to help themselves through the day. They can exist in relative peace in the moment by not acknowledging the bleakness of tomorrow. However, by not acknowledging the reality of their situation, they become unable to challenge its outcome. Although they cannot be said to be complicit in the savagery levelled against them, the clones are themselves facilitating processes that make them unable to act against their fate.

One such process of denial is the construction of fantasies to shield themselves from their reality. These fantasies appear in a more innocent form relatively early in the novel. Ruth and Kathy become fast friends following Kathy's admittance to the secret guard, a group led by Ruth that is dedicated to the protection of their favorite guardian, Miss Geraldine. The secret guard lasted for about a year, Kathy approximates, and the participating students were seven years old at the time, so in most ways, it was nothing more than a perfectly normal childhood fantasy. Yet, already at this early age, the students are aware of and deliberately seeking the comforting effects that derive from such fantasies. After a conflict with Ruth, Kathy is for a brief time excluded from the guard. Nevertheless, in a conversation with Moira, who is similarly excluded for a while, Kathy is furious when Moira voices her opinion that the guard is "stupid" (54). In retrospect, Kathy ponders her own response, aware of the fact that Moira would have been a natural ally at the time. But she ends up acknowledging that she was not ready to let go of that particular fantasy: "Moira was suggesting she and I cross some line together, and I wasn't prepared for that yet. … beyond that line, there was something

harder and darker and I didn't want that" (55). Beyond the fantasies exists a world full of cruelty and suffering, which they at some level are aware of, but not ready to acknowledge just yet.

The fantasy of Norfolk as the "lost corner of England" where everything they have ever lost will eventually turn up, serves a similar purpose. It is used as a coping mechanism to provide comfort whenever something precious goes missing: "What was important to us, as Ruth said one evening when we were sitting in that tiled room in Dover, looking out at the sunset, was that 'when we lost something precious, and we'd looked and looked and still couldn't find it, then we didn't have to be completely heartbroken'" (66). Kathy claims that they initially believed this in a literal sense, but Tommy brushes it off as a joke. I will argue, however, that the clones, in ways similar to how Miss Lucy suggests that the students "have been told and not told" (79), are in a state of believing and not believing at the same time. Though they deep down know more, they depend on their fantasies to cope with the difficulties they meet to such an extent that sometimes the lines momentarily become blurred. This becomes clear when Kathy and Tommy, who are now approaching their twenties, find another copy of a cassette, which Kathy had lost many years earlier, while in Norfolk. The search for the cassette is initiated by the fantasy itself. When Tommy proposes to search for it, now that they are in Norfolk, Kathy responds "Tommy, you idiot. You really believe it don't you? All this lost-corner stuff". Tommy assures her that he does not "necessarily believe it. But we might as well look now we're here" (168). Despite Tommy's nonchalance, their real-life actions are nevertheless informed by what they characterize as a childhood fantasy when they decide to search for the tape. Furthermore, when they ultimately find it, they find themselves unable to refrain from indulging the fantasy. Tommy asks the question: "Do you think it could be the same one? I mean, the *actual* one. The one you *lost*?". "For all I know, it might be", Kathy answers (170). Tommy's question should, in of itself, be absurd because there is no reason whatsoever why it should be, apart from the fantasy of Norfolk as a place where lost items appear. Kathy's response similarly betrays an affinity to the idea. Despite themselves, their fantasies briefly merge with their perceived reality.

These fantasies might initially appear childlike and innocent, but eventually, it becomes apparent that they function as protective mechanisms. Because they rely on them, the clones are oftentimes willing to go far to protect the integrity of their fantasies. Kathy reminisces about the secret guard that "all the time, we must have had an idea of how

precarious the foundations of our fantasy were, because we always avoided any confrontation" (51). And she adds: "We each played our part in preserving the fantasy and making it last for as long as possible" (52). The fantasies were only sustainable if they went to lengths to avoid questioning and confronting the guardians, and this shows the duality behind their passivity and efforts to act appropriately. On the one hand, they are taught to act appropriately, and not question what they are being taught by the guardians because it is a prerequisite in ensuring that the conditioning goes according to plan and eventually a means of self-regulation when the clones are allowed to roam the country. On the other hand, the clones conform to these patterns of behavior because they are necessary for the preservation of their fantasies.

The search for truth versus the preservation of their constructed fantasies presents a source of conflict between the main trio (De Villiers & Slabbert 2011, 89). Whereas Kathy to a greater extent fluctuates between the two sides, Tommy and Ruth mainly each represents one of these two interests. Tommy drives Kathy in her search for increased knowledge, while Ruth represents Kathy's desire to fight to preserve the integrity of their fantasies. This is not an attempt to demote Tommy and Ruth to only having this symbolic purpose, both are fully realized characters and the very human relationship between the main trio is an important motif in the novel. However, they also represent one side each in this driving conflict of increased knowledge versus preservation of fantasies. Tommy is curious about the things many of the other students take for granted, and it is mainly in the secret conversations with him by the pond that Kathy starts to question the practices they are being subjected to. Furthermore, Tommy, with his fits of rage and refusal to work on his art at Hailsham, is the one clone who displays anger at their fate and any semblance of a rebellious nature. Ruth, however, is known for telling tall tales and is the one most dedicated to the preservation of fantasies. Some of these even originate from her. In her recollections when she is together with Ruth, Kathy is dedicated to maintaining their fellow fantasies. This is perhaps most evident in the incident when Kathy brushes off Moira's criticism of the secret guard, because she was not ready to let go of that particular fantasy (54). After Ruth's completion, Tommy reveals that he is happy it happened before she could have learned the truth about the deferrals: "She was always different to us …we were always trying to find things out. But Ruth wasn't like that. She always wanted to believe in things" (278-279). These tensions are a

driving force in the novel, but it needs mention that all the clones remain on the passive side of the spectrum. Despite some inclinations, and a journey from innocence to increased knowledge, both Kathy and Tommy remain passive and unable to rebel throughout the novel.

A major reason for this passivity is that Kathy and her friends continuously experience that when attempted, the questioning or challenging of conventions lead to pain, often-times due to a corresponding weakening of fantasies that comes in the wake of acquired knowledge. A minor instance, but nonetheless informative of what is to come, is when Kathy challenges Ruth's knowledge of chess as a young girl. Ruth acted like she was something of an expert on chess in order to emulate the older students, but when Kathy realized that her friend is just pretending, she walked away in anger (53). As a result, Ruth's meticulously constructed image as a knowledgeable chess player falters, and they have a falling out. In the next few days, Kathy is excluded as a result, and thus punished for opposing a constructed fantasy. This is on a smaller level compared to what is to come, they are after all two very young girls experiencing their first fight, but it acts as a playground example of a process that will continue to limit Kathy and her friends.

In a darker turn, Kathy remembers the early years at Hailsham as their "golden years" (76), while the later years are also remembered fondly, but as significantly darker. The turning point that brings forth this increased darkness, is her first conversation with Tommy by the pond when they first start to question the strange things they experience. These conversations signify an increased knowledge about their future, and even current, circumstances. The clandestine conversations with Tommy would later become a regular occurrence between the two and it is predominantly in these conversations that secrets are uncovered. "The talk with Tommy beside the pond: I think of it now as a kind of marker between the two eras", Kathy notes, "They [the later years] weren't unhappy exactly – I've got plenty of memories I treasure from them – but they were more serious, and in some ways darker" (76). The acquisition of knowledge about their condition, and the accompanying weakening of their constructed fantasies, are associated with darkness.

A final example where questioning and the acquisition of knowledge lead to pain is when the trio travels to Norfolk to search for Ruth's possible. After they locate the person believed to be Ruth's possible, and they all agree that she very likely could be the person that Ruth was modeled after, they are triumphant. The fantasy that the students from Hailsham are special, and the possibility that Ruth could end up working in an office rather than becoming

a donor, would thus seem to be affirmed (159). However, excited as they are, when Ruth's imagined possible leaves the office, the group decides to follow her in order to know for sure. They get the information they seek, but unfortunately, as they are able to confirm that she looks nothing like Ruth up-close, the search for knowledge ends in heartbreak (161). Tommy, as the only one, does not get the what all the fuss is about, however, as it was "just a bit of fun" (164). The appeal of the comfort found in fantasies, though he is regularly culpable of indulging them himself, is not as immediately apparent to him. At this point, even Ruth suffers a loss of connection with her fantasy and angrily says that "We all know it. We're modeled from *trash.* Junkies, prostitutes, winos, tramps… We all know it, so why don't we say it? … If you want to look for possibles, if you want to do it properly, then you look in the gutter" (164). The outburst of anger is uncharacteristic of Ruth, but the acknowledgment that they knowingly repress knowledge to preserve their fantasies, is even more unusual. It is proof of the pain the whole ordeal has caused her, to learn that what she for a moment truly believed to be true, was just mere fantasy like the rest of her aspirations. Kathy expresses regret that they did not immediately head home to the Cottages "excited and triumphant" (161). It would have been better to leave happy than to be miserable but with more knowledge. To summarize, it is no wonder that the clones are hesitant to challenge lies and to search for truth, when either option exclusively lead to more pain.

Their time at Hailsham is the only experience the clones have of relative normality, family and co-existence (Whitehead 2011, 69). Their relations and memories from that time naturally become truly precious to them. In many ways, it is all they have. When their lives and futures are controlled by others, their memories become the only thing that is entirely their own. However, as they have experienced, their fantasies are built on fragile foundations and they can rarely, if ever, withstand encounters with the truth. Their fantasy of an idyllic childhood would similarly falter. Any large-scale confrontation would put it at risk, forcing the clones to acknowledge that they are, at best, like slaves to the normals. That Hailsham was a conditioning facility where they were reared as animals and held captive, and not the sense of normality and family they desire, would become impossible to ignore. They are not willing to lose that fantasy, and by extension, the authenticity of their memories, especially not since their external conditioning have instilled in them the belief that they have no hope of escape. The clones pursue a way to avoid their fate, but only within a framework that ensures the preservation of the fantasy. Thus, one could argue that they are fundamentally trapped by their conditioning, within a framework designed to keep them docile. Yet, to avoid the loss of

everything they have, to get a deferral through the gallery is the only way they can postpone their fate. When the deferrals turn out to be false rumors, nothing more than fantasies that have been passed between and developed from one clone to the next, Kathy and Tommy succumb to their fate. Their own fantasies and processes of denial therefore play a large part in the clones' inability to rebel. The clones must consequently be considered partly complicit in their own passivity as, by clinging to these fantasies, they are left unable to face the truth of their condition, and thus also to rebel.

4.3 Consequences of Compliance

When it comes to their passivity's impact on their perceived humanity, the clones' dependence on fantasies to ease the horrors of their lives, does not make them in any way less human, even though it renders them more passive. It is a result of the horrible situation they are in. More notably and interestingly, the normals in Ishiguro's novels depend on similar processes of denial. When normals flinch at the sight of clones, despite no visual difference between them and they, it is because they are uneasily reminded that the clones are innocent sufferers, who suffer because of them (Schwetman 2017, 433). They are unable to live with themselves unless they refuse to acknowledge the atrocities they knowingly permit for the betterment of the people they hold dear. That is why the clones are denied personhood, and why Hailsham, as a more human facility for conditioning, is closed. Miss Emily explains: "The world didn't want to be reminded how the donation programme really worked. They didn't want to think about you students, or about the conditions you were brought up in… they wanted you back in the shadows" (259). Therefore, it becomes clear that the normals hide behind a constructed fantasy in much the same way as the clones.

When it comes to Freud's pleasure principle, and the way it denotes that humans want to achieve and retain pleasure, J. E. Barnhart notes that "that is only one fork of the pleasure principle. The other is that the organism is predisposed also to escape or avoid pain and displeasure" (1972, 113). Attempting to escape or postpone a presumably unavoidable pain is exactly what the clones are doing when they construct their fantasies to seek shelter behind. Freud's pleasure principle therefore also confirms that the clones' dependence on fantasies is a very human trait. Given the very low likelihood of success in any endeavor to gain freedom or otherwise escape their oppression, the fight to avoid pain is a more accessible and plausible option than to seek pleasure.

To conclude this chapter, their inability to rebel does not make the clones any less human. There are several complex synergies that impact on one another, and which keep the clones docile. To a large extent, these are opportunities that are taken away from them through conditioning which normalizes ideas that the clones are different and that they fulfill their purpose in life by completing. They cannot be denied humanness by virtue of traits and opportunities that are forcibly taken away from them. Similarly, both normals and clones rely on deep-dyed deception, fantasies, to avoid facing the ugly truth of the society they inhabit. As such, it does not differentiate the clones from the normals who are included in the category of the human, and furthermore, according to Freud's pleasure principle, it is in itself a very human trait to attempt to avoid pain.

5 The Workings of Empathy

The guardians attempt to use art to showcase the clones' humanity. However, that was never enough to sway public opinions permanently in their favor. Yet, the clones are presented as human to the reader. Ishiguro is not overly concerned with the specifics of the technology that created the clones, because whether they were biologically or artificially birthed is not that relevant. It is empathy that allows the reader to recognize Kathy and her friends as human. According to Karl Shaddox, empathy and sympathy can be defined as

> psychologically complex states involving an outpouring of feeling toward another. Halpern and Weinstein state, however, that unlike sympathy, "empathy involves imagining and seeking to understand the perspective of another person." Importantly, "[t]his imaginative inquiry presupposes a sense of the other as a distinct individual." Accompanying this concern, then, is an emotive curiosity about and active interest in the other and her thoughts, being involved in an emotional experience not one's own, and being tolerant of emotional ambivalence. (2013, 462)

Notably, empathy must be considered a deeper and more complex sentiment than sympathy. The former has the ability help a person understand the emotional experiences and perspectives of another, whereas sympathy only involves an "outpouring of feeling".

5.1 The Identifiable Narrator

A significant factor encouraging the reader to empathize with the plight of the clones, is the fact that the story is narrated by Kathy, who is one of the victims of the apparent oppression. Through its narration, the novel deploys many of the techniques of an autobiographical memoir (McDonald 2007, 75). Kathy is reminiscing about her life and her most important relations. As a result of this stream-of-consciousness narration, there are frequent jumps in time as her thoughts wander. The readers have to guess at what she does not know, or which details she chooses to omit. Because of the distance in time between the actions as they happened and the present, when they are recollected, there is always a sense of uncertainty tied to Kathy's narrative. However, this is something that Kathy is very upfront and reflective about. Before delving into her memories from Hailsham, she admits that "this was all a long time ago so I might have some of it wrong" (13). She continues to refer to the uncertainty of her recollections throughout the novel. Furthermore, she is limited by her conditioning and lack of insight in the proceedings around her. This makes her more of an inadequate narrator,

rather than an unreliable one (Whitehead 2011, 70). Of course, this makes her recollections unreliable in the sense that they cannot be taken entirely at face value, both because her memory is fallible and because she has been conditioned in different ways by her guardians. But she is differentiated by her childhood innocence and intent to be truthful. After all, her memories are her most precious possession. This is arguably an endearing quality in her narration. Robbie Goh points out that "Kathy's tentative and nostalgic narrative confers upon her a greater semblance of humanity than any of the 'real' humans we meet in the novel" (2011, 60).

Kathy further makes claims on the reader's empathy by "asserting likeness between teller and listener" (Black 2009, 791). Kathy has an intended reader to whom she is narrating, and who she regularly refers to as "you". The first mention of the intended reader occurs already as Kathy presents herself. She does not want to appear boastful about her privileges so she expresses understanding, "if *you* are one of them [carers who do not get enough recognition], I can understand how *you* might get resentful" [emphasis added] (3). Importantly, Kathy assumes that this "you" is a clone, someone likely to be in the same profession as herself. Since she mostly only has been around, and certainly only had relations with clones, it is impossible for her to imagine her audience as anything else. Likewise, on three separate occasions in the novel, she uses the phrase: "I don't know how it was where you were, but at Hailsham" (13, 67, 94). Thus, she assumes the reader had his/her upbringing at a similar facility. However, barring any technological developments in the future, the reader is obviously not a clone. Nor is it possible for them to share the same references and experiences, although some readers might have experiences with something similar, such as racism. Nevertheless, the actual details of the experiences are less important than similarly felt feelings, as Kathy puts it: "I'm sure somewhere in your childhood, you too had an experience like ours that day; similar if not in the actual details, then inside, in the feelings" (36).

This relationship between the reader and narrator does something to the dynamic of the novel. What Kathy perceives as privileges, are not blessings, but basic rights. The reader recognizes that Kathy is not lucky, as she perceives herself, but that she is rather a victim of her society. Crucially, "we are cast as characters with whom Kathy shares a frame of reference, and this reassuring gesture invites us to return the favor" (Black 2009, 792). Kathy, by inviting the reader to identify with her and her predicament, furthers audience engagement and establishes a pact between teller and listener. The technique of allying the reader to the

narrator through a shared predicament, causes the reader to be more involved in Kathy's plight. Arguably, it displays what literature can accomplish in a discussion of ethics. Literature has the unique ability of placing the reader into the mind of another and to present their perspective. Understanding another's perspective is a crucial aspect that differentiates empathy from sympathy. The line between the human reader and clone is eroded as readers naturally develop empathy with Kathy by experiencing the world through her eyes. This is further strengthened as readers experience the contrast between how the clones are treated and the richness of their emotionally nuanced inner lives, which are so relatable and like our own. Ishiguro does not need to argue that the clones are human, it is rendered through the empathy that springs from the reader's role as the confidant who bears witness to Kathy's narrative (Shaddox 2013, 450).

There is little doubt that the novel invites us to recognize the clones as humans. Through Kathy's narration, the reader engages with clones from their perspective and therefore as individuals and as human beings from the very start. As Karl Shaddox notes, "the shock for *NLMG*'s readers comes not from realizing that the clones are human but that these humans are clones" (2013, 453). They exist in a world that is disturbingly similar to our own, but it is one where cloning and the horrific processes of involuntary organ harvesting are institutionalized. The originality of the molecular structures that make up the cloned bodies, is not the issue in determining their humanness. It can be likened to the incidence in Norfolk when Tommy and Kathy find the lost cassette tape. Whether it is the same, even though Tommy and Kath imagine that it is, does not matter. Kathy's feelings towards it do. She can listen to the music just the same, and, furthermore, because of the way in which it was found, the sentimental value of the memories regarding the new tape has eclipsed that of the original: "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" (171).

In a similar fashion, there could be thousands of clones around who are made from the same organic material as Kathy, or Tommy or Ruth for that matter (Shaddox 2013, 457). However, our feelings towards Kathy determines that this Kathy is just as valuable as the next, or even the original. There is a commonality between the characters of the novel and the reader that is born out of empathetic sentiment. This commonality is what makes us able to recognize them as human, thus advocating the importance of sentiment when we define human life. In this sense, *Never Let Me Go* can be compared to abolitionist literature

(Shaddox 2013, 451). They both depend on empathy to demonstrate that, while legislative bodies can recognize a being as human or non-human, true recognition is only possible when the individual is acknowledged and empathetic resonance has been identified.

5.2 Lacking Empathy

The importance of empathy can furthermore be identified in the failure of the guardians. Not only do they fail in their efforts to convince the public to improve the clones' general conditions, but also in the way they treat and view the clones themselves. Predominantly, they neglect the aspect of empathy towards their students in their strategies. With the sole exception of Miss Lucy, who is released from the Hailsham project because she is unable to conform to the strict conditioning of her students (263), the guardians show sympathy but lack empathy. However, to establish any clone's humanity, sympathy is not enough. With reference to the definition provided at the beginning of this chapter, only through empathy can one experience the distinct individuality of the recipient and become able to appreciate their perspective. Without it, the extent of one's emotional commonality is the ability to feel bad for the clones.

This lack of empathy is evident in Kathy and Tommy's final confrontation with the head guardian, Miss Emily, and Madame. Madame does express pity towards her former students, "poor creatures. What did we do to you? With all our schemes and plans?" (249). However, her choice of the word 'creatures' recalls a distance between them. By using the word children, for instance, Madame would have seemed more empathetic, but of course, by acknowledging that the students were just that, her own actions would be all that much harder to live with. The use of 'creatures' betrays a view of the students as something less than human. Furthermore, she refers to all her former students, not just Tommy and Kathy. She remains unable to feel empathy for the two distinct individuals in front of her.

Miss Emily is similarly detached. She too appears somewhat apologetic for her failure, but only because Hailsham has been shut down. About the continuous slaughter of the kids she helped raise, she is rather blasé: "as for myself, whatever the disappointments, I don't feel so badly about it. I think what we achieved merits some respect" (251). She does not acknowledge her own part in the general cruelty levelled at the clones, by providing a facility for their conditioning, or appear at all distressed about Tommy and Kathy's imminent and

premature demise. The guardians cannot be truly empathetic towards the clones at the same time as retaining the processes of denial that allow them to feel better about themselves. When Kathy wonders why they thought they had to prove that the students had souls, Miss Emily responds that "it's touching, Kathy, to see you so taken aback. It demonstrates, in a way, that we did our job well" (255). The extent of the guardians' charity and sympathetic sentiment, then, would seem to be to shelter the clones from the reality of their situation, to help them protect their own processes of denial and live in ignorant bliss a bit longer.

Without the required empathetic sentiment, the guardians' project to prove their students' humanity would appear to have been doomed from the start. Paradoxically, they cannot truly feel empathy for their students and prove their humanity, at the same time as they are serving as a tool for the state, deliberately conditioning and preparing the students to be slaughtered. Because they are unable to perceive their students as human themselves, the guardians necessarily also design a faulty strategy to prove the presence of a soul, which is what they perceive to be the essence of the human. They aim to prove that the clones can produce art, and that they thus have souls and must be human. The guardians fail because they attempt to use art to map the *what* rather than the *whom* the artwork proves that the clones are. They are not concerned with the individual who produced the art, but with the overall significance revealed by the obvious fact that clones are able to produce art, thus reducing them to a category of sameness. The novel, however, shows that the clones' humanity does not come from the theoretical presence of souls, but resides within each distinct individual. Hailsham's ultimate failure is the fact that the guardians and their benefactors are incapable of seeing the individual student because humanization "cannot happen *en masse* but must proceed one person at a time" (Shaddox 2013, 462). Through Kathy's narrative, empathy towards the main characters, by extension, humanizes the other clones. As has been made apparent, sympathy is not enough to prove humanness in instances when empathy with the individual is missing.

5.3 The Ambiguity of Empathy

Empathy, however, is not a virtue that is completely unproblematic. As previously mentioned, clones willingly do their jobs as carers because the occupation's true purpose is disguised behind that of care. To support clones who are going through emotionally tough processes, is in itself an admirable intent. Nonetheless, this emphasis on *care* makes them blind to the

processes of self-regulation and imposed docility they unwittingly take part in. The normals prey on the clones' empathy in order to make them willingly act as custodians for the donors. Kathy prides herself on the number of donors she has been able to help (3). Her desire to feel empathy towards the people close at hand makes her, like her peers, unable to see other processes that are at play. That's not to say that there is no value in the work that Kathy has done and the relations she has nurtured, but, crucially, empathy is used as a tool that prevents the clones from seeing the full truth about their condition and which plays a part in the conditioning that renders them docile.

To base inclusion on empathy or identification is similarly problematic. In a testament to the complexity of Ishiguro's fictional world, though empathy invites the reader to identify with Kathy, it is also crucial in facilitating the disturbing atrocities that take place in the novel's dystopian society. The very reason behind the donation programme is arguably empathy, or relations of care (Whitehead 2011, 77). This evidently does not refer to empathy towards the clones, but towards one's own family and close ones. In this sense, Ishiguro invites us to relate to the normals as well as the clones (Tsao 2012, 220). The novel begs the question of whether we are willing to close our eyes to atrocities to save the people close to us. The normals perform heinous actions not out of personal selfishness, but as Miss Emily reveals, because "their overwhelming concern was that their own children, their spouses, their parents, their friends, did not die from cancer, motor neurone disease, heart disease" (258). They never seem to wonder whether the clones are human, but are mostly concerned with forgetting the fact, because they primarily care about their own. Miss Emily continues: "people did their best not to think about you. And if they did, they tried to convince themselves you weren't really like us. That you were less human, so it didn't matter" (258). Kathy would appear to support this view when explaining why she as a carer mostly picks former Hailsham students as her donors, "so when you get a chance to choose, of course, you choose your own kind. That's natural" (4). Kathy does not forcefully remove the organs of the people she does not pick, of course, but agrees that there is a more natural relation of care the people you can identify and share a background with. Based on this, empathy can be used to exclude the ones with whom one does not share the same framework of experiences or identification. The normals point to the fact that the clones are artificially created and therefore different, but we have seen throughout history that religion, gender, and race also have been used to exclude others from the human. Thus, empathy becomes an ambiguous

virtue. It is connected to our ability to perceive the distinct humanity residing in the individual, but also the "failure to see those outside our own immediate circles of care" (Stacy 2015, 256).

5.4 Expanding Humanness

Indeed, the novel invites us to recognize the clones as human. However, that does not mean that it portrays the category of the human as wholly unproblematic. The normals depend on their constructed category of the human in order to act out their oppression. They hinge on the category of the human to label someone else as subhuman. By excluding the clones from such a category, deeming them subhuman, the consequences of their actions seem less dire, and by extension, become easier to live with. From the normals' point of view, the clones were created to fulfill a very specific purpose, to provide organs. Within the materialist culture that created them, the students necessarily have to be placed on the wrong side of the human/nonhuman binary to fulfill their purpose without raising too many moral and ethical questions (Whitehead 2011, 66). Regardless of their supposed humanness, however, as posthumanists have argued, the belief that humans are unique, dominant and exceptional to other species is wrong (Haraway 2008, 4). Donna Haraway goes further, and argues that nothing is innately human (2008, 4). Instead, the traits we consider human have developed alongside and in interaction with countless other species, not in isolation. As such, whether the clones are human or not should not matter as the very image of the human is flawed. Through empathy it is made clear that they are beings with as great a right to freedom and personhood as any. Neither clones nor the normals have developed in a vacuum but are intrinsically connected. To treat them as lesser because they are categorized as subhuman is part of discriminatory practices based on speciesism.

Similarly, and harking back to Chapter One, posthumanist scholars have argued that "nothing is innate to the human" (Nayar 2014, 11). It is rather the case that the qualities we deem to signify humanness have developed over the centuries through our interactions with the environment (Nayar 2014, 11). Ishiguro shows us that we must remove the category of the human from something logical and clinical bound by criteria. Human essence, in lack of a better term, exists within the distinct individual, not as something that can be categorized *en masse*. The clones are human in the sense that they are individuals who are just as valuable and deserving of rights as every being popularly considered human, regardless of whether

they fit into every proposed category of the human or not. The novel invites us to extend empathy beyond a rigid category of the human, but at the same time it acknowledges that any such category is deeply problematic and "exclusionary in itself" (Black 2009, 803).

6 Conclusion

This thesis set out to examine whether the clones in *Never Let Me Go* should be considered human or not. As described in the Introduction, this was to be achieved by exploring the clones' inability to oppose their fate, their position in Ishiguro's fictional world and the role of empathy in determining humanness. Furthermore, the ambition was to explore the novel's genre, critical reception and to what extent it exhibits a dystopian spirit.

Determining the genre of the novel was not entirely straightforward. However, this thesis contends that *Never Let Me Go* both retains a dystopian spirit and belongs to the genre of science fiction. Even if the novel deviates from many of science fiction's traditional conventions, it equally displays a strong affiliation to the genre in other areas. Particularly the novel's emphasis on SF themes, such as the limits of the human and the moral and ethical questions connected to cloning, as well as the strong presence of an estranging novum, place the novel firmly, albeit not necessarily exclusively, within the genre of science fiction.

The novel's dystopian elements similarly subvert reader expectations by diverging from several dystopian conventions. But, as this thesis has argued, the novel nevertheless retains a dystopian spirit in its warning against a future where human cloning has become an accepted and thriving practice, and where the resulting clones are devalued to the status of subhuman beings. A society that from certain angles might appear utopian, is clearly portrayed in a dystopian light as the readers experience it from the oppressed clones' point of view.

The novel's depictions of the clones are equally multilayered. The clones are clearly treated as subhuman by the normals. This treatment persists even though the clones are visually indistinguishable from their oppressors. Like Giorgio Agamben's *homo sacer* (Black 2009, 789), the clones are denied their individual worth and their deaths are only a minor nuisance compared to any physical damage done to any of the normals. However, as this thesis has argued, the clones' exclusion from the category of the human is based on a faulty premise. It is not absence of artificial body parts that makes us human, as proved when the normals readily incorporate these parts into their own bodies but nevertheless undisputedly retain their humanity. Ishiguro shows that Kathy, Tommy and Ruth are every bit as

compassionate, intelligent, creative, and deserving of basic rights as anyone commonly considered human. If the clones differ from the normals in any crucial way, it is because of the way their society treats them, not because they were created in a laboratory.

Furthermore, the clones' compliance can be attributed to complex processes of internal and external pressure that indoctrinate and internalize ideas that go against their own best interests. First of all, the clones are subjected to rigorous and deliberate conditioning by the guardians for the purpose of indoctrinating ideas that lead the clones to accept apparent discrimination as natural. This conditioning can be traced in everything from the language the clones use to their belief that they fulfill their purpose by completing. The thing they have in common, is that they are designed to keep the clones from fighting back and to deny them autonomy. In addition to stripping the clones of their autonomy and free will, if the clones accept their condition and future as natural and that their purpose is to perform well as donors, this conditioning renders them unable to realize the injustice that surrounds them and, thus, to challenge it.

Additionally, the clones depend on constructed fantasies to shield themselves from the bleakness of their everyday lives and future. They knowingly take part in and protect these processes of denial. The clones are aware that their fantasies are built on fragile foundations and that any large-scale opposition against their fate would lead to the increased realization that their fantasies are false. The idyllic childhood they treasure, would appear lesser by the realization that they were in fact held captive and prepared for slaughter. At some level, they already know much of this, but to make it concrete is to acknowledge something darker, which Kathy admits that they are "not ready for yet" (54). As such, the desire to keep these fantasies intact severely weakens the possibility of any rebellion. The clones are thus to some extent complicit in their own passivity.

However, the textual evidence brought forward in this thesis has shown that the clones' passivity does not make them any less human. As a result of conditioning, the agency to change their own fate is something that is taken from them, not something that defines them. Further, though they consciously rely on fantasies to shelter themselves from the harsh truth of their reality, this is proven to be a very human strategy. It follows Freud's pleasure principle, that humans are naturally disposed to attempt to avoid pain (Barnhart 1972, 113), and, crucially, the normals rely on similar processes of denial to avoid facing the truth of the despicable actions they knowingly commit by clinically slaughtering the clones. Therefore,

these constructed fantasies are not something that differentiate the clones from the people in the novel that unquestionably are considered human, and thus not something that would restrict their humanness.

Finally, the thesis has explored how Ishiguro invites the reader to regard the clones as human. It is empathy that allows the readers to see the distinct human individuals that the clones are. The guardians' project contrarily fails because they lack empathy. They feel sympathy, but the lack of empathy is to blame for their inability to recognize that the clones are unique individuals. Kathy's narration is an important feature in the novel in that it encourages the reader to feel empathy with the plight of the clones. Likeness between teller and listener is asserted and, as the reader experiences the world from Kathy's perspective, the clones' humanness becomes apparent through identification with and empathy towards the novel's narrator.

However, the thesis has also examined how Ishiguro portrays empathy as an ambiguous virtue. Empathy allows us the see the clones as human, but it is also partly the cause for their predicament. The normals' main motivation for the cloning programme is their empathic sentiment to their own loved ones. It was initiated in the hope that artificially created organs might extend the lives of the sick and the elderly. Thus, empathy becomes problematic if it is used to exclude others in favor of those who are close at hand, whether it is based on relations or identification. Similarly, though I have argued the case for the clones' humanness, I have also acknowledged that any such category of the human is exclusionary in itself. The normals rely on the category of the human to label the clones as subhuman. By excluding the clones from the category of the human, they create a barrier of difference that lessens the identification and thus empathy felt for the clones. Regardless of whether the clones are equally worthy of the label of the human or not, the category of the human is used to justify difference and then atrocities as distance between the human and non-human has been established.

When I started working on this thesis, I had planned to include an analysis of Mark Romanek's film adaptation from 2010, with a focus on how it translates *Never Let Me Go*'s arguments about humanness and invitations to feel compassion with the clones to a different medium. While literature is uniquely qualified in placing its audience inside the mind of its characters, an analysis of how the medium of film creates such empathy would definitely have been worthwhile. After some time, I realized that I had so much to say about the novel,

however, that reasons of space prohibited such an inclusion. On a different occasion, I would, furthermore, like to be able to explore the debate on different categories of the human and the posthuman in more detail. However, given the scale of the themes that have been examined, neither option was within the scope of this thesis.

To conclude, this thesis has addressed a number of significant issues that show that the clones must indeed be considered human, or if we move beyond the exclusionary categories of humanness, as equal to what we now consider human. They are infinitely more than the 'shadowy objects' that they appear as to the normals. Ishiguro accentuates the importance of sentiment in our definitions of human life and invites his readers to extend empathy beyond a rigid category of the human. The reader's feelings towards the novel's characters dictate that the clones are as deserving of freedom and individuality as anyone, regardless of whether they are universally conceived as human beings or not. We have seen throughout our own history that mankind's most heinous acts transpire when we employ definitions of the human that are too narrow and exclusionary. We lose something ethically important when we become unable to extend empathy beyond our own circles of care, and in such situations the slaughter or discrimination of the "Other" can seem to become justifiable. Ishiguro shows that if we lose sight of the individual, exclusionary categories can be used to validate such malpractice.

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