

Do Clones Have Souls? – A Posthumanist Gaze into Kazuo Ishiguro's Novel *Never Let Me Go*

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Abstract:

Accelerating development of science, technology and artificial intelligence since the late 20th century is leading human beings to explore high-tech means to overcome body limits, treat individual defects, enhance intellectual authority, and prolong human life time. Along with this, man's growing craze for happiness, immortality and unprecedented greed for power have reduced human beings into non-human heartless beings. A timely intellectual trajectory named Posthumanism came into being in 1990s which underscores the shifting boundaries between the human and the non-human to reconceptualise our understanding of identity, embodiment and cognition. In literary field, contemplation on the relationship between human beings and technology has become a major concern of posthumanism. Kazuo Ishiguro's novel *Never Let Me Go* (2005) sets in a highly developed scientific and technological world where clones are created by human and "educated" for the sake of "donating" their vital organs to human. Here clones are subjected to existential predicaments resulting from isolation, horror, and predestined death which haunt all clones and deprive them of all privileges. Although being portrayed as human beings having souls, emotions and dreams, they are irresistible to non-humanized fate. By exploring *Never Let Me Go* through the lens of posthumanism, this article probes into the non-human treatment on clones by humans and focuses how the principles of bioethics are violated by causing the existential predicaments of alienated clones. This paper also seeks to explore the very process of forming and claiming an individual identity by the posthuman clones and with this strives to urge an appeal to human conscience to ruminate on the relationship between scientific technology and human ethics.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, posthumanism, *Never Let Me Go*, human clones, existential predicaments, bioethics.

The rapid development of life science and technology in the 20th century has enabled human beings to overcome the limitations of human lives and living conditions. Until the second half of the 20th century, some developed countries also entered the post-modern era characterized by the information society. Even after the World War II, there emerged new possibilities and solutions to previously incurable diseases with the great breakthrough in science which helps in the emergence of the concept of 'Posthumanism'. Using modern science and technology, combined with the latest ideas and aesthetic consciousness in carrying out partial artificial design, artificial transformation, artificial beautification, technical simulation and technical construction of human individuals, human beings have formed a new association, new group who are perceived to be an entity which is beyond 'human'. In this present era of 'nano-bio-info-cogno', human beings are able to tackle their own modifications through Artificial

Intelligence, genetics and biotechnology which are designed to change human consciousness, metabolism and the personality of future generations.

The concept of 'human' has always been androcentric and with the advent of colonialism, the idea of perfect human self was constructed in the likeness of the white European male which is tremendously exclusionary as 'several forms of life have been throughout history subordinated to the human as sub-human, non-human and inhuman in the system of classification.' (Nayar, 11) According to Nayar, the notion of what is human has ironically been conceived by othering "differently-abled, women, particular races and ethnicities, and animals", putting them in the category of non-human and inhuman (Nayar, 35) Posthuman or post-human is a concept originating in the fields of science, fiction, contemporary art and philosophy. It means a person or entity that exists in a state beyond being human. A posthuman is no longer a natural or biological being, but an "artificial person", formed through the technical and biological processing or electronic, information-based action. The category of the post-human can refer to a wide range of beings that are presented as the "Other" who may include cyborgs, aliens, monsters as well as clones. According to Judith Halberstam and Ira Livingston, "The posthuman body is a technology, a screen, a projected image, it is a body under the sign of AIDS, a contaminated body, a deadly body; it is ...a queer body" (Halberstam and Livingston, 1995) The posthuman 'Other' always presupposes the human and its properties and posits the human as its goal, as an unattained ideal and original. While defining the posthuman subject, Rosi Braidotti also spoke of an "entity which is no longer an animal but not yet fully a machine, is the icon of the posthuman condition" (74) This concept aims at addressing a variety of questions, including ethics and justice, language and trans-species communication, social systems, and the intellectual aspirations of interdisciplinarity.

Posthumanists argue the uniqueness of human beings and denounce the belief that humans are dominant and exceptional to other species, and instead emphasise the evolutionary interdependence of species. This assumption is also 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 (Haraway, 4). Haraway also sees the dissolution of the boundaries between human and machine as an opportunity to weaken other humanist boundaries (Herbrechter, 99). Posthumanism as a philosophical approach emphasises the evolutionary interdependence of species and rethinks the very idea of human subjectivity because it sees human subjectivity as an assemblage, co-evolving with machines and animals. It also calls for a more inclusive distinction of life, and "a greater moral-ethical response, responsibility, to the non-human life forms in the age of species blurring and species mixing" (Nayar 19). Posthumanists emphasize the importance of respecting individual life and more precisely of respecting all kinds of life forms. As a leading figure of posthumanism, Max More held a view that the rapid development of science and technology is accelerating the transformation of human beings into post-human beings in his 1994 article entitled "On Becoming Posthuman". More argued that human evolution to higher forms is an inexhaustible process and human beings are predestined to be evolved.

Literature concerns social reality and human destiny. Since the dawn of human civilization, literature has been instrumental in propagating and perpetuating human values, their lives and concerns. Posthuman beings are portrayed in many literary works to explore our constructed criteria for humanness and our beliefs of what it means to be human. In recent decades, scientific and fictional works have flourished and entered the fields of literature. *Never Let Me Go* (2005) by Kazuo Ishiguro stands and shines brightly among them. Kazuo Ishiguro is a

British novelist of Japanese origin. His main works include *A Pale View of Hills*, *An Artist of the Floating World* and *The Remains of the Day*. *Never Let Me Go*, which was published in 2005, is Kazuo Ishiguro's sixth novel, describing the memories of human cloning as a donor of human organs. It was well received in British and American literature. *Never Let Me Go* was awarded the 2005 Booker Award and was in the American Book Review Association Awards Final List.

The novel reveals the fact that the emergence of human cloning is due to heavy causalities caused by World War II when human beings haunted by the fear of death and began to fixate on the development of science and technology and managed to prolong their lives. The novel opens with a strange boarding school named Hailsham, where children are actually clones of human beings. Here Hailsham is presented as a testing lab where the cloned individuals face nothing but abuse. It is not a charitable educational organization but a 'human factory'. We are introduced with the main character and narrator Kathy H, who presents herself as a 31-year-old "carer", an occupation she has held for 11 years (Ishiguro 3). 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. The Hailsham is completely an "Organ Culture Laboratory" or a "Human Factory" where the clones are sheltered just because their vital organs are in urgent need of human beings. The organ deprivation is labelled as "Donation", and the death of a clone is called "completion". The early years at Hailsham are idyllic, but there are several elements that differentiate the students' lives from the 'normals'. Several strange terms, customs, and complete isolation from the outside world raise questions regarding the true function of Hailsham. Hailsham becomes a symbol which carries the mark of human enhancement through scientific advancement. Eventually, the characters Kathy, Tommy and Ruth are introduced who are 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 sometimes 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 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. 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 rumour 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 and begin the preparations to get their deferral. The deferral turns out to be a false rumour, 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). Thus this novel interprets the childhood, teenage and youth of the protagonists Kathy, Ruth and Tommy. Miss Lucy, Miss Emily and Madame, the representatives of the humans are 'guardians' to the clones all the time, scrutinizing their behavior and health condition. This novel analyzes the unfair and unjust treatment on clones by human beings in Post-modern society.

All clones living in Hailsham are depicted as human beings, possessing emotion and self awareness, being educated and empowered with artistic creative abilities. Regarding physical constitution, the body of a clone is identical to that of a human being. They serve for the interest of human beings but are treated as slaves. In the novel, Clones are characterized as human beings having emotions and even suffering from emotional predicaments. They are all caught in solitude and despair in their respective roles, but still long for love and comfort. The guardians in Ishiguro's novel have devised a plan to portray 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. Miss Emily once said, "Your art would reveal what you were like, it would reveal your souls. We did it to prove that you had souls at all" (254). They believed that Art would reveal the clones' rich inner lives and, by extension, the presence of a soul which is also reflected in the following assertion by Madame: "Look at this art! How dare you claim these children are anything less than fully human?" (256). This assertion reflects the thought of Friedrich Nietzsche who 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 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. In Kathy’s declaration that “The clones have more human feelings than their creators” questions the humanness of the human beings, whereas assures the readers about the presence of souls in the clones.

Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go* questions the ideas of what it means to be human. Having an inner clone with a human appearance, the clones have become a ‘non-human’ back up ‘organ source’. These clones are segregated from the humans from birth, and their only purpose of life is to become organ donors. Their value of life is to sacrifice themselves to continue the life of the ‘prototypes’. The identity of the clones has always been a mystery, from the moment of birth. In posthuman society, the social identity of human clones is objectified and materialized as ‘non-human’. The clones of Ishiguro’s book are not physically anything beyond mere humans; they are built of flesh and blood. They are not transhumans, but are posthuman beings who are not acknowledged as humans in the society they live in. The clones neither have individual identity, nor uniqueness as a social being. Rather than identity, they have identifiers-numbers which are bestowed upon them by the ‘guardians’ of the Hailsham school ; these identifiers work more as tools in tracking and detecting, rather than giving the scope to individualize. Though these clones are molded as human beings, they are dehumanized by human. Each name of clone students is composed of a given name (like Peter, Mathew, and Ruth) and a followed English letter (like A, B, and J). Their names are read like the codes designed for robots, as in Kathy H, Jenny B and so on. The act of coding clones is a manifestation of making them to be objectified which is a means of alienating these clones. In the objectification of a cloned body, they are the silent sufferers who having neither a voice of their own nor the right to speak. Through the effective measures of body cloning, name coding, education infusing, behaviour isolating, and emotion controlling, human beings have completed their objectification and alienation to human clones.

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. Another example of the objectification of clones is the scene that Tommy got the gash on his elbow. On seeing the open wound on Tommy’s elbow, Christopher said nonchalantly: Don’t you know? If it’s right on the elbow like that, it can unzip. All you have to do is bend your arm quickly. (85) Here, clone’s body is regarded as “a bag”, and the word “unzip” implies that clone’s body is merely an object or a container. Moreover the students’ identity is sometimes reduced to only numbers, signs, symbols and their importance is calculated through the number of donations the perform.

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 5). The clones are as human as any when it comes as, “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. 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 to them. 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.

Due to human’s violation of the principles of bioethics, these clones are alienated as the counterpart of human beings- ‘the other’. After leaving Hailsham and moving to a place called ‘cottages’, clones are exposed to the outer world which causes them to question their existence. Having experienced the human world, we have seen Ruth getting collapsed and shouted to her fellow clones, “We all know it. We’re modeled from trash, junkies, prostitutes, winos, tramps, convicts, may be, just so long as they aren’t psycho” (164). Renowned American bioethicists Tom Beauchamp and James Childress proposed the widely acknowledged four principles of bioethics namely “Principle of Respect of Autonomy, Principle of Beneficence, Principle of Non-maleficence and Principle of Justice” (Beauchamp & Childress, 2013). In *Never Let Me Go*, clones are isolated to grow up in Hailsham, prohibited to cross the school boundary, managed to wear an electronic ID bracelet for health check, and are forced to organ donation. Teachers in Hailsham are “guardians” to these clones are scrutinizing their behavior and health condition all the time. Teacher Miss Lucy irrepressibly tells the truth once in a class that all students in Hailsham are cloned identical to human and raised up to provide organs, with survival time of donating organs three or four times before their death. From the perspective of bioethics, this is a serious violation of “Principle of Respect for Autonomy” as human clones are unable to enjoy their own rights of choice. In one aspect, the individual freedom of clones is restricted and deprived. All clones are not allowed to leave the school until they “graduated” from Hailsham. But after graduation, they are assigned to a designated area and wait to be informed of the beginning of donation. From the moment of being cloned and being created, their bodies and lives cannot belong to themselves. The only purpose of their existence is to provide organs for human beings. In another aspect, passive and gratuitous organ donations are harmful and fatal to their lives, which further violate “Principle of Non-maleficence” in the principles of bioethics. As the clones are stripped of their identity and are not allowed to enjoy even the basic human rights, the “Principle of Justice” is also being violated here.

The clones in Ishiguru’s novel 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. They love life even after knowing the harsh truth of life. 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. But these clones do not choose to escape. Though they are born to die

untimely death, they choose to live their life and keep on striving to find the meaning of life everyday they live, leaving traces of their own existence.

By interpreting *Never Let Me Go* through the lens of posthumanism, this article tries to show how human beings entrapped clones in existential predicaments and violated bioethical principles to usurp clones' organs. Using the setting of human cloning, Ishiguro describes the survival plight of not only the cloned beings but also the ordinary people who are similarly dejected and denied the basic human rights by the men- in -power. Ishiguro praises the spirit of the clones and arouse people's empathy for the oppressed group in real life too. In *Never Let Me Go*, Ishiguro provides a very compelling argument for how we should denote humanness even to non-human beings. This text prompts people to ponder on the relationship between high techs and ethics in future which, if neglected, can bring catastrophe to humanity. How human beings are under the threat of their own innovations are strongly reiterated in this article. It also furthers a suggestion of moral turpitude and ethical lapse of anthropocentric worldview held by humans in posthumanist period.

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