

The Uncanny Humanity of the Clone in *Never Let Me Go*

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Abstract

The clone's humanity is a central theme in Never Let Me Go that challenges the readers to rethink the nature of existence. It is the story of three friends Kathy, Tommy and Ruth who grow up in Halisham, a boarding school that hides their real purpose, organ donation. The clones exhibit complex emotions, desires and relationship making them very much relatable and human-like. Their emotional depth is clear in their bonds of friendship and the affection, which highlight the importance of human connections in explaining the humanity. Kazuo Ishiguro's narrative makes the readers to consider the ethics of scientific advancements and the consequences of exploiting clones for human benefits. Through the clone's experience the novelist throws light on the complexities of existence, identity and morality. Never Let Me Go explores the humanity of clones, encouraging the readers to reconsider their assumption about what it means to be human. The clones' uncanny humanity serves as a strong reminder of the importance of treating all individuals with respect.

Discussion

Never Let Me Go by Kazuo Ishiguro offers a haunting and deeply philosophical insight and exploration of what it means to be human through its three protagonists Kathy, Ruth and Tommy. The three students at Halisham who are revealed to be clones created to serve a sole purpose of being an organ bank. They have been cloned and raised to provide organs to their other parts that exist in a dystopian world. Beneath the calm narrative that the author has excelled in, lies the story of a dystopian world narrated with incredible detail. This narrative can be a basis for a profound critique of bioethics, identity and the limits of human exceptionalism.

Posthumanism poses a challenge to the traditional ideas of humanism, which places humans at the center of the existence and the rest of the functioning world around the activities of these intelligent beings. Posthumanism questions the ungiven, yet taken privilege of human beings over all other living and non-living entities. Humans often define themselves standing against the rails of their own creations and upbringings. Posthumanism's utmost concerns lies with increasing artificial influences and bio-engineering being a part of the routine world.

This paper will explore *Never Let me Go* as a post humanist text, diving into how the novel constructs and breakdowns the boundaries between human and non-human and how the novel questions the pre-assumptions holding down our perception of personhood, morality

and humanism as bolts in a the new age machine. In *Never Let Me Go*, Ishiguro is presenting a society where science has advanced and has achieved the ability to create genetically identical human clones. The sole purpose solved by these clones would be to act as organ super markets extending the longevity of their genetic twin. The ‘original’ humans extend their lives using these clones. This makes human as a product or commodity. Posthumanist concern tries to criticise the commodification of humans and what happens when a human becomes a product.

The Plot as Posthuman Parable

At the initial stages of the plot, *Never Let Me Go* hides behind a thin veil and poses like a quiet, melancholic coming-of-age story. The narrator Kathy H., recalls her life at Halisham, a boarding school in the English countryside. The children’s lives seem to be surrounded by an eerie tranquility of a dystopian era, yet they are engaged in normal day to day functions of adolescents. They attend classes, produce art and engage in interpersonal conflicts and dramas. Gradually Ishiguro introduces the real meaning and the original plot, the children are not allowed to dream of becoming doctors or artists. Their futures are decided, fixed—they will become “carers” or “donors”. They are eternally designated to server others.

As the truth becomes clearer, so does the horror. These students are clones. Biologically human, yet dehumanized of all human values and qualities. Personhood, familial ties, morals of the society and all that are commonly associated with a human are denied to these children. This is where *Never Let Me Go* poses a post humanist critique: it depicts and paints a future where biotechnology enables the literal manufacturing of human bodies for consumption by others, exposing how technology can be used to reinforce existing hierarchies rather than challenge them.

Deconstructing the “Human”

The key posthumanist question the novel raises is: “What makes someone human?” The children or more specifically ‘The Clones’ in *Never Let Me Go* possess all the characteristics traditionally aligned with a human. Emotions, creativity, memory, love and the desire for meaning—yet they are not assumed or recognized as fully human by the society that created them. This contradiction acts as the main forerunning theme of the plot.

The ideological experiment performed in the school of Halisham symbolises the dynamics of the clones in the society. The experiments are the drawings and the poetry created by the students of the Halisham. The drawings are collected by Miss Emily and Madame collect the students’ artworks for “The Gallery” claiming that the creative expression is associated with a person possessing a soul. Ishiguro puts this as, “We took away your art because we thought it would reveal your souls. Or to put it more finely, we did it to prove you had souls at all” (81). However, the experiment turns out to be an ultimate failure as it is revealed later in the novel. The plot later exposes the limits of the humanic gestures. No amount of art could prove their humanity because the society had already decided they were less-than-human. This fact is a reminder of the power of the ideology in perception of the influence of a society in human life.

This ties directly into posthumanist theory, especially the writings of Cary Wolfe and Rosi Braidotti, who argue that the category of “human” has historically functioned as a mechanism of exclusion. In Wolfe’s terms, “the humanist subject is defined by who it excludes—animals, machines, disabled bodies, racialized others”, and, in Ishiguro’s case, clones.

Technology, Ethics, and Control

The technological mechanics of cloning are not dwelled upon in *Never Let Me Go* instead, its focus is upon the ethical and existential aftermath. This choice of the narrative aligns with concerns

of posthumanism about how technological and capitalist concerns perform power mediation. From birth to death the clone's lives are completely in control and in the hands of their guardians. Even their schooling at Hailsham, which at first seems benevolent, is revealed to be a form of soft impulsion of control. They are educated just enough to understand their fates, not enough to resist them.

Technology, in this context, is disciplinary but not liberating. The clones' bodies are sites of surveillance and control, echoing Michel Foucault's theory of biopower—the management of populations through the regulation of bodies. According to Foucault biopower means

“the set of mechanisms through which the basic biological features of the human species became the object of a political strategy, of a general strategy of power, or, in other words, how, starting from the 18th century, modern Western societies took on board the fundamental biological fact that human beings are a species. This is what I have called biopower”(1).

The entire donor program in *Never Let Me Go* is a biopolitical system that treats life as a resource to be optimized and harvested. The clones are maintained not as subjects, but as biological capital.

This strongly resonates with posthumanist critiques of techno science capitalism. Donna Haraway's famous *Cyborg Manifesto* discusses how the boundaries between organism and machine have collapsed under late capitalism. In the world of Ishiguro, the clones are not machines in the literal sense, but they function as parts in a larger medical-industrial apparatus. Their humanity is rendered invisible because they are useful.

Memory, Emotion, and Resistance

Despite their lives being predetermined, the clones in *Never Let Me Go* exhibit variety of emotions, however limited. Kathy's role as a “carer” allows her to postpone her donations in which interval she reflects on her life. Her narration is steeped in memory, an act that asserts her subjectivity. This emphasis on memory and interiority challenges the dehumanizing narrative imposed on the clones.

Additionally, noteworthy are Tommy's drawings of hybrid animals, which he shows Kathy as a last-ditch effort to get a deferral. The post human blurring of the lines between human, animal, and machine is embodied by these odd, chimeric figures. They serve as a metaphor for the clones themselves, which are entities that defy easy ontological classification.

One of the most moving scenes in the book is the unsuccessful deferral appeal. Tommy and Kathy hope their love will buy them more time when they visit Madame and Miss Emily. They are informed, however, that there was never such a deferral. The regulations were set in stone. Philosophically as well as emotionally, this realization is devastating. It emphasizes how power structures sustain themselves by manipulating hope and the appearance of choice rather than by using physical force.

However, despite systemic denial, the clones' humanity is validated by the very act of remembering, loving, and hoping. *Never Let Me Go* provides a subdued form of protest against posthuman dehumanization in this way. Even as it inevitably approaches death, Kathy's story is an affirmation of life.

The Ethical Implications of Posthumanism

Never Let Me Go is finally a warning story of the moral boundaries of scientific advancement. It poses critical questions regarding what society considers to be life and worth in a world when biology is subject to tampering at whim. It forces readers to think about how simple it is to depersonalise people when systems of technology allow us to normalise their exploitation. Ishiguro says:

“I saw a new world coming rapidly. More scientific, efficient, yes. More cures for the old sicknesses. Very good. But a harsh, cruel, world. And I saw a little girl, her eyes tightly closed, holding to her breast the old kind world, one that she knew in her heart could not remain, and she was holding it and pleading, never to let her go” (266).

Posthumanism doesn't merely invite us to widen our definition of the human; it invites us to give up on human exceptionalism itself. Ishiguro's clones are not merely placeholders for future bioengineered subjects; they reflect how present societies already devalue particular lives—immigrants, the poor, the disabled, the incarcerated. The novel warns us that control technologies, without supervision, will always reproduce and enforce current social hierarchies.

Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* is a deeply posthumanist novel. The novel challenges the limits of humanity, criticizes biotechnological control ethics, and uncovers the vulnerability of humanist ideals when confronted with systemic dehumanisation. The novel, through the lives of Kathy, Tommy, and Ruth, shows how the technologies that aim to perfect human life can be deployed to eliminate its meaning.

Finally, the most disturbing element of *Never Let Me Go* is not the cloning, but the silent toleration of its results. The clones do not revolt, and society does not protest. Rather, there is a resigned complicity that mirrors our own world's complacency in the face of wrong. Posthumanism, as defined in Ishiguro's novel, is not optimism for the future but a caution—a reminder to consider differently how we define, value, and care about life in all its manifestations.

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