

Echoes of Humanity: Navigating Dystopian Cloning in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*

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Abstract:

In Kazuo Ishiguro's dystopian novel *Never Let Me Go*, morality, cloning, and the frailty of human nature are all profoundly explored. The narrative extends beyond the speculative idea of cloning, creating an authentic and ethically complex tale that encourages readers to explore the complex web of personal struggles and societal ramifications. The title, Echoes of Humanity, becomes a profound allusion to the resonant experiences of the characters, emphasising the larger ethical concerns surrounding cloning technology. As the primary protagonists wrestle with their inevitable responsibilities as organ donors, this narrative evolves into a complex analysis of the nature of identity itself and the ethical conundrums brought on by the rapid growth of science. Even in the depths of dystopian despair, aspects of a common human experience persist, as suggested by the title, which emphasizes a basic human need for connection and purpose.

This abstract encapsulates the novel's central ideas, urging readers to contemplate the profound repercussions of cloning on the human experience. By employing the term "Navigating Dystopian Cloning," the paper not only emphasizes the characters' agency in confronting their

fates but also hints at an odyssey through moral ambiguities. In essence, "Echoes of Humanity" anticipates a thorough exploration of moral complexities and the enduring resonance of the human spirit within a dystopian society shaped by the eerie implications of cloning technology.

Keywords: Dystopian, Navigating, Cloning, Technology, Morality.

The paper endeavors to investigate various facets of *Never Let Me Go* in the pursuit of understanding its themes of identity, memory, and the absence of resistance within the context of dystopian elements. The central research of this paper posits that, although not overtly emphasized, the novel harbors numerous dystopian features that can significantly contribute to a nuanced comprehension of these themes. The exploration will encompass three key aspects: the clones' societal isolation due to limited opportunities for social mobility; the clones' assertion of their human nature and quest for identity through individual and collective memory; and the ramifications of technological advancements in the novel's established world. Each of these dimensions will be scrutinized in relation to various utopian narratives, assessing whether *Never Let Me Go* aligns with the utopian tradition and, if so, how these elements offer insights into the themes of identity, memory, and resistance. Furthermore, existing research on the novel will be contextualized with respect to the specific aspects under consideration.

While *Never Let Me Go* introduces utopian elements, notably the existence of clones as protagonists, critics largely resists classifying it strictly within the utopian or dystopian genres. The novel diverges from the traditional dystopian narrative by portraying an alternate reality closely mirroring our present world, with a pivotal distinction. Although not a typical dystopian tale focusing on political totalitarianism, *Never Let Me Go* inherently incorporates dystopian elements. This research paper delves into the novel's dystopian facets, particularly in the realms of identity, memory, and the absence of resistance, aiming to unravel why the clones seemingly accept their predetermined fate without defiance.

The exploration of human identity, a pivotal theme in many utopian novels, is intricately depicted in *Never Let Me Go* with remarkable complexity. The novel subtly blurs the lines between clones and other humans, rendering them indistinguishable from individuals in our reality. The clones' experiences of memories, emotions, love, and sadness closely parallel those of contemporary society, possibly contributing to the limited discussions classifying it as dystopian fiction. Nevertheless, the novel's inquiries into the essence of human identity and the unique nature of clones firmly position it within the dystopian tradition, prompting contemplation on the criteria defining humanity in this nuanced context.

In *Never Let Me Go*, Part One explores the Hailsham children's experiences that diverge from typical utopian portrayals, resembling contemporary society rather than Mercier's taxpayers or Atwood's fanatics. Childhood games, like Ruth's imaginary abduction plan, and adolescent conflicts, such as the boys ridiculing Tommy, echo ordinary boarding school life. Kathy and Ruth's teenage tensions arise not from utopian elements but from personal differences and shared affections, typical of adolescence. The shift to cottages at eighteen signifies maturity, with Tommy finding solace in intricate drawings. The novel provocatively raises ethical questions about cloning, with institutions like Hailsham emphasizing the clones' undeniable humanity. Yugin Teo highlights Hailsham's unique role, encouraging artistic expression to assert the clones' full humanity within an alternative history of English cloning. Despite their unique origins, the clones' relationships, conflicts, desires, and talents are distinctly human, challenging traditional utopian narratives and contributing to the novel's nuanced exploration of identity and ethics.

Amidst the lingering winter shadows in Part Two, Chapter Twelve, veteran couple Chrissie and Rodney assert that Ruth's possible was spotted in a Norfolk office. Kathy unravels the haunting 'possible theory' within the clone community, where conjectures emerge about

their models living beyond Hailsham. Some believe these models age conventionally, offering tantalizing glimpses into their own destinies. Chrissie's probing inquiries about Hailsham raise suspicion of a concealed motive. Skepticism surrounds Rodney's Norfolk account, prompting Kathy's recollection of Ruth's open-plan office daydream inspired by a magazine ad. The veterans, fueled by hopes for unique opportunities, extend an invitation to Ruth for a Norfolk expedition. Unsettled, Ruth reluctantly agrees, as Kathy and Tommy join the journey, peeling back the layers of a dystopian narrative where clones grapple with the quest for elusive truths in the tapestry of their existence.

“The basic idea behind the possibles theory was simple, and didn’t provoke much dispute. It went something like this. Since each of us was copied at some point from a normal person, there must be, for each of us, somewhere out there, a model getting on with his or her life. This meant, at least in theory, you’d be able to find the person you were modelled from. That’s why, when you were out there yourself—in the towns, shopping centres, transport cafés—you kept an eye out for “possibles”—the people who might have been the models for you and your friends”.(*Never Let Me Go*:95)

To apply natural law theory to the clones in *Never Let Me Go*, their humanity must be considered primarily at the chromosomal level, unless Aquinas inherently included personhood in the definition of being human. While this paper underscores the crucial distinction between human and person, it seems improbable that Aquinas envisioned a category of humans devoid of personhood. If Kathy and her fellow clones are not deemed human, natural law would find no ethical qualms with utilizing them for organ harvesting, rendering any harm or death morally neutral. However, if Kathy is acknowledged as human, natural law theory faces moral

complexities, prompting ethical concerns about the treatment of these beings within society and their utilization for organ donation.

Following the events in Norfolk, Chapters Sixteen and Seventeen signal a significant transformation, prohibiting conversations about deferrals and possibles among Ruth, Chrissie, and Rodney. This prohibition reflects a somber perspective within their dystopian world. The Norfolk incident acts as a crucible, challenging their tendency to rely on rumors and indulge in fanciful visions of the future. Simultaneously, Tommy, surreptitiously preparing for a deferral, immerses himself in creating artwork featuring imaginary beings destined for Madame's Gallery. "The Norfolk effect" even got to me and Tommy. I'd been assuming, once we were back, we'd be taking little opportunities, whenever we were alone, to exchange more thoughts on his theory about the Gallery. But for some reason—and it wasn't any more him than me—this never really happened. The one exception, I suppose, was that time in the goosehouse, the morning when he showed me his imaginary animals" (*Never Let Me Go*: 126). These creations provide immediate satisfaction and cultivate optimism for the future. Intrigued by their deviation from Hailsham's norms, Kathy perceives a reflection of the clones' intricate essence. Tommy's drawings, much like the clones themselves, embody complexity and humanity, evoking emotions while resisting easy understanding.

The novel doesn't explicitly explain why Hailsham children can't reproduce, but it's plausible that, in the cloning process, their reproductive abilities were intentionally suppressed. If we accept these children as human despite being clones, society breaches a fundamental tenet of natural law theory by depriving them of the intrinsic good of procreation. This violation of their ability to conceive contradicts the principles of natural law.

The prohibition of procreation for clones serves as a strong indictment of the moral impermissibility of the donation program. Additionally, in Ishiguro's novel, the system violates

other natural goods. The prevalent theme of limited knowledge among students, encapsulated in the phrase 'told but not told,' unfolds a narrative of deliberate information withholding. Tommy's contemplation on the guardians' strategic dissemination of information highlights a conscious effort to keep the clones consistently uninformed. This deliberate confusion hinders the children's access to knowledge, emphasizing the ethical dilemma within the dystopian cloning scenario portrayed in *Never Let Me Go*.

In Part Three, Chapter Twenty Three, the echoes of humanity resonate in the dystopian landscape of cloning, as revealed through the encounter with Miss Emily. Hailsham emerges as a crucial institution for clones like Tommy and Kathy, providing a glimpse into a society that dehumanizes them for organ harvesting. Miss Emily and Madame, pioneers of a progressive movement, aimed to humanize the students by showcasing their artwork and challenging societal norms. Despite their noble efforts, Hailsham faced public backlash, intensified by the Morningdale scandal. The closure of Hailsham marked the end of a hopeful era, pushing clones into large government homes. Miss Emily's admission of initial revulsion towards the students reflects the broader societal struggle in acknowledging their shared humanity. Kathy's inquiry to Madame about a past encounter at Hailsham underlines the enduring impact of their unconventional upbringing. Miss Lucy's departure, advocating for honesty about the clones' fate, strikes a chord with Tommy, triggering an emotional outburst. As they journey home, Tommy's turmoil prompts contemplation about the suppressed knowledge inherent in their existence. In this dystopian narrative, the echoes of humanity persist, challenging the dehumanization of clones and encouraging reflection on the ethical intricacies, compassion, and societal costs of progress.

In conclusion, Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* serves as a poignant exploration of dystopian cloning, echoing the moral and ethical dilemmas surrounding the manipulation of human

life. Through the lens of the protagonists, Kathy, Ruth, and Tommy, Ishiguro delves into the consequences of a society that commodifies clones for organ harvesting. The novel prompts readers to reflect on the fragility of humanity and the implications of playing with the very essence of life. The pervasive sense of inevitability and acceptance among the characters adds a layer of tragedy to the narrative, challenging us to confront the ethical boundaries of scientific advancements. Ishiguro masterfully weaves a narrative that transcends the dystopian genre, inviting readers to grapple with the echoes of our own humanity and the moral responsibilities intertwined with technological progress. *Never Let Me Go* stands as a compelling testament to the enduring questions surrounding identity, ethics, and the consequences of tampering with the fundamental aspects of human existence.

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