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Cyborgs, Cloning and the Annihilation of the Self: Dystopian Discourses and Fragmentation in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*

Constanza Contreras

Degenerative diseases are the pandemic of our century. Cancer, Alzheimer's and Huntington's, among others, are the source of fear in modern society. The body, as a primary source of experience, appears to be constantly menaced by the different developing pathologies and eventualities that threaten its wholeness. In this contemporary society, where the canonical beauty of the body appears as industrialized and sold to the highest bidder; where consumerism and publicity has led to the worship and equalization of beauty and health, and, consequently, success; diseases are signaled as the deathliest of enemies, for they rob the capitalist market of its productive factor.

Now, imagine a world where these diseases are curable; where illness, aging, and any damage the body has suffered can be repaired. This is the premise of Kazuo Ishiguro's novel *Never Let Me Go*, a peculiar memoir in which a dystopian society has found the cure for the urging problem of aging and death: the cloning and raising of human individuals for the harvest of organs. The obvious ethical dilemma the institutionalization of cloning presents, nevertheless, appears to be only mildly questioned—if questioned at all—by the characters in the narrative: the clones submit to their fates with no sign of struggle or subversion.

It is in this problem that the notion of human and post-human, as in seen in Donna Haraway's cyborg theory, and Lennard J. Davis views on disabled bodies, become critical when trying to understand the clones' passive acceptance of their fate; furthermore, it is only in Haraway's

analysis of the development of scientific research as a result of a capitalist market that the blindfolded easiness with which society has chosen to exploit their bodies 'for the greater good' is understood. In such lights, this essay will explore how dystopian discourses, in the style of Orwell's *1984* or Huxley's *Brave New World*, aim at veiling the true post-human condition of both humans and clones, in an attempt to prevent the equalization of the clones' artificial existence with the 'complete' and 'natural' human body, in terms of an identity-constructing gaze. Also, this essay focuses on how the clones can and do actually compose a post-human identity in the liminal spaces of their oppressive state, an identity which is developed despite their society's attempt to neglect it, due to the understanding of the self (and subsequently, of the body) as a cybernetic machine. Hence, through the deprivation of the clones' human condition and their degradation to the animalistic state of product in a capitalist market, Ishiguro's fictional society is able to cope with the unethical and inhumane decision of farming human beings.

Never Let Me Go begins in a parallel late 1990's England where an incredible medical breakthrough has reshaped the concept of life for all: the cloning of humans has been made possible and has become an institutionalized practice as a palliative care or even final solution for aging and diseases. With this premise, the story is then told as the memoir of Kathy H., a thirty-one year old clone who has worked for ten years as a *carer*, looking after other clones in the process of organ donation. The whole narrative develops, from the very beginning, as a nostalgic look back on Hailsham, the boarding school where she and her friends grew up, and where, blindfolded, they were instructed to accept their deaths as normal. In the parallel, dystopian England, these boarding schools are in charge of raising the future organ donors in 'respectable' conditions, secluded from society in their infancy, and ready to give up their life for the greater good. Brought up as altruistic projects, these boarding schools have as a mission—as the reader soon realizes—to raise public awareness on the deplorable conditions in which the clones are forced to live; in this way, characters such as Miss Emily, the headmistress of Hailsham, and *Madame*, a mysterious art collector, become key authority figures in the institutionalization and acceptance of the cloning process.

Hailsham's depiction appears to be, in a first reading, rather idyllic. The institution, when compared to other institutions of its kind, is presented to the reader as a discourse of humanitarian aid; as the narrative unfolds the reader learns through Kathy's testimony that this particular institution is not like other boarding schools for clones, establishments which appear as blurry to the reader as the malign, stereotypical image of the orphanage in Victorian literature, submitting the

students to “deplorable conditions” (Ishiguro 261). On the contrary, Hailsham is, for Kathy and the others, a refuge as they leave their childhood into adolescence, a collective and unifying factor that separates them from other clones. Several instances early in the narration point at this feeling of “otherness”, a sense of “being special”; Kathy’s narration, for example, is triggered by one of her donor’s request to explain her life at Hailsham, a place to which he refers to as beautiful:

“Hailsham. I bet that was a beautiful place.” Then the next morning, when I was making conversation to keep his mind off it all, and I asked where *he’d* grown up, he mentioned some place Dorset and his face beneath the blotches went into a completely new kind of grimace. And I realised then how desperately he didn’t want reminding. Instead, he wanted to hear about Hailsham. (5)

This is the earliest instance in which Kathy becomes aware of the especial conditions in which they were brought up, and how utterly they differed from the circumstances of less fortunate clones. Furthermore, Kathy also states that her donor has asked for this telling as a way to suppress his own traumatic experience outside Hailsham, “to remember Hailsham, just like it had been his own childhood” (5). It is clear, then, that the school’s environment provides an atmosphere of secluded safety, a veil which allows Hailsham students to develop in an artificial normalcy.

However, the discourses of ‘specialness’—onto which the character’s existences are interwoven—present the reader with a rather darker and inhumane underlying message. When read within a post-World War II framework of thought, the specialness discourse becomes quite similar to the fascist discourse of xenophobic or segregationist prerogatives, employed by totalitarian regimes in the 20th century. Under this light, the same idyllic image of the English dreamy countryside that Hailsham evokes is, if stripped off of its shiny costumes, the same segregation center that those employed in Jewish ghettos and Nazi concentration camps in WWII, or even those used in the Soviet Union against the detractors of Stalin’s regime. In Ishiguro’s novel, as it is the case in Huxley’s *Brave New World*, society has been separated in delimited groups. But if in Huxley’s novel the segregation is part of a whole eugenic project installed as the core machinery of society, separating social castes (Alphas from Betas and the people from Malpais), in Ishiguro’s narrative the muffled discrimination that clones undergo— and which ostracizes them from regular society— does not simply separate, but ultimately eliminates the condition of ‘humane’ in the clones.

One reason could be, as it is explained by Leona Toker and Daniel Chertoff, that these repressive discourses arise from the “postmodernist paranoia about the possibility of conspiracies or social phenomena that are hidden from public discourse” (165). Such an idea is embodied in the Hailsham bubble: as a country manor far away from the city, its secluded state makes it the perfect location for a sublimation of the human condition in their cloned students. Moreover, and as is later explained in the book by Miss Emily, the headmistress, the paranoia arises not only from the possibility of conspiracy—one that society knows, but prefers to ignore—but from the fear of going back to the prior state, that of diseases and death:

How can you ask a world that has come to regard cancer as curable, how can you ask such a world to put away the cure, to go back to the dark days? ... However uncomfortable people felt about your existence, their overwhelming concern was that their own children, their spouses, their parents, their friends, did not die from cancer... So for a long time you were kept in the shadows, and people did their best not to think of you. (Ishiguro 263)

Miss Emily’s words clearly portray the fear that has led this dystopian society to accept the inhumane treatment to the cloned individuals, which are ultimately dispossessed of any sense of ‘personhood’ or ‘humanity’ to make the act of murdering, of ‘harvesting’, less macabre. Clones are sent into shadows, into oblivion, to that dark part of human consciousness from which fear arises yet it is constantly suppressed.

Such a behavior, nevertheless, apart from being a symptom of the fear of death and illness, has clear ideological foundations that go beyond the individual or social fear and into the fabric of social organization after the Industrial Revolution. Just as Shameen Black explains in his article “Ishiguro’s Inhumane Aesthetics”, the mechanization of the human, i.e., the loss of its humanity, is a consequence of technological advances and capitalist production (789). Black goes even further by explaining that the idea of personhood, of individuality, has a parallel in totalitarian repression, the *homo sacer*; this individual, according to Giorgio Agamben’s theory, can be killed without actually committing homicide. By virtue of this, the individual is reduced to a right-less being. In this way, the clones in *Never Let Me Go* can be murdered: their deaths imply no sacrifice, for their lives have become meaningless to society, both by means of the repressive silence into which they have been

ostracized as well as by their product-condition, that is to say, the condition of being nothing but product of a farming industry, the market of cloning.

This last idea can find clear grounds on Donna Haraway's studies on sociobiology and the epistemologies of Western scientific studies, from the Industrial Era until the present. According to her, between the First World War and now, the study of biology has passed from a field of study centered on the organism as a functional whole to the study of automated technological devices or cybernetic system, being the inflection point World War II (45). Before the Second World War, scientist Robert Mearns Yerkes became the central figure in the study and research of psychobiology and human engineering, a science of sexual organisms. For Yerkes, natural sciences had the purpose of understanding nature as an organic system, where everything from the tiniest cell was a functional part of a united whole, a structure which could be taken further into the superorganism of society's hierarchies; in this view of biology, the two main functional systems within the organism, the nervous and the reproductive, provided the scientist with a microcosms of nature, including social life (47).

In this way, Haraway explains, science before the Second World War had as its aim to explain social relations and work division by relating it to Darwin's adaptive theory. Every organism would, thus, evolve to fulfill a function within the social and—above all—the industrial network, both nature and society being managed in capitalist terms; dominance, which would determine social stratification and work division, was seen as a genetic disposition just as IQ or eye color (52).

However, Yerkes still believed in the value of the unity of the person as the proper unit of production within the industry, as he “believed that industrial systems had evolved from slavery, to the wage system, to the present system based on co-operation and that only now could the value of the person be realized”(56). In such a way, psychobiology presented a model of society in which the productive value of a person could be determined and/or pursued ideally in eugenic procedures, transforming human engineering in the mathematical modeling of society, of its relations of power and dominance within the industrial division of work. Consequently, the main focus of science was in the individual as a productive unit, a unit whose genetic material counted in terms of its contribution to a greater good, i.e., to the adaptive process of the species.

Haraway's view on Yerkes's theory and research presents the dystopian society of *Never Let Me Go* in the lights of a decaying psychobiology. The human—in this case, the genetically engineered human—has become the heart of a capitalist enterprise, a productive force in the industry of life-extension. In this way, the institutionalized practice of 'farming' human beings—embodied by the Hailsham school in their younger years and subsequently, in the Cottages—plays a double function in the novel. First, it moulds the clone's function within the industry of life-extension by pointing them as key factors in the production. Second, it assigns the clones a highly limited role within the community and society, positioning them at the very bottom of hierarchical organization of classes. The industrious process is then crystal clear: clones are created, raised and taken care of, in order to both be in good health—thus being an appealing product—and to meet the market's demand. Moreover, this capitalist enterprise finds an overwhelming mimicry within the novel, as the students of Hailsham unconsciously emulate the productive process in the Sales and Exchanges; here, the students interchange their 'tokens' obtained in the sales of their art production for different objects given to the school for charity: cassette tapes, dolls, games, purses, etc. Such a mimicry, which mirrors the organ donation, not only reflects the capitalist market in which their bodies are sold, but also helps the annihilation/construction of (non) human identity, as it will be explained.

Up to this point, psychobiology seems to explain the reasons behind the conception of the clones' existence as a product in the capitalist market. Nevertheless, it does not explain the ultimate negation of their human condition. If clones are seen as a productive force within the industry, there seems to be no reason for their condition to be different from, for instance, that of the *proletariat* or the *bourgeoisie*; such three actors become working roles within the industrial organization of capitalist society, as their presence is marked by the distribution of labor according to Yerkes's genetically determined capacity for dominance (Haraway 52). The answer to such a dehumanization of the human force as a productive factor in the industry is, however, explained only through the development of a different scientific paradigm: that of sociobiology. Sociobiology is, as Haraway explains, the ruling view on scientific research after World War II; the focus of attention, unlike Yerke's approach, is not set in the functional organism or superorganism, but on the understanding of nature—and hence, of its science—as “a series of interlocking cybernetic systems, which are theorized as communication problems” (59).

Sociobiology, having E.O. Wilson as its most prominent figure, understands society as a series of interwoven circuits or roads of information, whose main strategy and effort was in

communication control, a forming tool in capitalist market. The individual, as it was understood by Yerkes and his peers, is no longer a functional whole:

Sociobiology studies societies in terms of zones of communication and exchange of information . . . Individuals are systems common to sociobiology and other areas of life science. Individuals also are studied as part of structured flows of information and energy, interacting with other individuals; higher levels of order (societies, populations) result. Individuals are intermediate structures constructed, or rather instructed, by the genes . . . What the genes really make are behaving machines. (62)

In this way, for sociobiology, it would seem that the individual, the conscious being with personality and identifiable traits, no longer exist. The distance between persons or superorganisms, on the one hand, and multiple tracking systems, according to Haraway, is rather large (63). This idea of the cybernetic machine is very much rooted in Haraway's theory of the socialist feminist cyborg; the idea that "we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism" (150). Having understood this, the clone's place in the capitalist market presented in *Never Let Me Go's* dystopia points at the lack of wholeness and discredit of the organism. If the clone is not considered as properly human, if its condition as the *homo sacer* is imposed by society, it is because the very notion of what a human is has been challenged by technological and scientific advances. The conception of humanity as an intrinsic property, as the characteristic of a whole, a self, is defied in an industry where the productive factor or labor of the human is reduced when it is understood as nothing more than the sum of its genes. Just as Hume would deny the wholeness of the self in his "Treatise on Human Nature" by introducing his *bundle theory*, so the new capitalist market annihilates the concept of human by denying the human capital its traditional role.

Thus, the clone, the constructed individual, the representation of the cyborg, can be murdered for the greater good without anyone complaining: in sociobiological terms, it is nothing but a flow of information, the sum of its genes, and as long as it fulfils its labor position (that of dying for donation), it is perfectly acceptable. The human condition has been taken away from the clone, and their lives have been granted the same importance as cattle's.

This view, however, represents only the reason behind the annihilation of the human condition. Yet, Ishiguro's novel gives pace to much more. If the individual is denied of its human

condition, it is not only through and because of the economical model that lies behind the society he dwells in; there are also particular ways of annihilating the human in Ishiguro's clones.

Bodily and cognitive practices are key when annihilating the idea of human self in the dystopian England of *Never Let Me Go*. From the segregation and the rituals at Hailsham to the use of art and language as indoctrinating tools—very much like Orwell's *doublethink* in 1984—, the totalitarian society that has reduced clones to an almost animalistic status finds in such discourses the tool for the taming of the clones. Thus, it is a very distracting—and at times, frustrating for the reader—thing to find that the protagonists, Kathy H. and her friends, never really question their deathly fates or try to run away; the answer to such behavior lies, unequivocally, in their Hailsham upbringing.

It is also worth considering whether the oppressive discourse, embodied in the image of Hailsham, helps at diminishing the concept of human self and identification in the clones. More noticeable too is the way in which Hailsham, an institution arising from the conviction that clones also have rights, becomes the fundamental tool for the negation of humanity in clones. This is because, in Ishiguro's narration, the spatial marginalization that clones undergo at schools and care centers serves not only to raise them as part of the 'sham' hidden from public discourse, but also to make them internalize passively their 'donor' condition. Therefore, just as they are kept in ostracism, the clones at Hailsham undergo a process of indoctrination in which even the language of organ donation is replaced by mild euphemisms, thus normalizing the inhumane discourse of murder. As Keith McDonalds explains,

This normalization is evident not least in the language that is used to describe the harvesting of the victim's organs. The children (or captives) are described as "special" and "gifted" by their guardians (or wardens), and their murders are described as "completions," a jarring reminder of their sole purpose in the eyes of society, and of the ways in which language can normalize atrocities deemed necessary in a given ideology. (78)

In this way, the language of euphemisms used in the novel becomes, then, a subliminal tool that frames the minds of the now 'students'. The indoctrination, thus, takes place through the institutionalized normalcy of schooling, and in such a way the students learn day by day to passively

accept their dismembering and final murder. Just as Orwell's *doublethink* aimed at shaping the cognitive framework of the citizens, so does the euphemistic language in Ishiguro pretend to reshape the understanding of the self in the clones. Not only words such as *children* (or *students*), *guardian* or *completion* appear strikingly manipulated in their semantic content, as to veil the truth, but moreover, it is the word 'donor' which falls as the most lying term. Because clones are never 'donors', for a donation requires a willful and conscious act from a particular agent, the concept of 'donor' is used to sham the idea of 'cattle'. The animalistic tinge that the raising of clones has is thus evident: just as the cow that waits in the slaughterhouse for its death to supply the market's demand for meat, so does the clone that goes through childhood, adolescence and early adulthood, being convinced that its existence has no transcendence beyond the act of patching up somebody else's body.

The indoctrination process works out, at least in the Hailsham students (no real account is given of clones' experience growing up somewhere else), due to two main factors: first, it is the young age from which the clones are taken, and secondly, it is the amiable and lovely environment which gives them a false sense of security. When looking back at one of the main scenes of the novel, the 'gaze' with the Madame, Kathy H. comments on how, even at such an early age, they still had vague idea of the fatality of their fates; how they seemed to be aware of the difference between them and those outside but, regardless of how much they had been prepared by their guardians, they could not really "bring it [the idea] home". This is due to the euphemisms, to the veiled practices, to the false security provided by Hailsham and those humans working there, who so dearly refer to them as 'sweethearts' (Ishiguro 36).

Even so, something remains, despite of the veiling processes of indoctrination, which subliminally prepares them to accept their inhumane fate, just as Kathy's speech exemplifies:

All the same, some of it must go in somewhere ... by the time a moment like that comes along, there's a part of you that's been waiting. Maybe from as early as when you're five or six, there's been a whisper going at the back of your head, saying: "One day, maybe not so long from now, you'll get to know how it feels." So you're waiting, even if you don't quite know it, waiting for the moment when you realise that you really are different to them (36)

Such examples portray clearly the totalitarian discourse underlying the altruist mission of Hailsham, the indoctrination mechanisms and the dubious space in which the clones mediate their notion of self, a truncated and limited self. There is a horrifying reality, a macabre act, which Hailsham's promoters have, perhaps unwillingly, sugar coated and left aside, to redeem humanity's murderous sin.

This reality is best encompassed by Miss Lucy's speech of "you've been told and not told", a scene recounted by Kathy H. as part of her final years at Hailsham. Miss Lucy, one of the guardians at Hailsham, overhears a conversation in which a group of students wonders what life would be like if they became actors (80). This idea, which for a normal fifteen-year-old may appear complete normal, is unacceptable in the clones' reality, and Miss Lucy knows it: she knows they have been told from the very beginning their fate, but never in a straightforward way. Kathy hints this several times too, as she explains the strict way in which their health was held as the uppermost importance. In this way, Miss Lucy is in charge of revealing the true nature of Hailsham: the school, though activist in clone's rights, cannot be decontextualized from the oppressive discourse that the dystopian society of which is part imposes on it. The idea that "they have been told and not told", then, reinforces the notion of a subliminal, ulterior message that the raising of cloned children in such conditions proposes: a message of passive acceptance.

In other words, the parallel use of euphemistic language to cover systematic murder—disguised in the novel as 'the greater good of curing diseases'—and the fostering of a deceiving 'normalcy' in the upbringing of Hailsham students, becomes the perfect mechanism for obliging the clones to accept their fate passively. Miss Lucy is then the only valiant voice to open her eyes and speak up the failure of the Hailsham system:

If no one else will talk to you... then I will... You've been told, but none of you really understand, and I dare say, some people are quite happy to leave it that way. But I'm not. If you're going to have decent lives, then you've got to know and know properly. None of you will go to America, none of you will be film stars... Your lives are set out for you. You'll become adults, then before you're old, you'll start to donate your vital organs. That's what each of you was *created* to do. (80, emphasis added)

This speech, in a way, marks a before and after in the novel. Somehow, Miss Lucy's words affect Kathy's narration, and a submissive adulthood begins to play on for her.

The fascist discourses that separate humans and clones, then, become evident. Hailsham rises within the narration as the symbol of institutionalized language and discourse, a double function tool of repression and protection, whose cause, though noble, cannot come through as positive within the oppressive and paranoid dystopian society that holds and frames it. After all, it appears that, for the *Never Let Me Go's* society, it is easier to ostracize and forget, to put aside that to confront the reality of cloning for harvesting.

In addition to euphemistic language, art is too a fundamental tool when constructing and denying the concept of the human; it plays both part of the oppressive discourse as well as a means by which the clones or students can create an alternative sense of being and self, of a trail or fingerprint that may linger longer than the fleeting life of a donor student.

On this matter, Kathy H.'s depiction of life at Hailsham renders a pivotal importance to the production of art and artistic skills. At Hailsham, students are encouraged by their guardians from a young age to be creative: drawing, painting, and poetry, to begin, appear to be as important as the keeping of good health from donors at Hailsham. These creations, then, become the basic piece in the social organization between the Hailsham group, as all community life appears to be arranged according to them. 'Exchanges' are regularly held at the school, where students buy each other's pieces of art with tokens obtained by the purchase of their own pieces; the gathered objects become part of each student's 'collection', paradoxically shaping the concept of 'personal possession' in these individuals who do not even own their bodies. It could be said that these collections, in a way, function as memory deposits: objects that are filled with personal meaning as they help constructing some sort of identity different from that of their peers. In *Never Let Me Go*, these little pieces of art acquired at the Exchanges serve for decorating 'the walls around your bed' or 'your desk', thus reinforcing the sense of individuality in a cloned reality which is homogenous per se (16) .

On the other hand, the creative function seems to help constructing a certain social order too, a meritocratic structure in which the value of an individual is measured by his or her capacity to produce beautiful works of art. In particular, the case of Tommy, Kathy's childhood friend and lover, provides the reader with the perfect example on how the structural organization punishes

those who do not comply with its requirement. As Tommy is growing up, there is an incident which marks his social development and shows, in a way, the only hint of a subversive character: during an art class, Tommy draws a rather rustic and basic representation of an elephant “a kid three years younger could have done” (19), as a joke; immediately he regrets it, for the guardian in charge of the class, Miss Geraldine (who happens to be everyone’s favorite) feels sorry for him and praises his work in front of everybody, thus putting him in ridicule. In Tommy’s words, “that’s when I first heard them (his peers) talking... and they didn’t care I could hear” (20).

From then on, and as it is exemplified in early pages in the book, Tommy becomes an ostracized element between the Hailsham group, an issue which results on sporadic tantrums that do no more than distinguish him as an even stranger element (9). It is in the first tantrum accounted in the story that Ruth, the third element and friend in what would become Kathy’s love triangle, says Tommy’s constant bullying has been his own fault; to this, another student answers that the reason the kids go after him is because he is a “layabout”, thus implying Tommy’s inaction, or in other words, his lack of creativity. Moreover, Kathy’s narration addresses this issue explicitly when she refers to Tommy’s social situation as an outcast: “A lot of the time, how you were regarded at Hailsham, how much you were liked and respected, had to do with how good you were at ‘creating’”(16). Therefore, as it is seen in the examples below, art becomes both a medium for social mobility as well as a way for creating and/or mediating identity. Objects and creations are key when it comes to projecting the idea of the self in terms of individuality as well as collectivity.

Nevertheless, another interesting factor is at play too when it comes to art and the created objects, something that too aims at supporting the repressive discourses society has imposed in this dystopian world. In cloning, and especially in the idea of cloning for the sake of organ donation, a reading in terms of capitalist and economical analysis can be made: the students are part of a strictly regulated market, a market whose exchange coin consists of healthy bodily parts.

In this reading, the simile between the exchanging of organs and that of art is an irony that plays with the hidden discourse of oppression mentioned above, as Shameen Black explains:

From a young age, children grow accustomed to the idea of handing over their "inner selves" to figures of authority. For such donations they are literally paid in "Tokens"—one of Ishiguro's most frightening wordplays. Furthermore, through

their seasonal Exchanges, students barter their own work to buy the sculptures, paintings, and poems of their classmates. Held four times a year, the rhythm of the Exchanges mirrors the four organ donations that each student expects, or hopes, to make (795-795).

In clones, the concept of “humanity” as an inherent quality, a unified concept of the individual is, if not denied, very much diminished into an almost animalistic level by their non-cloned peers. The clones, though created in image of their creators, have been denied the “human” epithet as they are taught to accept, unaware of it, the deathly fate of their lives. That is to say, they are, unconsciously, forced to construct their identities and selves within the human paradigm as cattle. The only option left is a construction of an alternative identity made up of memories and collections, a *pastiche* or cut souvenirs and pictures, making up, almost prosthetically, the lack of a unified whole.

An identity based memory deposits, however, of recollected items and scattered artwork (pictures, presents, souvenirs), though highly recognizable as an adolescent practice, still embodies an important concept in identity studies. According to Jose van Dijck, author of *Mediate Memories in the Digital Age*, this type of elements are what he calls ‘mediate memory object’, pictures, videos, tapes, etc., in which people have invested interest because they come to serve as material triggers of personal memories (28). If personal memories are thought of as one of the constituent elements in the conception of an individual self, this material objects appear in a reciprocal relationship of object, memory and cultural context. In this way, the Hailsham student’s collection becomes an alternative path for the construction of an inherently alternative identity.

Yet, intrinsically, this identity is radically different from that of their human counterparts. Just as these scattered and particular collections are deposited in different objects, so does this image seem to echo Haraway’s proposition of the cybernetic self. What the clones have is not the unified sense of personhood, in the line of Yerkes’ organicism, or a clear body-mind dualistic separation, as what Descartes proposes; there is no sense of human uniqueness, neither in terms of consciousness—considering all the indoctrinating practices shaping the clones minds—nor is there a unity or property of the body—for their body is dismembered and not their own. In this way, Haraway’s cyborg appears as a suitable metaphor for the alternative constructed identify of the clones: it is no myth of organic wholeness nor does it follow original unity or identification with

nature; the cyborg myths puts at stake the relationships between nature and culture, the process of making wholes from parts, becoming a chimera, an hybrid of machine and organism, of nature and culture (Haraway 150-151). In this framework, the clone is part of the cyborg world: it shakes the relationship between natural beings and artificial ones, and it conceives its identity as a prosthetic extension of their obliterated consciousness—the memory deposits and objects that mediate its lived experiences—see, for example, the growing melancholy with which Rose, Kathy’s friend, recalls her collection of poems as she starts donating, the memories in these poems becoming a prosthetic extension of her denied humanity, represented in the extraction of organs (Ishiguro 18). In this line, Daniel Dennet fictional narratives of the self, inspired by Hume’s bundle theory, point at the idea of a composed construction, a pastiche, as the mind is nothing but “a problematically yoked together bundle of partly autonomous systems” (Dennet 6).

Thus, authors like Haraway and Dennet seem to advocate for the understanding of the self as a putting together of collective pieces, very much in the way that sociobiology understands the organization of life as a flow of information, a myriad of interwoven cybernetic systems. The adjective human has, hence, given space to the post-human.

So far, two aspects of the totalitarian dystopia have been reviewed, namely the capitalist-market background that justifies the exploitation of clones, and the repressive practices that divest the clones from their sense of self as a whole. Nevertheless, there still remains one underlying feature of the process of annihilation of the human identity, in order to reach a full understanding of the post-human. It has been stated that the clones’ attempts at constructing an alternative, *pastiche* identity in *Never Let Me Go* come as a result of the negation of identity by the outside world. It is true: totalitarian practices and the economic explanation of society’s behavior are the excuses for the inhumane act of murdering clones. Nevertheless, it remains unexplained the underlying reason for such a rejection, a reason which is deeply rooted within the oppressors subconscious. Such a reason can only be understood in the light of disability studies’ theory, as proposed by Lennard J. Davis.

In *Enforcing Normalcy*, Lennard J. Davis proposes a view on the concept of the normal body as a constructed beauty cannon, giving rise to its binary opposite, the abnormal, fragmented body, i.e., the disabled body. For Davis, the reason why societies tend to discriminate people with disabilities lies on two factors: first, their degree of disability affects directly their performance in the capitalist market, and two, the disabled body provokes in the viewer a sort of cognitive dissonance,

a disruption or distress in the sensory field (2402). This disruption triggers a mechanism of defense in the viewer, the *Spaltung* or splitting, which separates and objectifies both categories, the normal and the abnormal, conferring the latter the negative connotation of borderline monstrous. Such a discriminatory act finds its explanation in a deeply rooted psychological phenomenon, as Davis notes:

The divisions of whole/incomplete, able/disabled neatly cover up the frightening writing on the wall that reminds the hallucinated whole being that its wholeness is in fact a hallucination, a developmental fiction. *Spaltung* creates the absolute categories of abled and disabled, with concomitant defenses against the repressed fragmented body. (2403)

Thus, the disabled body echoes too with Haraway's and Denet's vision of a fragmented identity, where the illusion of wholeness is, in fact, a hallucination. In order to relate this hallucination of wholeness, this fictional narrative, with disability, Davis recurs to the dialectic of the Greek myths of Venus and Medusa: The Venus being the Western feminine beauty cannon and the Medusa becoming its monstrous counterpart. The myth is simple: Medusa was punished by Athena for taking Poseidon into her bed, who transformed her into a horrible monster with snakes for hair and eyes that transformed everyone who gazed at her to stone; Athena finally orders Perseus to decapitate Medusa, thus transforming her into the dismembered cannon. The Venus, on the other hand, with her beauty and sexuality, becomes the canonical symbol of beauty for Western Civilization (2403-05).

These two mythologies, however, embody much more than simple ugliness/beauty binary oppositions: in Davis's view, the Venus de Milo, the famous statue with severed limbs, presents to the viewer a cognitive conflict far greater. According to Davis, when a 'normal' individual meets face to face a disabled individual—in the myth, when Venus meets the Medusa—, there occurs a disruption of the sensory field, for the vision of the fragmented body (i.e., of the Medusa) produces in the viewer the same reaction that the mythological monster's gaze: it freezes the viewer, turning him or her into stone (2404). Thus, by gazing into the disabled eyes, the 'normal' individual is taken back from a symbolic, known order into a prior order in the construction of identity, and sees its hallucination of unity compromised by the uncanniness of such dislocation, being this a recurrent psychological process when facing disability.

Nevertheless, Davis explains, a different phenomenon occurs when seeing the Venus de Milo, an artistic production raised by art historians and critics as *the* beauty cannon, despite its now fragmented constitution: the Venus has always been known as an armless statue, and still there seems to be no threat to the wholeness of the viewer when he or she faces it. The issue goes as following: when the critic or historian sees the Venus' dismember body, he immediately neglects the lacking in the statue, filling "the absence with a presence"; thus, the critic or historian can see the statue as a complete entity and not enter the state of sensory disruption, and so the Venus de Milo can be regarded as a beauty cannon (2405).

What the spectator and viewer fails to see is that the image of the Venus de Milo captures both sides of the able/disabled dialectic: the statue is both the Venus and the Medusa at the same time, thus corroborating the actual state of the body as fragmented. What he does not want to be reminded of, and what happens when he sees a person with disability, is the frail, fragmented nature of his own body and self; the idea that between him and the person with disabilities the only difference that lies is no the completeness of one body and the lack of it in the other, but the degree of dismembering. The 'normalcy' label is then disregarded (2408-10). This is, exactly, what happens between the clones and their oppressors, what ultimately makes the latter divest the former from any opportunity to construct a coherent, unified self.

In *Never Let Me Go*, clones cannot have a complete, whole humanity like that of their oppressors, for their ultimate destiny is that of dismembering: their organs shall be retired in a series of four donations, process after which they are doom to complete. But in the beginning, there is no such dismembering: just as the Wretch in Shelley's *Frankenstein*, so have the clones been created from scratch, in a defying game of being God. Their genes, not their bodies, have been put together as *pastiche*, in the topmost sociobiological project; their bodies thus have been born complete and flawless, ready to donate to the imperfect humans.

What is really going on in Ishiguro's novel is that humanity has created a flesh-and-bone representation of the Venus/Medusa dialectic. Clones are perfect copies raised to be perfect donors, and such a creation soon becomes a threat for the creator; soon, the reader comes to understand that this 'gazing' process is the underlying motive for the totalitarian practices, as the fear lies not only in the possibility of death and illness, but in the recognition of the fragmented self and body when gazing at the clone. The process goes as follows: the human sees the clone, the perfect

copy, whole yet fragmented, as sees both the Venus and the Medusa. He sees the Venus because the outside package, the body, comes in a perfect state; he sees the Medusa because, deep down, he knows that this 'thing' has been unnaturally created, and *must* lack the humanity that he surely possesses. The human knows that there is something separating them, therefore the uncanny feeling of sensory disruption plays its part.

Several instances in Ishiguro's narrative aim at portraying such a moment, but always from the clone's point of view. Nevertheless, two scenes play pivotal roles when understanding the process of the Gaze and the effects of the totalitarian discourse in the construction of the clones' fragmented identity. The first scene takes place at Hailsham, when Kathy H. and her friends are in the Junior section of the school. Madame, a mysterious woman, comes twice or thrice a year to collect the children's artwork for her own personal Gallery; yet, every time she stumbles into one of Hailsham's students, she does not talk to them and keeps distance with a chilly look (Ishiguro 32-33). Puzzled by such a rare behavior, as most workers and carers at Hailsham treat their students tenderly (36), Ruth is the first to come up with a truly assertive explanation for Madame's behavior when she declares "[s]he is afraid of us" (33), and in order to prove her theory, Ruth plans an encounter with Madame at the entrance of Hailsham. In this way, Ruth, Kathy, and a group of girls wait and stare at Madame while she gets out of her car:

Only when she came to a stiff halt did we each murmur: "Excuse me, Miss," and separate.

I'll never forget the strange change that came over us the next instant ... until then, it had been a pretty light-hearted matter, with a bit of a dare element to it. And it wasn't even as though Madame did anything other than what we predicted she'd do: she just froze and waited for us to pass by. She didn't shriek, or even let out a gasp. But we were all so keenly tuned in to picking up her response, and that's probably why it had such an effect on us ... I can still see it now, the shudder she seemed to be suppressing, the real dread that one of us would accidentally brush against her... Ruth had been right: Madame was afraid of us. But she was afraid of us in the same way someone might be afraid of spiders. We hadn't been ready for that. It had never occurred to us to wonder how we would feel, being seen like that, being the spiders (35).

This remarkable scene pictures most poignantly the process of the Mirror stage and its Gaze, the identification and construction of the self. As Madame is physically forced to engage with the cloned girls, she inevitably enters the dynamics of gazing: she sees such perfect little creatures on the outside, but cognitively, she still knows that there is something utterly different with them, thus evoking the sensory distress that Davis explains. The Gaze therefore plays a double function: first, it reminds Madame of her own fragmentary self; secondly, it grants the little girls the first chance to understand and construct a vision of themselves through the acceptance of the Other, a feeling which is brilliantly expressed in the comparison of “being the spider”. For the first time, Kathy has the chance to understand herself as different.

The second scene, and maybe one of the most dramatic moments in the narration, occurs when the triad of friends, Kathy, Tom and Ruth, are already living in the Cottages, a kind of secluded college in the countryside. There comes a moment in which one of the other clones that lives with them tells Ruth that he might have seen her ‘possible’ in a trip to Norfolk (139). A possible in the *Never Let Me Go* dystopia refers to the possible person from which the clone has been modeled, the source of his or her DNA combination. Such an event is of crucial importance, for it is the only window through which clones can project themselves in adulthood, leading normal lives. Nevertheless, the instinct never goes beyond the seeing, for their brains have already been taught into thinking differently. Despite this, the three friends decide to go on a Trip to Norfolk in the search of Ruth’s possible. However, when they do find her, it only means a huge disappointment for Ruth. This disappointment comes to be because of the Gaze, again; Ruth, by looking at the supposedly ‘complete’ version of her (or so she thinks), finds nothing but the reassurance of her own disabled state. As she realizes that it really does not matter whether this complete copy is or not her possible, she is also giving up the hope of understanding herself as a complete entity with a future ahead; by denying Ruth her ‘possible’, she is literally being denied the possibility of survival.

This miserable condition explains Ruth heartbreaking discourse of “we are modeled in trash”, in which she bitterly accepts the gaze of the other, that label which society has imposed on them to make their deaths less macabre: “[w]e know it, so we might as well just say it. If you want to look for possibles, if you want to do it properly, then you look in the gutter. You look in rubbish bins. Look down the toilet, that's where you'll find where we all came from” (166). In this way, Ruth accepts society’s labeling of her as the Medusa, as Mary Shelley’s Wretch, made up from deathly, rotting parts.

There seems to be, then, a clear cognitive dissonance when the gaze occurs between humans and clones. Yet one point remains left out: when this dissonance occurs, and the human tries to immediately label the clone as unnatural, as lacking, as disabled, he is truly acting in self-defense, because what the dialectic figure of the clone represents for the human is his or her own fragmented body. The human cannot be regarded as a whole any longer, but its constituency can only be understood as that of a post-human entity, the cyborg, just as the clone he is so keen to separate himself from. For, if there seems to be any acceptance of common ontological grounds between the human and the clone, then the whole industry of cloning and harvesting is shut down: if a shared fragmented identity is accepted, then clones are cannot be regarded as the *homo sacer* any longer, and their deaths would be unveiled as the macabre, institutionalized homicides they already are.

It is therefore easy to understand the clones' identity as that of the post-human condition or cyborg. The repressive yet subtle practices that the altruist leaders of Hailsham exert on their clone students does not allow the creation of a complete identity or self, in the same plane as their human counterparts do. If the norm, the criterion for humanity is the existence of a true consciousness of the self, an identifiable and whole 'I', then such a concept is taught to be denied systematically to Hailsham students and clones in general, in order to accept their deaths with greater ease. By putting them in the animalistic plane, in a stage prior to the recognition of the self as a whole (a mere illusion, in Lacanian terms), the oppressor justifies the murdering of the clones just as the farmer justifies the slaughter of the cattle.

Nevertheless, a solution can be offered to such a fallacy by re-studying the Lacanian Gaze and the human/post-human dichotomy in terms of disability studies. It is only by re-writing the myths of Venus and Medusa as dialectic of disabilities that one can truly comprehend the extent of the fragmentation proposition, from Denet to Haraway and Davis, in philosophical and epistemological terms. Therefore, when applied to the capitalist-drive totalitarian regime of Ishiguro's novel, the reader can understand the segregationist practices in terms of fear of accepting the fragmented self and the post-human condition. Only in this line of thought, in which clone and human share the same fragmented constituency, both of mind and body, can the crime of harvesting humans as cattle find, if not its end, then a logical explanation for such an inexplicable genocide.

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