

Posthuman Biopredicament: A Study of Biodystopia in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go**

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Abstract—Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* is a novel that depicts a typical biodystopia. By recollecting the clones' tragic experience of organ donation for the benefit of humankind, it discusses the bleak posthuman prospects of science, the double manipulation of life by power, and the metaphorical dimension of posthuman lifewriting. Ishiguro approaches the theme from the clones' perspective, taking the clones as a metaphor to demonstrate the actual circumstances of human life, therefore the novel could be seen as a parable about human nature. This paper proposes to analyze, from the aspects of science, power and metaphorical lifewriting, Ishiguro's unique art in creating a biodystopian narrative that reflects universal human conditions and reveals the posthuman biopredicament.

Index Terms—Kazuo Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go*, science, power, biodystopia

I. INTRODUCTION

Together with V. S. Naipaul and Salman Rushdie, the Japanese-born British novelist Kazuo Ishiguro is hailed as one of the “Postcolonial Trio” in the contemporary world of British literature. Since the publication of *The Remains of the Day* in 1989, his literary vision has no longer remained exclusively confined to the “mother country” of Japan from before his emigration to the UK, nor has he chosen to continue focusing on the “exotic touch” by exporting Japanese culture. Instead, Ishiguro has become increasingly interested in the universal condition of human lives. Just as the citation for the Nobel Prize in Literature of 2017 goes, Kazuo Ishiguro “in novels of great emotional force, has uncovered the abyss beneath our illusory sense of connection with the world” (“Nobel Prize in Literature,” n.d.). In truth he has always regarded himself as an “international writer.” Under the influence of “cosmopolitanism” with its ideas that transcend a nostalgic feeling for hearth and home, Ishiguro published in 2005 his sixth novel *Never Let Me Go*, presenting in an unusually artistic way a story of “posthuman” growth that serves nothing less than a parable for modern human beings. With its heroine Kathy recounting her past experience to an imagined audience, the novel tells a tragic tale in which a group of “clones” grow up to adulthood only to find they are predestined to donate, all the way till the end of their lives, bodily organs to the humankind.

The birth of “Dolly”—the first sheep cloned at the University of Edinburgh, UK—in 1996 marks the fact that “cloning,” a technology that almost borders on an impossible myth, has finally become a reality. When *Never Let Me Go* was published against such a scientific background nine years later, it was not only much loved by readers, but also extensively reviewed in the critics' circle. Shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize 2005, this thin but insightful book has won many literary awards including the *Time* magazine “Best Novel of the Year.” As the novel inquires into subject matters like genetic duplication, biological engineering, and prospects of future medical practice, most critics tend to define it as a dystopian novel with an affinity to science fiction. For instance, Toker and Chertoff (2008) think that *Never Let Me Go* represents a “mildly melancholic dystopia” (p. 163). Griffin (2009) points out that it belongs to the category of “critical science fiction” (p. 653). And Barnes (2005) suggests that the novel “falls in the science fiction subgenre of alternative history” (p. D6). With its typically accessible narrative of science, the novel has assuredly carried on the Anglophone tradition of literary dystopias. As part of a long line of novels including *Frankenstein* (1818), *Brave New World* (1932), and *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) that share a common dystopian motif, *Never Let Me Go* reflects upon the underlying issues and dilemmas that western society would often come across with the development of science and the implementation of political power. Though the cutting-edge technique of biological cloning supplies fodder for Ishiguro's literary creation, yet in his work scientific elements are almost nowhere to be found, invisible or even “absent” to the readers' eye. Just as one reviewer famously states, “Inevitably, it being set in an alternate Britain, in an alternate 1990s, this novel will be described as science fiction. But there is no science here” (Harrison, 2005, p. D5). *Never Let Me Go*, thus regarded “without science,” also counts as science fiction of a peculiar kind. However, it is even more of a biodystopian novel. With his singularly magnificent imagination, Ishiguro creates for his art a group of clones, aiming to explore the nature of being human in a “posthuman” age. Its observation on science ethics, its perception of

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power politics, and its concern for human life are motifs both hidden deep within the text and integrated to one another's advantage. From the perspectives of science, power and metaphorical lifewriting, the following part will deal with the issue of how Ishiguro draws a metaphor of cloning to create a bio-narrative that not only reflects universal human conditions but also reveals the posthuman bio-predicament.

II. INDIFFERENCE OF SCIENCE TOWARDS LIFE VALUE

Although science takes the “absent” form in *Never Let Me Go*, the context of biological technology or medical application that permeates the entire narrative is hinted at or conveyed in an indirect way. In the novel, Hailsham is an institution that appears to be a boarding school, with students not the least unlike “normal” people, while in fact they are far from “normal.” As the story proceeds mid-term, readers would suddenly find to their dismay that the word “students” is but a euphemistic way of calling these people who are clones “duplicated” from human models. To these “students” Miss Lucy as one of the Guardians who are teachers of a sort would say: “Your lives are set out for you. You’ll become adults, then before you’re old, before you’re even middle-aged, you’ll start to donate your vital organs. That’s what each of you was created to do” (Ishiguro, 2006, p. 81). In this isolated world, the heroine Kathy and her fellow students lead a “normal” life. As she remembers it in a measured tone, the common daily routine stands in stark contrast with the truth gradually revealed that they are actually all clones, highlighting in the “posthuman” age a particular social phenomenon: the coexistence of natural human beings and the clones. On the other hand, the use of such ordinary words as “student,” “carer,” “donate” and “complete” has demonstrated in an obscurely devious way the dichotomy between “normal people” and their artificial counterparts, which is a bio-power relationship between the ruler and the ruled, the consumer and the consumed. Despite the fact that *Never Let Me Go* neither concerns itself with concrete details of science nor participates directly in the scientific debate, which is to say it lacks “scientificity” as Harrison’s review indicates, the issue of life value in a “posthuman” age raised by Ishiguro in the novel, however, bears an intimate connection with the development of contemporary science.

Never Let Me Go was “gestated” (to match the scientific lingo here) and later published during a period—the early 2000s—when cloning, biological developments, and the debates associated with these more generally, were causing much controversy across the globe. Though it is regrettable that the first genetically edited babies immune to AIDS were born in China last November without notifying the national authority for medical ethics and caused large-scale public criticism and professional censure, almost all countries in the world have banned the practice of “reproductive cloning” out of concern for science ethics (Griffin, 2009, pp. 646-647). If readers have a fair idea of these hot issues concerning biological engineering, then they would no doubt take an interest in, or even find an echo with this up-to-date but sensitive topic in the novel. Ishiguro has proposed a certain possibility for organ donation, that is, a fictional alternative to harvest organs from the bodies of clones produced from human beings. As a consequence, the latest developments of cloning serve not only as a crucial premise for the plot to unfold, but also a major reason for the large amount of attention the novel has received worldwide. Griffin (2009) points out that in Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go* the story happens into a “near past,” and “the salience of that near past is in part derived from the continuity of the scientific debates alluded to in the novel in the present” (p. 653). In his essay, Griffin (2009) has listed the developments of cloning in the UK at the beginning of the present century, such as the legalization in 2002 of “therapeutic cloning” which is intended for the research of diseases as opposed to “reproductive cloning” which aims to create particular types of babies (e.g. prenatal gender selection), and how the courts in Britain has granted permission for doctors to use cloning technology to save a five-year-old boy suffering from a genetic disorder. These achievements have put legality of clones’ cultivation high on the public agenda.

If we were to take an overview of the progress made by biological technology, and genetic engineering in particular, in the early 2000s, it wouldn’t take a genius to find an interesting phenomenon, i.e. an imbalance between theoretical advancement and practical value, or in other words the problem of how to make the application of one technological innovation more “cost-effective.” In the opinion of Squier (1995), “as material practices have a low success rate, the potential for iatrogenic health damage, and a problematic relationship to a pronatalist culture and society, reproductive technology has been indicted...as: unsuccessful, unsafe, unkind, unnecessary” (p. 115). So in terms of the common goal of harvesting organs, genetic engineering represented by cloning would surely take the brunt from the almost simultaneous achievements of the tissue-growing technology. Furthermore, cloning humans for organ harvesting purposes has already been marginalized—if it ever was a scientific consideration—as biotechnological developments have “veered into new directions” (Griffin, 2009, p. 649). Scientists have been trying to produce human organs in other ways that do not involve cloning. In fact, they have made some breakthroughs in this field. Scientists, for example, have successfully cultivated autologous spare parts from tissues of the human bladder with the help of latest techniques in tissue-engineering (Atala, et al., 2006, p. 1241). This technology, though it has only been applied to a biologically simple organ, signaled “the beginning of the actualization of growing organ tissue and creating organ replacements from engineered materials” (Griffin, 2009, p. 649). Thus it would no doubt circumvent the need to “duplicate” intact human bodies so as to yield the needed organs for transplantation, which to a great extent reduces the likelihood of the novel’s fictional events coming true in reality.

Never Let Me Go, however, is by no means a realistic novel bound to describe true details of science. Ishiguro has chosen not to depict how those clones are exactly produced, nor has he indulged his writing to touch upon much of the

actual medical process of organ removal. Instead he has focused on the life experience of these clones before and after their organ donation to the human beings, thus avoiding the obsession imposed by dystopian tradition with undue writing about future possibilities of science and actual applications of technology. In other words, what really concerns Ishiguro is not so much the bright prospect of medical application for biological sciences as the “dim view” for human beings in a “posthuman” age, which is fabricated ahead of time by the author’s artistic imagination. According to the story, reproductive possibilities are reduced to the minimal for both human beings and the clones, being replaced by a mania of the former for longevity, and by an enforced sacrifice of the latter to ensure the former’s prolonged existence. Indeed it is a tragic future, when the clones are deprived of their right of life by natural human beings. As a result, the fictional world in the novel can be viewed as a peculiar scientific dystopia with allegorical propensities. Science has made human society more convenient than ever before, but it has also brought about potential attitudes of disrespect and disregard for the value of human life. In order to cure fatal diseases humankind has abused cloning technology unscrupulously, making one part of the species—the natural part—live longer at the cost of denying the other part—the cloned part—their right of life.

“And for a long time,” says Miss Emily, “people preferred to believe these organs appeared from nowhere, or at most that they grew in a kind of vacuum. ...and people did their best not to think about you. And if they did, they tried to convince themselves you weren’t really like us. That you were less than human, so it didn’t matter” (Ishiguro, 2006, pp. 262-263). Displayed on various levels of the fictional narrative through the use of common expressions, this sort of discriminating “knowledge” not only exists in the tremendously different identities of the clones, guardians and the mysterious absolute authority “them,” but also emerges from the separate spaces where the clones and the human beings live respectively. To the clones who live after a fashion in an “isolated zone,” the human beings as their “possible models” are like all sorts of “images,” such as “the actors you watch on your videos” (Ishiguro, 2006, p. 81), pictures on porn magazines and little advertisements (Ishiguro, 2006, pp. 134-135), or clerks working in an “office with a large glass front” (Ishiguro, 2006, p. 140). In Ishiguro’s novel then, “ideas about difference...are enacted and disturbed” (Anderson, 2002, p. 644) through the alienating effect that the uncommon use of common words provokes. In Ishiguro’s advancing imagination of the future, science has enabled human beings to produce exact copies of themselves through the cloning technology. But these clones are nothing but holding units for spare parts, whose existence is maintained solely for the medical need, and whose right of life is deprived under the indifferent “planning” of science.

Thacker (2001) in his study divides science fiction into two categories. The first is the one that showcases the value of actualization or application of science, “in other words the science fiction which science creates in order to model the future,” and the second is “critical science fiction” that reflects “potentialities” of science so as to criticize current social situations, its primary intention being “to comment upon, and intervene in, the ‘history of the present’ in terms of its cultural and ethical dimensions” (pp. 157-158). Obviously *Never Let Me Go* falls into the second category of “critical science fiction.” In the novel, the group of clones has been reduced to a means, the adoption of which would fulfill the end to cure human diseases and prolong human life. Such an outrageous treatment of living breathing bodies which are not dissimilar to our own despite the fact that they were produced and not born, serves as Ishiguro’s criticism against the abuse of science and the disregard for life value; it also denotes his insightful thinking into the one essential issue of philosophy, namely the nature of being human, or how a human being should behave to be worthy of the title “human.” Modern science and technology have brought numerous benefits to human society, in the mean time they have also created among human beings no less amount of chaos and confusion, especially the great uncertainty for the human future brought about by the technology of genetic cloning. By narrating a dystopia where human reproduction has been marginalized under the combined forces of the life-prolonging obsession and the body-duplicating methodology, Ishiguro constructs an allegorical world in which science, technology and society are closely interrelated. In this parable of human life, Ishiguro has proactively refrained from projecting the actualization of science. Instead he has effectively revealed a dismal future when science would pose a potential threat to the human life experience. Hidden underneath a surprisingly calm narrative are the author’s heartfelt concern for future prospects of science, his profound reflection of life ethics, and his strong criticism against the ideology of “scientism.”

In a 2005 interview on BBC Radio 4, Ishiguro gave some explanations for the background of *Never Let Me Go*, a novel which to some reviewers is at odds with the contemporary social situation. In reality the scientific breakthroughs after WWII lie in the field of nuclear physics, whereas in the novel the story is set in an alternative history in which the post-war scientific achievements are within the biotechnological domain. Ishiguro, however, argues that since human beings managed to get themselves into such a terrible mess during the Cold War arms race, with nuclear destruction posing as a very tangible threat to our survival, it would have been equally possible for rapid advancements in biotechnology to create a similar, albeit fictional situation in his literary work. “In order to take medicine forward, in order to take cures forward,” says Ishiguro to the audience, “we often do have to take risks and some of them are very profound risks” (qtd. in Butcher, 2005, p. 1300). This remark, logical and convincing as it is, would no doubt trigger a moral tension in the heart of the conscientious reader, who as he/she reads the novel cannot help but be caught between individual senses of self-identity of human beings who see themselves as persons and the reality of a system of power that uses them merely as bodies, as a similar dilemma is earnestly expressed and expediently overcome in Miss Emily’s confession that borders on a “willed ignorance” which is typical for the oppressor in a standard power regime: “There was no time to take stock, to ask the sensible questions. Suddenly there were all these new possibilities laid before us,

all these ways to cure so many previously incurable conditions. This was what the world noticed the most, wanted the most. ... There was no way to reverse the process. How can you ask a world that has come to regard cancer as curable, how can you ask such a world to put away that cure, to go back to the dark days? There was no going back. However uncomfortable people were about your existence, their overwhelming concern was that their own children, their spouses, their parents, their friends, did not die from cancer, motor neurone disease, heart disease" (Ishiguro, 2006, pp. 262-263).

With vivid delineations of the clones' fate, Ishiguro brings to light the potential indifference and wanton disregard for life value from the perspective of science and technology. Set in a narrative background featuring the scientific development of such biological technologies as human cloning, organ reproduction, removal and transplantation, *Never Let Me Go* highlights the gap mentioned "between the range of medical practices (actual and hypothetical) known as reproductive technology, such as AID, IVF..., cloning and so on, and their representations" (Squier, 1995, pp. 114-115). Griffin points out that this gap actually exists between biotechnological developments and their literary indicators, justifying the fact that the novel "effectively coalesces a number of different but interrelated biotechnological developments—cloning, organ harvesting, designer babies—into one set of fictional preoccupations, simultaneously condensing their diverse meanings into a particular critical perspective" (Griffin, 2009, p. 649). Indeed such a comment is delivered to the point, as Ishiguro draws from the reality of scientific development his writing material, with which he forms his own artistic thoughts on the scientific effects. Thus the theme of the novel breaks free from the science fiction tradition that emphasizes the minute depiction of scientific details, for not only does it express a skeptical attitude towards scientific progress or convey a critical view about "scientism" like such science fiction as *Frankenstein*, but more importantly it reveals behind scientific breakthroughs the deeper issue of the power and nature of life, and explores the scientific investment with life as well as the ensuing problems of life value and science ethics. In terms of setting and theme, *Never Let Me Go* transcends the dystopian narrative tradition and brings the genre of science fiction into a new dimension of narrative biodystopia.

III. POWER-DRIVEN DOUBLE MANIPULATION OF LIFE

In *Never Let Me Go* Ishiguro imagines a dismally "posthuman" view that might be brought forward by future genetic sciences. But as a tool used for the "good" of human beings, the highly-advanced cloning technology is held in the hands of a certain ruling group called "they" who have never showed themselves throughout the story, or in other words under the political control of those in power in a "posthuman" society. As a result, while Ishiguro envisions the possibility that rapid technological developments in a "posthuman" age might have caused life value to suffer from callous disdain, he also probes into the hidden manipulation and potential oppression of life, which is implemented through a highly politicized power system. Situated in rural England, Hailsham with its landscape would without fail impress the reader as an idyllic place fit for a traditional public school. From the look of it life at Hailsham appears nothing less than that in a utopia. However, as the story proceeds, the institution gradually exhibits every feature of a Foucauldian panopticon: there is a strictly arranged schedule for the daily life of students, who are subject to the constant control of their guardians. All of this gives expression to two important characteristics of the Foucauldian power, i.e. a political investment of the individual body and an invisible manipulation of the collective mind.

When politically invested with power, the clones in *Never Let Me Go* are almost cultivated into what Foucault calls "docile bodies." For those people in power, members of a modern society must possess docility which, though at the cost of losing the maximum amount of individuality, would induce individuals to perform productive activities and fulfill various tasks assigned by the authority in a submissive and efficient way. In Foucault (1976/1978)'s opinion, this bio-power that oppresses individual bodies is just one of the very basic social factors that have promoted the rapid economic growth of western capitalism ever since the Enlightenment, "the latter [the development of capitalism] would not have been possible without the controlled insertion of bodies into the machinery of production and the adjustment of the phenomena of population to economic processes" (p. 141). Thus the human body gets involved in the political domain, and comes under the direct interference of power. He also contends that "the body becomes a useful force only if it is both a productive body and a subjected body" (Foucault, 1975/1995, p. 26). In a similar way, the students living in Hailsham resemble a group of penned animals waiting to be slaughtered, their sole purpose of existence being to donate their vital organs to human beings in due course. As far as the school is concerned, what are deemed of social value are the students' bodies rather than their minds, so that radical thoughts are always nipped in the bud through the banning of "misleading" literature and so on. The students' lives are only of use if they take good care of themselves, bodily speaking, to ensure the health of organs growing inside. To achieve the goal of making them docile, "discipline" must be brought to bear upon the interior of the institution. This discipline education of the students is very similar to what Foucault (1975/1995) has termed as "a 'new micro-physics' of power," by which he means to illustrate "a certain mode of detailed political investment of the body" (p. 139). In other words, those in power would often resort to meticulous disciplinary modes to interfere with the body in a specifically political way, all for the purpose of subjecting individuals and controlling their behavior.

Hailsham of the novel clearly resembles a breeding factory of the clones, but it also serves on various levels as a metaphorical space constructed by Ishiguro for the Foucauldian power discipline and its invisible manipulation. In order to make sure that discipline is efficiently implemented, the power authority has set the school complex in an enclosed space, almost entirely cut off from the rest of the world. The principle of "enclosure," in Foucauldian disciplinary

machinery, should be neither constant nor indispensable, so that Hailsham makes a more flexible and detailed advantage of the spatial effects, allowing senior students a certain amount of freedom of action. They are required by the school to move to some semi-enclosed adult communities—one of which is called the Village—after their study, and live there for a period of time to mix in with human beings before they start to donate. As far as Foucault (1975/1995) is concerned, “Discipline is an art of rank, a technique for the transformation of arrangements. It individualizes bodies by a location that does not give them a fixed position, but distributes them and circulates them in a network of relations” (p. 146). In *Never Let Me Go* various aspects of the students’ lives are left in the care of different guardians, who are instructed to allow students free access to school facilities on condition that their actions are conducted strictly within the confines of the complex. Like prisoners these students are regularly let out for “exercise” and granted certain personal space, lest their bodies or minds be undermined for lack of vigor or stimulation during the disciplinary process.

Besides the assignation of an “enclosed” space to the positioning of Hailsham, its eighteen-storey main building with an open view, its sporting pavilion with high windows, and its surrounding shrubs and hedges are all suggesting complex metaphors of political power. Situated at the bottom of a valley with fields sloping high on all sides, the main building of Hailsham is not only a symbol for the school, but also a center for the planning and manipulation of power. Just as Foucault (1975/1995) says, “The perfect disciplinary apparatus would make it possible for a single gaze to see everything constantly. A central point would be both the source of light illuminating everything, and a locus of convergence for everything that must be known: a perfect eye that nothing would escape and a center towards which all gazes would be turned” (p. 173). The school building in the novel is exactly such a central point. On the one hand, its design offers great advantage for observers up on the top floors to spy on students, because “from almost any of the classroom windows in the main house—and even from the pavilion—you had a good view” (Ishiguro, 2006, p. 34). On the other hand, its conspicuous shape in striking contrast with the landscape also means that “they” from the outside could very easily put the building itself, with every clone inside, on continuous surveillance. Thus between the students, guardians, and “them” who are from the outer world, an apparent link of hierarchical observation emerges, by which the schoolhouse serves as a central point both to see everything and to be seen by everyone.

Furthermore, Hailsham has adopted multiple means to control the students, with its strict regulations and punishments showing in particular how bodies are disciplined by power. In the first place, certain criteria are established to judge the students’ mental performance according to their various academic capabilities to meet the said standards. Their creativity, in one particular case, is differentiated by their paintings being accepted or denied into the gallery of the “Madame,” a quasi-mysterious figure supposedly belonging to the “they” circle. The institution also frequently employs examining methods, which according to Foucault (1975/1995) “combines the techniques of an observing hierarchy and those of a normalizing judgment” to form a “normalizing gaze, a surveillance that makes it possible to qualify, to classify, and to punish” (p. 184). For instance, as the school is responsible for the health of the students’ bodies, so physical check-ups are regularly carried out to decide whether their bodies are up to the medical requirements for “donors.” As a highly ritualized procedure, medical examination betrays indeed a “superimposition of the power relations and knowledge relations...in all its visible brilliance” (Foucault, 1975/1995, p. 185). Another instance is that in order to keep fit, the clones are deprived of the ability to reproduce. They could acquire sexual knowledge and are free to have sex, but their choice of sexual partners is strictly censored lest they catch venereal diseases. And even guardians who have acted against safety protocols are severely punished, just as Miss Lucy is banished from the school because she has told the students in plain words the true purpose of their existence. Therefore Hailsham like the “camp” is exactly such a perfect disciplinary apparatus, the veritable “diagram of a power that acts by means of general visibility” (Foucault, 1975/1995, p. 171).

Apart from the political investment of the clones’ bodies, another characteristic of the control that power exerts over life is the invisible manipulation of the clones’ spirit. Creating a terrible atmosphere and disseminating dreadful rumors are its primary means to assert forbidden zones of mentality. The woods in Chapter 5, for example, along with horrible tales of chopped off bodies and wandering ghosts beyond the school boundaries, play an effective part of intimidation on the students’ minds. Casting a “shadow over the whole of Hailsham” (Ishiguro, 2006, p. 50), these woods make sure that their presence is felt on the students’ imagination day and night, ensuring the safety of their bodies while at the same time restricting their spiritual freedom. In Chapter 7 an equally ghastly metaphor has been made between the electrified fences around the prison camps of WWII and the non-electrified ones at Hailsham when the students are having a class of English with Miss Lucy. The imagined possibility of committing suicide by touching the prison fence and the allusion to terrible accidents happening at the school fence have both intensified the intimidating effects of a disciplinary power at work deep within the students’ psyche. Its invisible manipulation brings them a fear that grows so strong that the experience has even gradually integrated into part of their personality as they reach adulthood. A permanent mark upon the minds, such an intrinsic fear refuses to go away after the students graduate and leave to become donors. That is why the barbed wire fence on the way of the boat-seeking trip would upset and nearly paralyze Ruth to the extent that she needs supporting by Tommy and Kathy to pass through.

There is, above all, a pervasive humanizing atmosphere around Hailsham that not only denotes the human beings’ attainable but misrepresented hope of making them more “like us,” of turning them into loving and sensitive individuals, but also betrays a deceptive strategy of empathetic education that plays a catalytic role in promoting altruism and affection as the true end of manipulating the clones’ soul. This subtle tactic aiming to mold the clones of *Never Let Me*

Go into willing donors, contends Whitehead, echoes the “contemporary debates regarding the value of the arts and humanities, and the empathetic effects of literature on readers” (Whitehead, 2011, p. 56). Based on the liberal arts, Hailsham’s curriculum not only encourages students to paint pictures regularly but also imposes a habit of reading with a special preference to Victorian novelists like George Eliot and Thomas Hardy. As the plot unfolds, Ishiguro appears to offer a defense of the humanities as the necessary panacea, because the arts, especially literature, “make us more enlightened and sensitive citizens and/or professionals” (Whitehead, 2011, p. 55). The students are being trained as professional carers, and their literary education seems to have cultivated a close bond of affection towards one another. Indeed as the novel proceeds to its final section, Kathy, Tommy and Ruth are portrayed as individuals brimful of human virtue, even though they are not accorded the status and rights of human citizens within the dystopian political system that has brought them into being. However, this outcome of making them good carers and donors comes at the cost of raising in their minds false beliefs in a society that denies them any future—the rumor of donation deferral is a good example, because they draw from literature not only templates of good-will but also misleadingly fictional indications of social advancement. Reviewed in this light, the empathetic education at Hailsham becomes a sham hailed to impose altruism on the psyche of the clones, an accomplice in a hidden system of spiritual manipulation to which they are unwittingly subject.

The empathetic effects of reading literature are represented by Ishiguro not to broaden a very important political vision for the clones that would otherwise have demanded they grasp the true nature of their spiritual slavery, but instead to restrict rather than expand their imaginative capacities for identifying the social good. In other words, the inherently altruistic value of literary empathy is challenged and rendered morally ambiguous in *Never Let Me Go*. Although there does exist a possibility that literature can be productive of an empathetic sensibility among certain readers, the complex connection between reading, compassion and social justice can never be simplified into an intrinsic or causal relationship which the current received opinion has easily taken for granted. Just as Keen (2007), who highly doubts the common view that identification with literary works can result in our becoming more altruistic, asserts: “I ask whether the effort of imagining fictive lives, as George Eliot believed, can train a reader’s sympathetic imagining of real others in her actual world, and I inquire how we might be able to tell if it happened. I acknowledge that it would be gratifying to discover that reading Henry James makes us better world citizens, but I wonder whether the expenditure of shared feeling on fictional characters might not waste what little attention we have for others on nonexistent entities, or at best reveal that addicted readers are simply endowed with empathetic dispositions. ...I would be delighted to affirm the salutary effects of novel reading, but I am not prepared to take them on faith” (p. xxv).

Hailsham symbolizes a dystopian society where life is ruthlessly subjected to political investment, where all the students are daily disciplined in spirit to carry out various tasks without existential consciousness of their own. Under the political manipulation of power they are forced to succumb to an involuntary lethargy that takes a tremendous toll on both their bodies and minds. In due course these clones are completely subjugated, with a morbid mentality perennially confused. Only vaguely conscious of what lies ahead of them in the future, the students do have an inkling about “donation,” yet they are far from inclined to probe deeper into the matter. With a spiritual restriction imposed upon them by the school ever since they were little, they are unable to see other possibilities for their lives apart from a planned fate which they take comfort in accepting together and which induces them in the end to “donate” their right of life in an involuntary though seemingly proactive way. Like Foucault’s modern state that turns life into a principle object for the projections and calculations of state power, Ishiguro’s world of clones has callously invested life with politics on both individual and collective levels, rendering the continuance of it, in terms of either longevity or reproduction, susceptible to the covert and yet extremely efficient double manipulation of political power.

IV. METAPHORICITY OF POSTHUMAN LIFEWRITING

Posthumanism, as a term closely connected with and also starkly contrary to humanism, has emerged following the development of 20th century technologies. As far as a posthumanist is concerned, humankind is no longer considered as a deified species with unalienable rights or exclusive properties over other seemingly lesser or lower species. The posthuman theory “displaces the boundary between the portion of life—both organic and discursive—that has traditionally been reserved for *anthropos*, that is to say *bios*, and the wider scope of animal and non-human life, also known as *zoē*,” claiming that “*zoē* as the dynamic, self-organizing structure of life itself stands for generative vitality. It is the transversal force that cuts across and reconnects previously segregated species, categories and domains” (Braidotti, 2013, p. 60). Under criticisms from 20th century thinkers like Nietzsche, Fukuyama and Foucault, the human image shaped by the humanist tradition gradually crumbles. With humanity in a traditional sense constantly weakened by such symbols of the scientific age as computerized robotics and gene-centered bioengineering, and with life itself being digitalized by informational codes, humankind seems now to have been on the threshold of a “posthuman” age of highly developed artificial intelligence and genetic biology. When considered from this interestingly new perspective, the line between the clones and human beings in *Never Let Me Go* no longer appears so clear and visible, for “post-anthropocentrism displaces the notion of species hierarchy and of a single, common standard for ‘Man’ as the measure of all things. In the ontological gap thus opened, other species come galloping in” (Braidotti, 2013, p. 67). With the help of advanced science, human beings could turn into “posthumans” by transplanting vital organs from the clones; while “posthuman” clones, as creations of a genetically duplicating process, could obtain rich feelings and life

experience through an acquired education to become “human beings.” Therefore the relationship between natural human beings and the clones is not only antithetic, but also interdependent and interchangeable in its complex metaphoricity. In other words, “posthuman” lifewriting in Ishiguro’s novel is distinctly metaphorical.

In *Never Let Me Go* this metaphorical lifewriting is firstly based on the interchangeability within two sets of basic dichotomies, i.e. natural humans/the clones and body/soul. When Tommy and Kathy hear of a rumor that a deferral of donations could be obtained by proving to the unknown authorities that they are properly in love, they decide to visit Madame with Tommy’s pictures to win over this chance of being together for several more years. However, instead of achieving their goal, they get to know from Madame the true purpose of her gallery. The paintings are collected from these clones not so much to “reveal your inner selves...display your *souls*” (Ishiguro, 2006, p. 254) as to “*prove you had souls at all*” (Ishiguro, 2006, p. 260). And Miss Emily admits to them that this rumor of getting a deferral by appealing to an imagined humanity—namely to prove a consciousness of love—is never true. Her confession no doubt satirizes the human (or the guardians’) attempts to encourage a manifestation or materialization of the clones’ soul, since human beings only care about those vital organs inside the clones’ body after all. When asked by the clones if they could count as human beings, if their lives have any value at all, Miss Emily answers them in a seemingly resigned and sympathetic way, though she is in fact the very emblem of human egotism and hypocrisy. In Ishiguro’s novel the clones such as Kathy have led lives full of human experience and acquired emotions rich in human subtlety, whereas natural human beings like Miss Emily and Madame have eventually turned as cruel and cold as a machine. In the form of memoirs, Ishiguro tells his tale from the students’ perspective as though he were one of them, a clone who sees and feels as they do. Undoubtedly, this shows that Ishiguro has taken the group of clones as a core symbol invested with unusual metaphoric properties to help him explore the universal meaning and common value of life. Kathy’s memories are constantly filled with a certain “warmth” or “sweetness,” but in truth they both challenge the “Hailshameful” scheme of “donation” and accuse its masterminds who are represented by human beings such as Miss Emily and Madame. As a consequence, Ishiguro’s remembering narrative is also a life narrative with strong metaphoric implications. It is not only an elegy of the clones for their lost life power, but an allegory of the human beings for their life value as well.

In Agamben (1995/1998)’s opinion, “if today there is no longer any one clear figure of sacred man, it is perhaps because we are all virtually *homines sacri*” (p. 115). The clones in *Never Let Me Go* are very much similar to the “sacred men” in Agamben’s terms, which is another important metaphorical dimension of Ishiguro’s lifewriting. What Agamben means by the term “*homo sacer*” or “sacred man” is that under certain conditions, individual life becomes doubly excluded on both the political and legal levels, so that it is thoroughly abandoned in a state of violence. Therefore it is far from a good thing for a man to become or to be made “sacred.” In fact, according to Agamben’s textual research, the ancient Latin expression “*sacer esto*” (“May he be sacred”) expresses a wish with a sinister tone, or a curse as it were; “and *homo sacer* on whom this curse falls is an outcast, a banned man, tabooed, dangerous...” (Agamben, 1995/1998, p. 79). In order to find further evidence that could shed more light on the exact meaning of the curse, which Agamben (1995/1998) has found implies “at once the *impune occidi* (‘being killed with impunity’) and an exclusion from sacrifice” (p. 72), he quotes Pompeius Festus’s treatise *On the Significance of Words* for an interpretation of “*homo sacer*” in archaic Roman law: “Neque fas est eum immolari, sed qui occidit, parricidi non damnatur (‘It is not permitted to sacrifice this man, yet he who kills him will not be condemned for homicide.’)” (p. 71). This, in Agamben’s words, is called a double exclusion of “*sacratio*” (“sanctity”), which means life is both excluded from the human law (it may be killed) and from the divine law (it cannot be sacrificed), both from the domain of the profane and from that of the religious.

As “sanctity” deprives the sacred man of any status in god’s sphere, his life is thus first nominally transferred to the gods by way of a death threat, indicating the initial round of violence; in fact, as his body already belongs to the gods and yet still keeps an “incongruous remnant of profanity” (Agamben, 2005/2007, p. 78), it is therefore also excluded from sacrificing rituals, which denotes the second round of violence. This kind of double violence obliterates individuals from both the human and the divine law, rendering their life august (holy) and accursed at the same time so as to become a form of complete “bare life,” that is to say, “the life of *homo sacer* (sacred man), who *may be killed and yet not sacrificed*” (Agamben, 1995/1998, p. 8). In Agamben (1995/1998)’s mind, “bare life” and “sacred life” refer to the same thing, for “*homo sacer* belongs to God in the form of unsacrificability and is included in the community in the form of being able to be killed. *Life that cannot be sacrificed and yet may be killed is sacred life*” (p. 82). In a word, by probing deep into the ancient meaning of the term “*sacer*” Agamben (1995/1998) has managed to unravel the enigma overshadowing an image of the sacred that, before or beyond the religious, “constitutes the first paradigm of the political realm of the West” (p. 9). Complementing Foucault’s view that life is included into the *polis* (city) as an object of the projections and calculations of State power, Agamben (1995/1998) argues that “at once excluding bare life from and capturing it within the political order, the state of exception actually constituted, in its very separateness, the hidden foundation on which the entire political system rested” (p. 9).

Similar to “*homo sacer*,” the clones in Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go* are also excluded from the community because they have been created in a way different from natural human reproduction, “each of us was copied at some point from a normal person” (Ishiguro, 2006, p. 139). Abandoned by human beings, these clones are reduced to the form of “bare life” to be captured, expropriated and controlled by a sovereign power. They may be killed, and yet the law which is

supposed to forbid or punish this killing is suspended here, so that the absent power authority (represented by “they” in the novel) could slaughter them (the clones) and make use of their organs without fear of incurring the wrath of law. In addition, the process of life cloning is not unlike that of the creation of Adam by God. Therefore in the clones’ world, human beings as creators of life would very naturally assume the status of gods. The callous attitudes of these gods to refuse to acknowledge the clones as humans after all are equivalent to excluding the clones from the human domain which serves no less than a sphere of the sacred in the eyes of these clones. In Agamben’s theory, the ambivalence of human beings as a sacred domain gives expression to an “inclusive exclusion” of life, or “exceptio” in his words, which might be readily used to illustrate this peculiar state of Kathy and her fellow clones—they belong to human beings (as they are “duplicates” cloned from human models) but they do not identify with human beings (as they are artificially created rather than naturally born into this world). A “state of exception” is partly separated from the community by those wielding power (meaning human beings) whose sovereign operation (the so-called “sovereign judgment”) excludes the clones’ life from the space where it should have been protected and reduces it by abandonment to “bare life.” In modern societies, veiled under the life-preserving bio-political logic to save people through organ transplantation lies just a ruthless destruction of the bare life of those who are deemed “not deserving” to live (Agamben, 1995/1998, p. 160-165). This is the very bio-dystopian logic for the human beings in *Never Let Me Go* to deal with the clones. The life value of these clones is determined by their organs, so much so that after three or four “donations” they would become what Agamben (1995/1998) gruesomely terms as “life devoid of value” (p. 139). Once this boundary of value based on the human needs is crossed, “life ceases to be politically relevant, becomes only ‘sacred life,’ and can as such be eliminated without punishment” (Agamben, 1995/1998, p. 139). In *Never Let Me Go*, the scenes where Ruth and Tommy gradually lose their lives in the value-emptying process of donation are filled with such poignancy that surely no one would deny them as vivid expressions of the said callous logic in literature.

In human consciousness, the sole purpose of creating clones is to provide the much needed organs to cure disease. Compared to containers, these clones are of no value on their own, their utility value being asserted only during the process of giving away the contents of the containers—their vital organs—to the human beings for transplantation. Clones are asked to “donate” until they are “complete;” however, in human society such ruthless destruction cannot be defined as “murder,” and therefore do not count as punishable by law but instead as an altruistic deed which aims to save human lives. Meanwhile, the human beings in the novel are fearful of the possibility that a generation of created clones with “superior intelligence, superior athleticism” (Ishiguro, 2006, p. 264) would usurp their supremacy, so much so that they “recoiled from that [producing clones for medical use]” (Ishiguro, 2006, p. 264) and finally closed all the “donation” projects, hoping their damnable practice would fade away into oblivion. It stands to reason to infer that for human beings abandoning or shutting down the program means a large-scale slaughter of the clones, not merely for their organs but more importantly as a preemptive move to prevent them from replacing humans to become rulers. As such, the human behavior to make use of the clones’ bodies without willing to take risks or responsibility indicates an ambivalent attitude of human beings toward the clones.

The ruthless abandonment and slaughter, when transcribed into Agamben’s language, could almost mean the “sovereign ban” in which a human victim (a clone in *Never Let Me Go*) who may be killed but not sacrificed—*homo sacer*—is captured. “The sacredness of life,” Agamben (1995/1998) points out, “in fact originally expresses precisely both life’s subjection to a power over death and life’s irreparable exposure in the relation of abandonment” (p. 83). This no doubt illustrates from the reverse side the necessity of making the clones sacred; namely, that human beings must oppress the clones’ spirit with power and obliterate their life by abandonment. Only in this way can the clones be completely reduced to bare life destructible at any time and can the human beings take advantage of the clones’ bodies without scruples. To some extent closing the donation program is nothing less than the ultimate expression of a posthuman life-sacralizing ideology. At the end of the novel, Kathy calmly accepts her destiny to become a “donor.” Perhaps Ishiguro intends to use Kathy—a figure of his clones that comes closest to a human being—to express metaphorically the following key thesis: that in modern society everyone has the potential to become a “sacred man” and is likely to be abandoned in a “state of exception.” Agamben (1995/1998) says that “every society—even the most modern—decides who its ‘sacred men’ will be. ...Bare life is no longer confined to a particular place or a definite category. It now dwells in the biological body of every living being” (p. 139-40). Therefore Ishiguro’s argument in part echoes Agamben’s opinion, but more importantly Ishiguro is different from Agamben in that *Never Let Me Go* constructs with artistic images of the clones a metaphor for a “posthuman” society, in which the author strives to express profound concerns about the relationship between life and power, and to deliver serious thoughts on the nature of being human.

V. CONCLUSION

In *Never Let Me Go*, Ishiguro has described a dismal “foreground” for future science in a “posthuman” age, revealed the manipulative mechanism of political power over individual lives, and displayed a new dimension of lifewriting in the construction of metaphorical juxtapositions. By using the “clones” as a metaphor to reflect upon the living condition and life situation of the humankind, Ishiguro has leapt in his literary endeavor from the power politics on the narrative surface layer to the bio-politics hidden under the narrative deep structure. In an interview Ishiguro confessed: “I’d have to say that my overall aim wasn’t confined to British lessons for British people because it’s a mythical landscape which

is supposed to work at a metaphorical level. ...I think if there is something I really struggle with as a writer, whenever I try to think of a new book, it is this whole question about how to make a particular setting actually take off into the realm of metaphors so that people don't think it is just about Japan or Britain, but also give it that sort of ability to take off as metaphor and parable" (qtd. in Vorda, Herzinger & Ishiguro, 1991, p. 140). Ishiguro has perfectly fulfilled his aim and answered his question in *Never Let Me Go*, a novel that highlights the English myth as a metaphor for the entire human race. Through depicting the clones' tragic fate, Ishiguro's novel indeed "takes off" as a cautionary fable that reexamines the power and value of life. It not only expresses strong criticism on social reality like the traditional dystopian narrative, but also represents with an exquisite artistic finesse the biopredicament for humankind in a "posthuman" age.

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