

## CLONES ARE HUMANS: THE DYSTOPIAN ELEMENTS IN KAZUO ISHIGURO'S *NEVER LET ME GO*

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This article explores and aims to identify and foreground the dystopian aspects of Kazuo Ishiguro's novel *Never Let Me Go* in the context of identity, memory and lack of resistance. Various issues have been raised in previous research in regard to this novel, such as: how the narrator's memory is related to her identity, why don't the clones show any sign of opposition to the situation they are in, does the ending provide an optimistic view of the world. The utopian elements of *Never Let Me Go*, however, have not been much discussed. The objective here is to place Ishiguro's novel in the context of the utopian tradition, since such an approach will provide new perceptions about the above-mentioned questions. The research will show how the novel's dystopian elements are helpful in understanding the nature of the clones, their identity and memory.

**Key words:** dystopia, Ishiguro, clones, resistance, technology

## КЛОНОВИТЕ СЕ ЛУЃЕ: ЕЛЕМЕНТИ НА ДИСТОПИЈА ВО РОМАНОТ „НИКОГАШ НЕ МЕ НАПУШТАЈ“ ОД КАЗУО ИШИГУРО

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Овој труд ги истражува и се обидува да ги идентификува и да ги истакне дистописките аспекти на романот „Никогаш не ме напуштај“ од Казуо Ишигуро во контекст на идентитетот, сеќавањето и недостигот од отпор. Претходните истражувања на ова дело се занимаваат со различни прашања, како што се: како сеќавањата на нараторката се поврзани со нејзиниот идентитет, зошто клоновите не се спротивставуваат на ситуацијата во која се наоѓаат, дали крајот дава оптимистички поглед за светот? Но утописките елементи на „Никогаш не ме напуштај“ се малку истражувани. Овде, целта е да се стави романот на Ишигуро во контекст на утописката традиција, бидејќи таквиот пристап ќе овозможи нови гледишта на споменатите прашања. Истражувањето ќе покаже на каков начин дистописките елементи во романот можат да помогнат за разбирање на природата на клоновите, нивниот идентитет и сеќавања.

**Клучни зборови:** дистопија, Ишигуро, клонови, отпор, технологија

## 1 Introduction, research objectives and methodology

Establishing one's identity through memory in a world that does not recognise either that person's identity or their memory is a theme substantially explored in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* (first published in 2005). Various aspects of identity, memory, loss, trauma and lack of resistance have therefore been examined and discussed by critics (Teo 2014; Matović 2017; Kakutani 2015) in regard to this and other novels by Ishiguro.

Although *Never Let Me Go* does include certain utopian elements, most notably the fact that its protagonists are clones, most critics do not categorize it as belonging in the utopian (or more specifically dystopian) genre<sup>1</sup>. The reason for this is that the novel is concerned with human experience as we know it, and does not portray a future world in which the landscape has greatly been altered in comparison to the one that exists in the present, but rather portrays an alternative reality which largely resembles the present, with a single, yet essential, difference from our own world. Consequently, its dystopian elements have seldom been discussed. Indeed, *Never Let Me Go* is not, strictly speaking, a dystopian novel in the tradition of dystopian narratives that focus on political issues of totalitarian societies and their power and control over people's private lives. Yet, dystopian elements are an essential part of the novel. This research paper explores and aims to identify and foreground the dystopian elements of *Never Let Me Go* in the context of identity, memory and lack of resistance, since the connection with the dystopian tradition may shed light on these aspects, as well as on a recurring question in regard to the novel: why do the clones seem to accept their destiny without opposing it.

There is a deep paradox in the setting and characters in *Never Let Me Go*. In the description of their life in the boarding school, the Hailsham students seem privileged – the narrator Kathy H. herself assumes that others see her as coming “from Hailsham or one of the other privileged estates” (Ishiguro 2006: 4); in her article “Sealed in a World That's Not as It Seems” in *The New York Times*, Kakutani claims that at first sight, the Hailsham students seem “like any other group of privileged boarding school students” (2005). How does Ishiguro manage to make this group of students, the protagonists of his novel, seem privileged despite the fact that they represent precisely an unprivileged group of people – clones whose only purpose is to provide organs for other people and whose lives therefore end by their mid-thirties at the latest, in most cases even before they reach thirty? Why

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<sup>1</sup> The term “utopia” (and “utopian”) is used here, in accordance with positions emphasised in the history of utopian literature, as a general term that covers *all* imaginary places, including both those that present a vision of a perfect future society and those that present a vision of a threatening future society. In case of emphasis of negative visions of society, the term “dystopia” is used.

have they failed to show resistance to their position and fate? What are the implications of the technological development on the world created in the novel?

These are some of the questions that this research aims to explore in the context of the novel. The thesis that this paper attempts to examine and substantiate is that *Never Let Me Go* contains numerous dystopian elements – even if they are not foregrounded – which can contribute further to the understanding of the themes of identity, memory and lack of resistance. The following aspects will be analysed: (1) the isolation of the clones from the rest of society because of lack of opportunities for social mobility; (2) the human nature of the clones through their attempt to assert their existence and their quest for identity by means of individual and collective memory; (3) the consequences of technological progress in the world established in the novel. Each of these aspects will be discussed in the context of various utopian narratives in order to examine whether *Never Let Me Go* can be placed in the utopian tradition; and, if so, how may the utopian elements provide insight into the mentioned themes of identity, memory and lack of resistance. Previous research on the novel will be placed in the context of the specific aspects discussed.

## **2 Lack of social mobility: isolation of the clones from the rest of society**

The narrator of *Never Let Me Go* is Kathy H., who describes herself as a thirty-one-year-old carer. What exactly is a carer is not so clearly explained in the beginning of the novel, but gradually readers come to realize that she looks after organ donors. The story is set in an alternative England in the late 1990s, the time in which Kathy starts her story. Soon enough, however, she goes back in time in order to explain how she ended up in her present situation. Her memory of the Hailsham boarding school slowly reveals that Kathy, as well as the donors she looks after, are clones. This is not explicitly revealed to Kathy and her friends, and it is hinted at only through the fragments of Kathy's memories, which eventually compose the larger picture from the disunited pieces scattered through the narrative.

The clones are completely separated from the rest of the people in the society, resembling a distinct social class in a hierarchical class division. This is presented in the novel with great subtlety, and the difference between people and clones “is brought into question by Kathy's narrative, whose strategies prevent us from establishing strict boundaries between *us* and *them*” (Matović 2017: 42). However subtly presented, the distinction does exist, and this kind of a division between various groups in the society of the novel's world has its predecessors both in reality and in the utopian tradition. To relate it to previous utopian visions, it can be underlined that this kind of a division is one of the two opposite poles of utopian imagination in terms of what would make a society function successfully: on the one hand are societies in which everyone is equal, and on the other, societies in which there is strict class distinction.

The former are represented by utopias such as Thomas More's *Utopia* or Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backwards*, in which all people are equal, have access to the same resources, the working day is the same for all, everyone takes turn in jobs that are difficult. On the other hand, certain utopian works are based on the idea of a strict class division: in Plato's *Republic*, people belong to one of the three categories (four, including the slaves): Rulers, Auxiliaries and Workers. This is a society with no social mobility since each category has a role to fulfill, and is only a piece of the mechanism that contributes to the existence of the state. Such strict class distinction is also present in H. G. Wells's *The Time Machine* and *The First Men on the Moon*, and is especially highlighted in the dystopias of the twentieth century. In Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, the separate classes: Alphas, Betas, Gammas, Deltas and Epsilons are even created through genetic manipulation, as the D.H.C. explains to the students arriving in the Hatchery (Huxley 2006: 6). Thus, each class has inherently different physical and mental abilities concomitant to the work they are supposed to perform in society, which makes it virtually impossible for them to move from one class to another. Such an impossibility to transfer to another category of citizens, in this case women, is also present in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, although not by genetic manipulation, but by the laws of society. All women in the novel are marked by the colour of their attire, and are therefore easy to spot – a convenient device for the government to control their movement.

*Never Let Me Go* is certainly in line with this latter tradition of class division. The story is told from the perspective of a clone, and it is clear from the beginning that there is no social mobility in the society of the novel, no transference from the category of clones to the world of the other people (in the novel, the other people refers to those who are not clones). Similarly, as in *Brave New World*, this is established through genetic engineering. The clones have been created from the genes of other people. This fact itself establishes from the outset such an insurmountable difference that whatever the clones do or achieve, they can never belong to the world of the other people. No amount of education, invested effort or the artistic work they are dedicated to can alter this situation, since the difference is already prescribed in their genes. This seems to be accepted by the clones themselves, since they have been taught from young age to know and recognise the fact that in their twenties they would become organ donors.

The stark distance between the two categories becomes obvious in many scenes in the novel. In the very beginning, Kathy H. says that even though she has been a carer for over eleven years, “they want me to go on for another eight months”, and just a little later she comments on the fact that “they’ve been pleased with my work” (Ishiguro 2006: 3) and therefore let her choose donors. “They”, as it is later revealed, are the people who are not clones. “They” are the ones who have the power and the authority to make decisions; Kathy and her fellow clones are the ones who obey and implement the decisions, and who never have the power to decide. Later, through her happy memories of her life in Hailsham – one of several boarding schools for clones throughout the country – with the other students,

especially her best friends Tommy and Ruth, what seems as a usual opposition between teachers (called *guardians*) and students is presented. However, the fact that the guardians can leave Hailsham and go to their private lives after the classes, whereas the students have nowhere else to go, do not have families and are not allowed to leave Hailsham, establishes the great gap between the guardians and the students. This is not simply a difference between those who teach and those who are taught; it is a difference between those who have freedom and choice, and those who exist only to serve others.

In several scenes, when they go on a journey to look for Ruth's "possible" (the person she was cloned from), they comment on the behaviour of the people from the outside world, which betrays lack of understanding of how it functions, as M. John Harrison notes: "The clones look at the society that made them, failing to understand its simplest social and economic structures" (2005). This contributes to the understanding of why the clones cannot rebel – namely, they only know how their own closed world functions and, before traveling outside of the cottages, they had not been in touch with the outside world. Therefore, they do not have a reference point against which to measure how desperate their situation is.

Another visible reminder that the clones are distinct from the rest of society and cannot belong to it is the over-emphasised concern for their health, which is a motive also present in *The Handmaid's Tale*, and for much the same reasons: they have a task to perform in society. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, Offred and the other handmaids are taken to medical examination once a month to check if they are healthy and can bear children, since bearing children for society is the only purpose in their life, as prescribed by the Republic of Gilead. Additionally, they have to eat only healthy food: "Healthy food. You have to get your vitamins and minerals, said Aunt Lydia coyly. You must be a worthy vessel. No coffee or tea, though, no alcohol" (Atwood 2017: 74). The Hailsham students are not tasked to bear children, but just as in Atwood's novel, their life has only one purpose in the society, and in their case, it is to provide healthy organs. Therefore, similarly as in *The Handmaid's Tale*, Kathy and her friends in Hailsham "had to have some form of medical almost every week" (Ishiguro 2006: 13). And similarly, they were not permitted to smoke or do anything that would harm their health. It is ironic that while the guardians and doctors at Hailsham show great concern for the students' health, which makes them parent-like figures to the parentless children, their motive for doing so is purely to deliver healthy organs to clients who would potentially need those organs. This makes the whole overprotection and exaggerated concern for the students' health seem only a business investment: in this sense, the guardians belong to the class of people that are able to act, while the students are dehumanised as they belong to a class of objects to be purchased in an exchange of goods. The discrepancy between these two classes eliminates all opportunities for social mobility – thus, the clones are forever trapped in the class they belong to, without any possibility of avoiding early death. There is a deep paradox at the heart of this division: the enormous gap between the two classes is never explicit in the novel, it is something readers can infer from the overall text, whereas the situation seems to be exactly the opposite.

Namely, the novel foregrounds the closeness of the guardians and students, such as in the scenes when Miss Lucy comforts young Tommy about his bad drawing, or the long and interesting discussions with Mr. Roger who “as usual, was making us [the students] laugh and laugh” (ibid.: 32). The torturer-victim relation is much more subtly presented than in most dystopias, such as George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty Four* or *The Handmaid’s Tale*; the friendly guardians who encourage the students to do well in their education are accomplices in the system that dooms them to death, as Kathy and Tommy find out more than ten years after leaving Hailsham.

The difference between the clones and the people “from outside” is striking in the contact with Madame, who twice a year arrives in Hailsham to select the children’s best artistic works for her Gallery. Madame is the only person who “wouldn’t talk to us and kept us at a distance with her chilly look” (ibid.: 32), as Kathy remembers in one of the fragmented accounts about her childhood in Hailsham. Although in regard to outer appearance, the clones look like anyone else, Ruth believes that Madame is afraid of them. To test this assumption, several children unexpectedly surround Madame during one of her visits, and Kathy then realises, to her own horror, that Madame was indeed afraid of them “in the same way someone might be afraid of spiders” (ibid.: 35).

The main difference between the outside people and the clones – the fact that all of the clones are sterile – comes to light in the episode when Madame accidentally sees Kathy dancing with a pillow in her hands singing the lyrics of the song “Never Let Me Go” that plays on the tape. Kathy remembers that at that point she didn’t know yet that she could not have children, but she admits that the episode deeply upset her, and “although I wasn’t to find out its real meaning until years later, I think I sensed, even then, some deeper significance to it” (ibid.: 70).

Another emphatic scene that foregrounds the isolation and powerlessness of the clones is the one near the end of the novel when Kathy and Tommy, after Ruth’s death, visit Miss Emily hoping to be able to defer Tommy’s fourth donation. During Miss Emily’s explanations about the closing of Hailsham it becomes clear that the only battle between the humans in regard to the clones was whether the clones should have been told of their fate during their early childhood, or later, when they were supposed to give their first donation. There had never been any discussions about the ethics behind that practice, or ideas to alter it or preferably stop it, and thus protect the children. Kathy and the other clones have never had the opportunity to make any decisions about their own life and death, which undeniably marks them as the underprivileged class.

### 3 The nature of humans, the nature of clones

The nature of humans is one of the focal points in utopias. “The aim of all utopias, to a greater or lesser extent, is to eliminate real people,” John Carey says, explaining

that the reason for this is that “[i]n a utopia real people cannot exist, for the very obvious reason that real people are what constitute the world that we know, and it is that world that every utopia is designed to replace” (Carey 1999: xii). Then he illustrates this point with many utopian works in which the human character has been greatly altered. Louis-Sébastien Mercier’s taxpayers, who happily and willingly give their money to the state because they are unselfish and concerned much more with the public good rather than with the individual good are typical in this regard, as Carey points out (ibid.: 160). Bringing the human nature to a certain extreme continues in dystopias as well, although clearly, dystopias strive to show the opposite: the negative sides of humans become much more prominent there. Thus, in Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*, the representatives of the governing structure torment those who may pose potential threat. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the members of the Thought Police physically torture Winston Smith without any trace of remorse because he has tried to join The Brotherhood against Big Brother. In *The Handmaid’s Tale*, cruelty is unleashed and empathy is almost completely eliminated among those in power – the Commanders and their Wives – and the reader witnesses how they do not hesitate to completely dehumanise Offred and the other handmaids. This aspect, so central to the majority of utopian novels, is represented in *Never Let Me Go* with great complexity and intricacy, so that neither the clones nor the other humans are recognizably different from the people of our world. In fact, the human identity of the clones, their memories, apprehension, love, sadness are so much like the human identity familiar to the people of the contemporary world that perhaps this is one of the main reasons why *Never Let Me Go* has seldom been discussed in the context of dystopian fiction. However, raising questions about what constitutes human identity and exploring the nature of clones in this context place the novel in the dystopian tradition.

Kathy and her fellow students resemble much more the people familiar to us than most characters (other than the protagonists) in utopian fiction. Yet, they do share some specific traits with characters from several dystopias that had spent their youth in a time before the dystopian society was established; and they also have certain traits as a consequence of their circumstances, which is also the case with other utopian characters.

The Hailsham children have experiences and characteristics comparable to those of the people of today rather than characteristics more typically found in utopias, such as Mercier’s taxpayers or Atwood’s fanatics. Kathy remembers an event at the time she was about eight, when Ruth, acting as a leader of a group of several girls that Ruth calls the secret guards, claimed that some of the guardians made a plan to abduct their favourite guardian Miss Geraldine. This childish game goes on for some time and the girls soon act as if it is true although they are at least vaguely aware that it is imaginary, just as is the case with most games of children of that age. Kathy also remembers another event from the time they were about twelve: a few girls were watching the boys playing football and making fun of Tommy. Tommy had frequent tantrums because of that, which made the boys mock him even more. The boy’s bullying of Tommy and Tommy’s tantrums, Ruth’s laughter

at what the boys were doing and her statement that it's cruel but it's Tommy's own fault because "[i]f he learnt to keep his cool, they'd leave him alone" (Ishiguro 2006: 10), Laura's comic imitation of the others children's facial expressions, as well as Kathy's concern about Tommy because she likes him – are all part of growing up together in any boarding school. Later, as they grow older, the fact that Kathy and Ruth are so different brings their close relationship in several crises, typical of the teenage years. Kathy is more introspective and more careful not to hurt other people's feelings, whereas Ruth has a strong desire to be popular. The tensions between them become more frequent additionally due to the fact that they both like Tommy. However, as they grow older and move to the cottages at the age of eighteen, they become more mature and a calmer atmosphere predominates. Here, Tommy finally dedicates himself to drawing the small, densely detailed imaginary animals, which become an important part of his identity in his life in the cottages and after. Discussing memory of Hailsham in the novel, Yugin Teo points out that the creation of Hailsham and a few other institutions "brought ethical questions about cloning to the fore" (2014: 76) because they were different from the terrible conditions in which the clones had been raised in the alternative history of England from the middle of the twentieth century on. Hailsham "encouraged the students to produce their own works of art, and then exhibited these works to influential people around the country, insisting that the clones were in all aspects fully human" (ibid.: 76). As Teo and the novel itself show, all relations, quarrels, desires, talents of the clones are recognisably human.

The human identity of the clones also comes to light when compared to the humans in a few dystopian novels. It is significant that Kathy is similar only to those characters that had spent their youth in a time before the dystopian society was established, such as Winston Smith and Offred, and, in fact, there is a very strong resemblance between these three characters in several aspects. *Nineteen Eighty Four* and *The Handmaid's Tale* take place in the near future, and the dictatorial societies they live in were established at a time when the protagonists were younger (Winston was a child, Offred was just a few years younger than she is in the opening of the novel), so they both have memories of the life before. Having no family and no friends, they desperately want to share with someone, with a person who hopefully thinks like them, their perspective that something is wrong with the society they live in. Winston starts writing a diary at a risk to his life, while Offred, as the end of the novel reveals, has taped her story secretly. The "someone" they both address their stories to is not a person they know, it is simply a hope that a likeminded soul will somehow find their testimonies, and this gives them comfort that their lives are not meaningless. Similarly, Kathy tells her story to someone; it appears that she talks to a person directly, to another carer, but that person never responds in the course of the novel, so it can be concluded that Kathy most probably imagines she is talking to someone, hoping, just like Winston and Offred, that a likeminded soul will hear her, which would give comfort to her life that is soon to end. Her address to the unidentified person comes in fragments: "I know carers, working now, who are just as good and don't get half the credit. If

you're one of them, I can understand how you might get resentful [...]" (Ishiguro 2006: 4), Kathy says at the beginning of the story. Later, talking about the collections the children made at Hailsham from the things they bought with tokens, Kathy addresses her potential listener: "I don't know if you had 'collections' where you were" (ibid.: 38). These statements compose only a small part of the sentences in which Kathy remembers her past, but they are significant because they clearly show that she wants to make her presence felt, recognised by someone else, which would confirm her identity. The person addressed is not known although statements such as "I don't know how it was where you were, but at Hailsham [...]" (ibid.: 13)" indicate her wish that the person listening to her would also be a clone, like herself, raised in a similar boarding school. If someone knows her story, she feels her memories would go on, and not be lost along with her upcoming death. This is also the case with Winston Smith, who wonders who he is writing the diary for and tries to find an answer: "For the future, for the unborn" (Orwell 1989: 9); and with Offred, who attaches herself to the message carved in the cupboard by a previous handmaid, because they both share the hatred towards the regime even if they have never met, which shows that the story she tapes can likewise be a message sent into the future and received by someone who can understand. This similarity between Kathy, Winston Smith and Offred of sharing their stories and perceptions is certainly a strong indication of the link of *Never Let Me Go* to the previous dystopian tradition.

The third point about the nature of humans is related to how human behaviour is shaped by circumstances. In utopias such as More's *Utopia* or Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, the continuation of human species is important and, in the case of Atwood's novel, the rapidly declining birth rate is in fact the reason for the establishment of the Republic of Gilead. In such societies the authorities practice utmost control to pairing off male and female members of society, and reproduction is seen as the only reason for having sexual intercourse. It is understandable, then, that among a group of people who are created solely for the purpose of organ donations and whose reproduction abilities have therefore been eliminated, free sex is practiced. This is contrary to the above mentioned (and many other) utopias, in which free sex is sanctioned, precisely because of the different circumstances. Relationships in *Never Let Me Go* are not meant to be meaningful, long lasting or strong. While the clones are in Hailsham or the cottages, they are free from a relatively young age to engage in sexual intercourse with various partners. This has eliminated the notions of faithfulness or jealousy. Thus, while Kathy seems to be in love with Tommy throughout the novel, she also loves Ruth as her best friend, and does not seem to mind, or at least never recognises explicitly, the sexual relationship between Tommy and Ruth. It is completely normal to everyone in Hailsham and the cottages that once Tommy and Ruth break their relation, Tommy and Kathy will become partners, and none of them are concerned about ethical issues usually attached to intimate relationships. This aspect is convincing in the described circumstances in which they grow, and may be compared to *Brave New World*, where, similarly, free sex is practiced without any of the recognisable

“moral” constraints, since reproduction takes place in laboratories and not through intercourse, and the standard is so high that people are interested in satisfying their various desires rather than limiting themselves to only one partner.

Many narratives in the utopian tradition describe transformed human nature, whether for better or for worse; while in *Never Let Me Go* the clones have identity that is deeply human rather than transformed despite their genetic transformation. Yet, Isiguro’s novel is equally focused on exploring the human nature, just as other utopias, through the attention to the relations between people/clones, sharing memories with potential listeners and examining the dependence of human behaviour on circumstances. The comparison with characters from other dystopian works, such as Winston Smith and Offred, are especially relevant for this point because they display that human nature cannot easily be destroyed even under difficult circumstances. “It’s about the steady erosion of hope. It’s about repressing what you know, which is that in this life people fail one another, grow old and fall to pieces. It’s about knowing that while you must keep calm, keeping calm won’t change a thing” (Harrison 2005). Both *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *The Handmaid’s Tale* are predominantly about erosion of hope (*Nineteen Eighty-Four* even ends with utter hopelessness), about how people fail one another and fall to pieces (Winston and Julia), and about the futility of staying calm (Winston and Offred). This shows that although Harrison does not refer to other utopian works in the article “Clone alone”, his statement certainly reveals how closely the novel is related to the above-mentioned characters from dystopian fiction.

#### 4 New, technologically developed world

Technology is certainly one of the most recurring and most prominent elements of utopian fiction, which is understandable taking into consideration that their setting is the future. According to Vieira (2010: 18), “scientific and technological progress which, instead of impelling humanity to prosper, has sometimes been instrumental in the establishment of dictatorships” is one of the ideas that are frequently encountered in dystopian discourse. The frightening consequences of technological advancement are strikingly evident in the artificial production of five grades of human beings in the hatcheries of *Brave New World* – they are all clones from a limited number of eggs. Huxley’s dislike of technology is also visible in the ironic reference to Henry Ford’s legacy of mass production, which makes the clones of the future call the notion of their supreme being “our Ford” (based on “our Lord”), as well as in the sexual promiscuity which is enabled by the mass production of contraceptives, an aspect that is clearly meant to have negative connotations in Huxley’s novel. This fear from technological development is not unique to Huxley. Exploring various works of science fiction and dystopia, Evie Kendal has noticed that “while there is great potential for utopian sf to promote balanced discussion of the ramifications of technological development on society, at present its use

predominantly favors a socially conservative political agenda” (Kendal 2015: 90). She illustrates this through discussing *Brave New World*, Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* and Andrew Niccol’s *Gattaca*, which exist “both as philosophical thought experiments and as socially conservative, technophobic cautionary tales” (Kendal 2015: 90), in the context of bioethics debates. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, technology is used to crush human freedom and privacy through the use of telescreens, and in the last few years this fear of technology, so prominent in dystopian fiction, is also emphasised in numerous dystopian films.

*Never Let Me Go* departs from this characteristic aspect. Rather than cautioning about technological development, it actually cautions about fear of technological development. Its clones are not a threat to society, they are not the frightening ramifications of technological progress. On the contrary, they are the victims of the human technophobic views. They have been created through advancements made by scientists in the areas of medicine and technology in order to promote human recovery from illnesses or injuries. A consequence of this advancement in science, however, is the creation of human beings – as the novel makes it clear that the clones are deeply and undeniably human. Fearing the clones as unethical results of technology, the society has isolated them and, as the end of the novel reveals, has gradually closed down the schools such as Hailsham, that provided better conditions for raising them. This is explained by Miss Emily, one of the guardians in Hailsham, whom Kathy and Tommy visit in order to ask for deferral of Tommy’s fourth donation, as mentioned before. The closing of Hailsham and similar schools was based on a scandal connected likewise with fear of technological development. A scientist named James Morningdale experimented with creating enhanced physical and mental abilities among children, and his work was banned when this was discovered. “It’s one thing to create students, such as yourselves, for the donation programme. But a generation of created children who’d take their place in society? Children demonstrably *superior* to the rest of us? Oh no. That frightened people.” (Ishiguro 2006: 263). The irony of these words is lost not only to Tommy and Kathy, but even to the speaker – Miss Emily. The people’s technophobia, as demonstrated although not understood by any of the characters participating in the conversion, is profoundly hypocritical: people fear technological development when it seems to threaten them, but is perfectly acceptable when it creates normal humans who can be sacrificed in case of need. Neither Miss Emily nor Tommy and Kathy see the unethical dimension in this, but instead focus on the unethical dimension of the fact that Hailsham and other similar boarding schools were closed as a result of fear from medical advancements. Miss Emily even goes on to say how dedicated she and Marie-Claude (the woman the children used to call “Madam”) were in trying to sustain Hailsham.

Miss Emily reveals her fear of technology by justifying the fact that Marie-Claude was afraid of the children and assuring them that she was on their side. “‘Is she afraid of you? We’re *all* afraid of you. I myself had to fight back my dread of you all almost every day I was at Hailsham. There were times I’d look down at you all from my study window and I’d feel such revulsion...’” (ibid.: 269). How

unfounded and prejudiced this statement is can be concluded from the fact that the children look and behave exactly as any other children, so Miss Emily's and Marie-Claude's fear is based only on the awareness that they are clones, not on any characteristics that make them different or threatening. There is an even greater irony in the explanation of Marie-Claude about why she cried when she saw Kathy as a child holding a pillow and dancing, and how she interpreted the dancing.

'[...] When I watched you dancing that day, I saw something else. I saw a new world coming rapidly. More scientific, efficient, yes. More cures for the old sicknesses. Very good. But a harsh, cruel world. And I saw a little girl, her eyes tightly closed, holding to her breast the old kind world, one that she knew in her heart could not remain, and she was holding it and pleading, never to let her go. That is what I saw' [...]

Then she came forward until she was only a step or two from us. 'Your stories this evening, they touched me too.' She looked now to Tommy, then back at me. 'Poor creatures. I wish I could help you. But now you're by yourselves.' (ibid.: 272)

The irony is stark and yet may escape detection since Kathy as a narrator does not seem to notice it, in spite of the fact that she is exceptionally intelligent and sensitive. This aspect of Kathy's character is also discussed by Sarah Kerr, who points out that the voice that Ishiguro has given to Kathy "is a feat of imaginative sympathy and technique. He works out intricate ways of showing her naïveté, her liabilities as an interpreter of what she sees, but also her deductive smarts, her sensitivity to pain and her need for affection. She has a capacity to grow and love that is heroic under the circumstances" (Kerr 2005). But even the much more experienced Marie-Claude is unable to interpret some of the things she sees. Talking about the scientific, efficient, but cruel world, Marie-Claude does not recognise the fact that the cruelty is not due to the scientific development, but to the way that development is abused by herself and the people like her. She does not see herself as responsible for the fact that the clones are kept for organs, although she is a direct participant in that practice. There are no indications that Marie-Claude manipulates Kathy and Tommy or that she is trying to justify herself. She is simply unaware of her guilt, and constructs an essentially nonexistent dichotomy between *older, less scientific, good world* and *newer, more scientific, harsh world* – which would make her feel as only a powerless innocent survivor in a world shaped by greater powers. This is also supported by the fact that, as she says, she feels sorry for them, and wishes she could help them, as if nothing depended on her. Her perception is so twisted that she interprets Kathy's holding of the pillow as attachment to the *old and kind* world, which is virtually impossible since Kathy, being a clone, is a representative of a *new and kind* world, a combination not recognised by either Miss Emily or by Marie-Claude.

How much all the characters understand only the narrow aspects of the story, the ones most directly related to them, and fail to grasp the larger picture of the outrageous use of clones can be seen in the comments they all make about Miss

Lucy, who tried to reveal to the children what their future was going to be like. This is considered too idealistic by Miss Emily, who believes that by not telling anything to the children at Hailsham, the guardians managed to protect them and give them happiness. After the conversation, Tommy says that, according to him, Miss Lucy was right, not Miss Emily, which suggests that there is no option of changing what awaits them; the only option can be between being informed and not being informed of the outcome.

These discussion with the guardian and Marie-Claude in the final part of the novel greatly resemble a typical utopian characteristic: almost all utopias include characters that arrive in a new world, where there is a host, who is an insider and therefore has a much better perception of the functioning of the world, and introduces them to the society they are in. Hythloday in *Utopia* and Julian West in *Looking Backwards* are but two examples of travelers greeted by a host who explains the ways of the utopian society they arrive in. In many dystopias, this tradition continues although somewhat altered: the character who knows there is something wrong with society encounters someone who, in one way or another, is involved in the way that society functions: the Savage in *Brave New World* has an encounter with Mustapha Mond, Resident World Controller of Western Europe; Winston Smith has encounters with O'Brien, high member of the Inner Party; Offred has a chance to speak to the Commander, a high member of the governing structures of the Republic of Gilead. Tommy and Kathy visit Miss Emily and Marie-Claude asking for explanations, which undeniably the latter in the position of oppressors. In *Never Let Me Go*, the role of Miss Emily and Marie-Claude is much more ambiguous and much more difficult to determine. They were guardians and were treating the children with great care, and are kind to the adult Kathy and Tommy. There is no obvious torture, no demand for obedience, no threats. Yet, if compared to such conversations that reveal knowledge of the system in other dystopias, the role of Miss Emily and Marie-Claude becomes more obvious, and their words of concern, empathy or kindness cannot completely cover their role as oppressors and accomplices in the discriminatory system.

## 5 Conclusion

Facing the death of her closest friends and her own impending death, Kathy H. remembers her childhood, questions her actions in an attempt to make sense of her life and understand her and her friends' place in the world. She develops her identity in the interaction with the various characters in Hailsham and in the cottages, as well as with the donors she cares for, and through her memory of her past life, she comes to simultaneously construct and recognise this identity. These themes are in the focus both of the novel itself and of the criticism that discusses the novel.

This research demonstrates that placing *Never Let Me Go* in the utopian tradition points out additional ways in which the novel and its themes of memory and identity

can be perceived. Analysing the nature of clones in the context of the frequent utopian theme of the nature of humans has shown that the clones are no different from the humans: that they have the same concerns, the same complex inter-human relations, that they establish their identity in the interactions with other people around them and through remembering past events and trying to grasp their meaning and share them with a likeminded person. On the other hand, their specific circumstances place them in a position in which they are unable to act as other humans. They have been created as a separate group to serve as a repository of organs, and are therefore a class that politically, socially and genetically has been placed in a position of being underprivileged.

The aspect of isolation may shed light on the question raised in some of the previous research of the novel about why the clones do not rebel against the situation they are in. In his article "Positive feedback", Mullan refers to an earlier column in which he wrote that *Never Let Me Go* "is made compelling by its characters' compliance with their fate"; and adds that "[s]everal readers have strenuously questioned the willingness of the 'students' and in particular the narrator, Kathy H, to cooperate with those who would exploit and finally kill them" (Mullan 2006). Putting the novel in the context of utopian tradition can contribute to providing a possible explanation of the characters' passivity that has perplexed many readers. It shows that the lack of social mobility, extensively discussed in many utopian works, makes it virtually impossible for individual clones to rebel. The only way they can oppose the authorities is if they develop awareness of their position and organise a common front against the practice of organ donation. However, as Winston Smith explains the paradoxical situation of the proles, "[u]ntil they become conscious they will never rebel, and until after they have rebelled they cannot become conscious" (Orwell 1989: 74). The clones likewise are not yet aware that they can change the situation.

This is mostly seen in the two situations related to the conversation with Miss Emily and Marie-Claude. First, Kathy and Tommy regret the fact that Hailsham no longer operates because it is linked to their happy childhood memories, without understanding that the purpose of its founding is ethically deeply wrong. Second, Tommy's main conclusion from this same conversation is that Miss Lucy was right for wanting to tell them the truth (that they are clones) and Miss Emily was wrong for hiding it. In this context, neither Tommy nor Kathy even mention how horrifying the practice of using them for organs is. The comparison with dystopian novels makes it clear that the clones could not have opposed their fate. It also makes it clear that the kind and caring guardians are in fact the oppressors. In light of these two aspects, it can also be argued that the ending is deeply pessimistic, although it is sometimes interpreted as containing a sense of hope: "Kathy's yearning for her past to return to her, and her wish to be reunited with Tommy, represents a painful yearning and a sense of hope that brings a spiritual element to the novel's final moments" (Teo 2014: 141). Despite the spiritual element, there is no indication that there will be any improvement for the clones. Lonely after Tommy's death, Kathy stands in a desolate place somewhere in Norfolk, half closing her eyes and

imagining that “this was the spot where everything I’d ever lost since my childhood had washed up, and I was now standing here in front of it, and if I waited long enough, a tiny figure would appear on the horizon across the field, and gradually get larger until I’d seen it was Tommy, he’d wave, maybe even call” (Ishiguro 2006: 287–288). Her sadness is the sadness of a person struggling to come to terms with personal loss, and there does not seem to be any hope of repairing the social injustice inflicted on the clones.

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