

***Never Let Me Go* and the Necropolitics of Biomedical Engineering**

Samuel Humy

This article is a close inspection of Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*, zeroing in on how the novel's three major themes are to be applied within their larger context of the dystopian genre. With the premise concerning the goings-on of an alternate universe in which systematic human cloning is designed for organ harvestation, these themes are naturally deeply troubling. The first of these three discussed is the ontological shift in the fields of science and how problematic advancing science to this point would be. The article uses the work of Eugene Thacker for clarification of this idea, and his conclusion relies on rejecting popularly-held myths behind the science of regenerative medicine. The second, on a more personal level, involves the characters themselves and how their exploitation by this system may take its toll psychologically. The article is able to examine the psychology of an exploited woman living in this universe by bridging the work of Frantz Fanon, which discusses at length the notion of the "racialized other." And the final dystopian theme discussed is Ishiguro's response to the political question of the novel: the nature and origins of the kind of system that enabled such exploitation. Here, Achille Mbembe's words on the dehumanization and industrialization of death form the framework for the article to analyze this final main theme. Together, these themes scream dystopian, and the article is able to properly dissect both their role and their effect within the novel.

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Kazuo Ishiguro gained critical acclaim after publishing his third novel *The Remains of the Day* in 1989. The novel features a narrator named Stevens, a butler in a traditional English manor who reminisces over his years of service to his former lord, a Nazi sympathizer with sinister visitors, and in doing so ponders the traits that are required to be a gentleman and the meaning of class distinction, dignity, and purpose in life. As a narrative about interwar England concerned with class exploitation and the persecution of the Jewish community, we might put *The Remains of the Day* in dialogue with its post-war English counterpart, Ishiguro's later novel *Never Let Me Go* (2005), which dives into a world that is suggested by the aftermath of the austere scientific rationale of the war, further developing the ideas of class disparity addressed in *The Remains of the Day*.¹

Like *The Remains of the Day*, *Never Let Me Go* is told in the first person by a narrator in England recounting past experiences and coming to terms with loss and the cruelty of their personal service. Kathy H. narrates the story in the late 1990s as she is coming to the end of her life at the age of thirty-one. She and all of her friends are bred through cloning to be killed by the rest of humanity in order to donate their organs to allow the outside community's lives to continue, a fate they slowly become more and more aware of throughout their lives. Years of disillusion go by filled with attempts to assimilate into the society that oppresses them by trying to find their "possibles," or those individuals whom they were cloned from originally, by parroting the social norms of the people they see on television, and through a failed attempt to escape their morbid fate involving a fabricated belief that if two of them prove they are in love they may escape or postpone their fate. Kathy eventually becomes a "carer," one who looks over organ donors as they gradually die giving up their vital organs, a job the clones must take on before they themselves become donors. At the close of the novel she looks over her childhood friends as they expire, or "complete," and Kathy is left alone to continue caring for donors until she herself must give up her body for the rest of society. In the closing chapter, she reflects upon her isolation in the world and the futility of her life before she calmly acquiesces to her fate. Kathy tells the story of her life and the development of her friendships from early childhood onward, highlighting her steadily increasing understanding of her social place in society as a member of an exploited class and/or race and the psychological turmoil such an understanding causes.²

¹ Kazuo Ishiguro, *The Remains of the Day*, Vintage International Edition, 1993

² Kazuo Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go*, Vintage International Edition, 2006

Never Let Me Go and *The Remains of the Day* have a great deal in common; both utilize a first person narration that occasionally addresses the reader directly, both explore themes of emotional isolation, loss, exploitation by other groups, a love life never fulfilled, and cold calculability in the political treatment of human beings, and both take place in provincial England. The primary area in which *Never Let Me Go* differs from *The Remains of the Day* is in its more contemporary temporal setting and its thematic reach into the realm of science fiction. *Never Let Me Go* depicts a society driven on the use of cloned human beings in a form of exploitation akin to slave labor, a system put into practice shortly after what the reader would assume is the Second World War, a glimpse of the story's history disclosed in the end of the novel. In this sense the novel can be seen as a continuation of *The Remains of the Day*, an extension of the harsh rationality of Nazi Germany and the ideologies of the Second World War into the fervor of biological exchange and technological advancement in the contemporary moment.

The ambiguous genre of the novel reflects the eclectic assortment of themes it brings to light. *Never Let Me Go* contains elements of science fiction in its exploration of cloning, realism in its focus on the mundane, historical fiction in its post-war temporal setting, the bildungsroman in the development of the characters since early childhood and the steady disillusionment they face, and even romance in their tragically thwarted relationships. Due to its mixed form, the most fitting genre that we might use to classify the novel is the broad umbrella term of speculative dystopian fiction. By utilizing this open genre, the novel incorporates a wide range of themes and sets up an entire discursive world. In this sense the novel traverses freely between themes in order to better express the multifaceted implications of biotechnology and exploitation of an underclass instead of being confined to potentially restrictive generic conventions. The use of elements from the bildungsroman establishes a psychology of otherness in the clones with which Kathy and the others must come to terms, science fiction allows for an insight into the biomedical aspects of our current technologically driven epoch, and an even more curious political exploration comes to life in the novel's dystopian speculation which is, in turn, thrown into high relief by a jarring tendency towards the realist everyday. Without constraint, *Never Let Me Go* is able to escape the facile and achieve mobility across genres emphasizing the complexity of what remains in post-war England in the wake of the rationalized and political death regime of Nazi Germany.

This broad genre calls for multiple theoretical approaches. The most crucial elements of *Never Let Me Go* seem to be as follows: the ontologically altered biomedical field and cloning, the psychological development of exploited demographics, and the political system that allows for such exploitation. I will use three different theoretical paradigms to address these three primary themes in the novel, drawn from respectively, Eugene Thacker's *The Global Genome*, Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*, and Achille Mbembe's "Necropolitics."

A Destabilized Ontology

Regenerative medicine and tissue engineering have become prevalent areas of research and medical advancement, although many of the developments are still experimental. Thacker succinctly sums up the general logic of tissue engineering, stating it is “to combine ‘cells and materials’ to grow tissues and organs, and then to implant those tissues and organs into the patient’s body.”³ In basic terms, the most common model for tissue engineering involves taking a cell sample without damaging the donor site, implanting the cells into a biomaterial skeleton for structural support, inducing regeneration of the tissue or organ, and transplanting the engineered organ into the patient’s body.

Thacker highlights a crucial element of the procedure: “at no point in these processes are mechanical or nonbiological, nonorganic artificial materials or components incorporated as part of the core process of cellular and tissue regeneration. All ‘natural’ biochemical processes are maintained [...] The regenerative tissue thus ultimately derives from the patient-subject’s own biological resources.”⁴ With this in mind, Thacker claims that “tissue engineering is in the process of constituting a unique biomedical normativity based on a notion of the body as ‘regenerative’ and as self-healing,” a biomedical ideology embedded in regenerative medicine.⁵ Of course, tissue engineering is not entirely “natural” because the body is not capable of growing, say, a new heart without outside intervention, but the “natural” processes of the body themselves are not altered, they are, so to speak, merely redirected. In addition, past concepts of biological normativity are typically grounded in the idea that medicine is applied to the body in order to return the body to a normal or healthy state, but tissue engineering does not utilize medicine outside the body, and there need not necessarily be a deviation from a healthy or normal state for tissue engineering to prove beneficial to the patient.⁶ Therefore, instead of conventionally treating the body as separate from medicine, “regenerative medicine purports to treat the body as marked by operational deficiencies open to improvement in design.”⁷ In other words, the healthy or normal state of the body is obliterated; if there is room for improvement, the body can benefit from regenerative medicine. The notions of sick and healthy are rendered obsolete and instead we are left with the potential for reaching beyond what is considered healthy in a form of regenerative augmentation. In this sense, the practice of tissue engineering is paradoxically both of the body, in that the engineered organ or tissue comes purely from the patient’s own biological resources, and beyond the body, in that tissue engineering enables the patient to transcend the natural restrictions of the “normal” human body.

³Eugene Thacker, “The Thickness of Tissue Engineering,” *The Global Genome*, p. 254

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 258

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 260

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 260

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 262

This state of being within and without the body works to redefine what we perceive as truly human. Theoretically a patient could be the subject of numerous organ transplants and regenerative practices, both transcending natural human capabilities as well as becoming more cloned parts than “naturally grown” parts, forcing us to consider where we draw the line to determine what we consider still human. Thacker poses a number of open-ended questions brought to light by the practice of tissue engineering, such as:

Does the involvement of a range of biotechnologies fundamentally change the ontological status of the particular body part regenerated? Is the regenerated organ or tissue mass exactly the same as the “original”? What are the phenomenological and psychological dimensions of this process of autoalterity? If the biomedical body of tissue engineering is dispersed throughout these techniques and technologies, how and where do we situate the body that is supposedly “proper” to the patient-subject?⁸

Additionally, due to the suggestion that tissue engineering opens up the notion of the body being “open to improvement in design,” the body becomes a sort of canvas for the patient to act upon and experiment with. Aside from the ongoing trend of bioart⁹ where such an approach to the body is evident, regenerative medicine upholds a new concept of the human: “a strange body that is constantly surpassing itself, a body-more-than-body,”¹⁰ a notion idealistic yet chilling, playing into the modern fear of the loss of the human.

Ishiguro explores many of the implications of tissue engineering and regenerative medicine in the economic and medical purpose of the clones in *Never Let Me Go*. The actual process of the cloning and organ donation in the novel is left fairly vague, but we know Kathy and the other students are clones created for the sole purpose of donating their organs to the outside society, a system of regenerative medicine that extends and explores the existing practices of tissue engineering described by Thacker. The clones in the novel thus exemplify the destabilized definition of what it means to be human in our biomedical epoch. When in public, the clones are indistinguishable from ordinary human beings,¹¹ but when any member of the outside society becomes aware of the clones’ origins they recoil in horror.¹² Towards the end of the novel, Kathy visits Madame, an old acquaintance from outside the cloned community who recognizes their status as clones due to her previous time with them. She describes the encounter, observing “I don’t know if she recognised us at that point; but without a doubt, she saw and decided in a second *what we were*, because you could see her stiffen.”¹³ Kathy does not describe Madame as deciding “who” they were, but instead as “what” they were, clearly showing that Madame does not consider the clones entirely human. The clones are objectified

⁸ Ibid., p. 264

⁹ Ibid., “Conclusion: Tactical Media and Bioart,” p. 305-20

¹⁰ Ibid., “The Thickness of Tissue Engineering,” p. 286

¹¹ Kazuo Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go*, p. 163, 166

¹² Ibid., p. 35, 248

¹³ Ibid., p. 248

despite the fact that they appear just as “normal” humans would. This discrepancy between what is considered human and what is visually apparent parallels the ontological complexities of tissue engineering addressed by Thacker. Like an engineered organ, the clones are seemingly indistinguishable from the original, all the biological processes of the body are maintained, and their bodies are comprised entirely of “natural” biological phenomena. And yet, again, like an engineered organ, the clones could not be created without some sort of “unnatural” biological manipulation, and the legitimacy of their very being is subject to question. As readers we empathize with Kathy and most likely consider the clones human, but cannot explicitly state why. By opening up the implications of tissue engineering and regenerative medicine into a narrative, Ishiguro creates a paradox of human and not human that arrests the reader in a form of ontological play.

The novel also addresses the notion of “improvement in design” that is perhaps the most profound aspect of regenerative medicine. Towards the end of the novel, Miss Emily, a previous caretaker of the students, describes to Kathy and Tommy a controversial scientific breakthrough by a scientist known as James Morningdale. She states, “What he wanted was to offer people the possibility of having children with enhanced characteristics. Superior intelligence, superior athleticism, that sort of thing. Of course there’d been others with similar ambitions, but this Morningdale fellow, he’d taken his research much further than anyone before him, far beyond legal boundaries.”¹⁴ In her description, not only does the Morningdale controversy allow for a brief speculation of “improvement in design,” but it also suggests the ethical issues such practices bring to light and the line that must be arbitrarily drawn between what is considered acceptable and “human,” and what is considered unnatural. The society is comfortable with creating clones in order to sacrifice them for the benefit of continuing their own lives, but there is an immediate refusal of notions of altering human design. Miss Emily continues, emphasizing the public’s rejection of such ideas, “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. They recoiled from that.”¹⁵ This moment in the novel forces the reader to ponder further what it is that deems something human or not human. From the beginning of the novel, we consider Kathy human and through her life story we gain a deep empathy for her. The society’s refusal to accept Kathy and other clones as human therefore seems barbaric to the reader, but the scandal caused by the Morningdale incident appears strange in comparison, for its implications seem relatively mild. The seemingly arbitrary sentiments of the public in the novel reflect the difficulty in answering the open-ended questions Thacker proposes.

Thacker suggests that in order for regenerative medicine to progress, society must rethink the dichotomy of biology and technology through what Bruno Latour calls hybridization, amalgamating the two instead of perceiving them as mutually

¹⁴ Ibid. p. 263-64

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 264

exclusive. Without reconsidering these now pliable definitions, “it becomes all too easy to desire habitually, at any cost, the vision of a body transcending itself, sublimating itself, curing itself, and yet still ‘a body.’”¹⁶ *Never Let Me Go* does not necessarily suggest hybridization, but it experiments with the ontological implications of the biomedical field. The creation of life is becoming more and more hazy in its specifications, especially in a world that by and large accepts children born from in vitro fertilization and surrogate motherhood as entirely human; to question the legitimacy of life created in such a way seems absurd, but if we accept it then how do we approach regenerative medicine? Furthermore, if we consider the act of cloning an organ for donation as acceptable, but we consider the act of cloning an entire being like Kathy for donation as inhumane, where do we draw the line? At what point does an organ or a series of connected organs become human? The novel does not answer these questions and simply presents them for the reader to ponder, evoking a sense of trepidation over the potential ramifications of tissue engineering and regenerative medicine, and constructing a form of biomedical ontological play at the heart of the story that lays the foundation for the question of what it means to be human, a question shared by both the reader and the clones in the novel themselves.

The Human and the Other

The ontological play Ishiguro constructs manifests itself in the clones’ development of identity. Kathy and her friends are not immediately aware of their status as clones segregated from the outside community, or of the organ donations ahead of them, although she notes that there was always some notion that they were different in the back of their minds.¹⁷ Instead, much of the novel focuses on the various points in Kathy’s childhood where she slowly comes to grasp the extent of her social otherness and the exploitation of her life. The first moment of true realization arises when the children all rush towards Madame, a regular visitor from outside Hailsham, the closed community in which the clones are raised, only to be shocked by Madame’s revulsion towards their very existence. Kathy recalls the scene, stating

As she came to a halt, I glanced at her face—as did the others, I’m sure. And I can still see it now, the shudder she seemed to be suppressing, the real dread that one of us would accidentally brush against her. And though we just kept walking, we all felt it; it was like we’d walked from the sun right into chilly shade. Ruth had been right: Madame *was* afraid of us. But she was afraid of us in the same way someone might be afraid of spiders. We hadn’t been ready for that. It had never occurred to us to wonder how *we* would feel, being seen like that, being the spiders.¹⁸

Before actually surprising Madame, the act had been merely a kind of blithe childhood dare, and “if not a joke exactly, very much a private thing we’d wanted to settle among ourselves,” but afterward Kathy observes “we were a very different

¹⁶ Eugene Thacker, “The Thickness of Tissue Engineering,” *The Global Genome*, p. 274

¹⁷ Kazuo Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go*, p. 69, 83

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 35

group from the one that had stood about excitedly waiting for Madame to get out of her car,”¹⁹ and the whole event takes on a seriousness unanticipated by the children. The scene is a turning point in Kathy’s life, for she notices at eight years old for the first time the difference between her and others in the world, and the brutality of such a realization. She continues, speaking of the scene as

the moment when you realise that you are different to them; that there are people out there, like Madame, who don’t hate you or wish you any harm, but who nevertheless shudder at the very thought of you—of how you were brought into this world and why—and who dread the idea of your hand brushing against theirs. The first time you glimpse yourself through the eyes of a person like that, it’s a cold moment. It’s like walking past a mirror you’ve walked past every day of your life, and suddenly it shows you something else, something troubling and strange.²⁰

Kathy’s social disillusionment in this scene is also reminiscent of Fanon’s concept of coming to consciousness of one’s racial alterity. Fanon writes of the subject: “As long as the black child remains on his home ground his life follows more or less the same course as that of the white child. But if he goes to Europe he will have to rethink his life, for in France, his country, he will be different from the rest.”²¹ Additionally, Fanon notes that “the black man is unaware of it as long as he lives among his own people; but at the first white gaze, he feels the weight of his melanin.”²² The clearest resemblance between the scene in *Never Let Me Go* and Fanon’s concept appears in his footnote to the previous sentence:

Let us recall what Sartre said on the subject: “Some children, at the age of five or six, have already had fights with schoolmates who call them ‘Yids.’ Others may remain in ignorance for a long time. A young Jewish girl in a family I am acquainted with did not even know the meaning of the word *Jew* until she was fifteen. During the Occupation there was a Jewish doctor who lived shut up in his home in Fontainebleau and raised his children without saying a word to them of their origin. But however it comes about, some day they must learn the truth: sometimes from the smiles of those around them, sometimes from rumor or insult. The later the discovery the more violent the shock. Suddenly they perceive that others know something about them that they do not know, that people apply to them an ugly and upsetting term that is now used in their own families” (*Anti-Semite and Jew*, p. 75.)²³

When Kathy runs out to surprise Madame she feels herself placed under the “white gaze” and comes to consciousness of her otherness. Although there is no mention of race with regard to the clones in the novel, the clones are racialized by the outside community and are seen as ontologically inferior. Tissue engineering and regenerative medicine suggest the question of what it means to be human, and

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 35

²⁰ Ibid., p. 36

²¹ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, “The Black Man and Psychopathology,” p. 127

²² Ibid., p. 128

²³ Ibid.

Ishiguro addresses the question from a different angle as well. Kathy and the children not only exhibit an aspect of Ishiguro's ontological play in the fact that they are clones in a system of tissue engineering, they also take on the psychological traits of a racially oppressed "other," a form of otherness at the center of the brutal human ontology of colonialism. As Fanon starkly states, "I shall say that a Black man is not a man. [...] There is a zone of nonbeing."²⁴ Like the racialized other, the clones are relegated to nonbeing, and are not considered human. Kathy feels something momentous shift in her perception of her identity, just as is mentioned in Fanon's quotation of Sartre, she describes the sensation as a realization of difference, and like "walking past a mirror you've seen every day of your life, and suddenly it shows you something else." Similarly, Sartre remarks of the recently disillusioned racial other that "suddenly they perceive that others know something about them that they do not know." Kathy's recognition of her racialized alterity is a critical moment in her childhood that initiates her into a life of otherness framed and defined by her impending premature death, a moment as significant as that which Fanon depicts. Kathy reflects upon it as so, noting, "it was the start of a process that kept growing and growing over the years until it came to dominate our lives"²⁵

Later in the same section, Fanon notes that after coming to consciousness of one's otherness, the racialized other must also understand that they are what Fanon calls "phobogenic": "We have said that the black man is phobogenic. What is phobia? Our answer will be based on the latest book by Hesnard: 'Phobia is a neurosis characterized by the anxious fear of an object (in the broadest sense of anything outside the individual) or, by extension, of a situation.' Naturally such an object must take on certain aspects. It must, says Hesnard, arouse fear and revulsion."²⁶ In other words, the black man inspires fear and revulsion in the white community. Again, Kathy's coming to consciousness parallels Fanon's study, for at the moment of realization Kathy notes that people like Madame "shudder at the very thought of you [...] dread the idea of your hand brushing against theirs," and fear the other "in the same way someone might be afraid of spiders." Ishiguro addresses the colonial society's fear of the racialized other, more specifically he likens it to the fairly common phobia of spiders, arachnophobia. Even Miss Emily, the most sympathetically drawn "guardian," or pedagogic overseer at Hailsham, remarks on her fear of the clones. She tells Kathy "We're *all* afraid of you. I myself had to fight back my dread of you almost ever 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."²⁷ In setting up the social dynamic of fear in the relations between the clones and the rest of society in such a light, Ishiguro allegorizes the element of disgust involved in racialized otherness. The novel not only expresses the fear of the other but also its internalization, tapping into the deep revulsion that Kathy faces in coming to consciousness, constructing the identity of the clones as phobogenic.

²⁴ Ibid., "Introduction," p. xii

²⁵ Kazuo Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go*, p. 37

²⁶ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, "The Black Man and Psychopathology," p. 132-33

²⁷ Kazuo Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go*, p. 269

After facing disillusionment and being forced into the realization of their otherness, the clones continue to exhibit psychological traits of a racialized other. After leaving Hailsham, Kathy and the others move into the Cottages, the last communal area for the clones. During their stay, Kathy observes the older students and in particular “how so many of their mannerisms were copied from the television. [...] the way they gestured to each other, sat together on sofas, even the way they argued and stormed out of rooms.”²⁸ Ruth, one of Kathy’s close friends, begins to mimic the older students and use body language seen on television. This bothers Kathy, who eventually tells Ruth, recalling “I just pressed on, explaining to her how it was something from a television series. ‘It’s not worth copying,’ I told her. ‘It’s not what people really do out there, in normal life, if that’s what you were thinking.’”²⁹ Kathy berates Ruth’s behavior in a peculiar manner, highlighting Ruth’s attempt to appear less like a clone and more like a member of “normal” society through the adoption of language. Kathy acknowledges two crucial aspects of the behavior of her peers: the copying of the language of the community that oppresses them, and the fact that such mimesis reflects a desire to assimilate into the oppressive community. Fanon writes of this phenomenon “the more the black Antillean assimilates the French language, the whiter he gets—i.e., the closer he comes to becoming a true human being. We are fully aware that this is one of man’s attitudes faced with Being. A man who possesses a language possesses as an indirect consequence the world expressed and implied by this language.”³⁰ In addition to attempting to appropriate the culture of the oppressive community through the mimicry of language, the clones declare their very being in an effort to be recognized as “a true human being,” an ontological status they have been denied.³¹

The clones’ effort to assimilate culminates in the search for Ruth’s “possible,” the original person from which she was cloned and a member of the outside society.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 120-21

²⁹ Ibid., p. 123-24

³⁰ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, “The Black Man and Language,” p. 2

³¹ It should be noted that Fanon focuses primarily on the appropriation of the French language by the black Antillean, a subject with a spoken language entirely different from the French. The clones in *Never Let Me Go* have been raised speaking English just like the outside community and frequently allude to the myriad of literature they have read, and therefore do not face as large a degree of separation as the black Antillean from the oppressive society in the utilization of language. Although this is the case, the clones still seek to appropriate *body* language and small mannerisms such as slang or idioms evident in the outside community to assimilate further. Fanon also addresses such mimicry, albeit briefly, writing, “Professor Westermann writes in *The Africa Today* that the feeling of inferiority by Blacks is especially evident in the educated black man who is constantly trying to overcome it. The method used, Westermann adds, is often naïve: ‘The wearing of European clothes, whether rags or the most up-to-date style; using European furniture and European forms of social intercourse; adorning the native language with European expressions; using bombastic phrases in speaking or writing a European language; all these contribute to a feeling of equality with the European and his achievements,’ (p. 9). In this sense, the mimicry of language is broadened into more than spoken and written language. Kathy and the clones from Hailsham, the more educated of the cloned communities as the reader learns throughout the novel, quite accurately display this form of mimicry.

While at the Cottages, two of the older students inform Ruth that they may have seen her possible, someone who looks exactly like her, and they gather the group together for a trip outside the enclosed Cottages. Kathy describes the fervor over the subject of possibles, stating,

One big idea behind finding your model was that when you did, you'd glimpse your future. Now I don't mean anyone really thought that if your model turned out to be, say, a guy working at a railway station, that's what you'd end up doing too. We all realised it wasn't that simple. Nevertheless, we all of us, to varying degrees, believed that when you saw the person you were copied from, you'd get *some* insight into who you were deep down, and maybe too, you'd see something of what your life held in store.³²

The clones' desire to find the person they were copied from in order to get "insight into who you were deep down" reflects their abrogated identity. The clones have no positive sense of being, having been denied humanity by the rest of society, but they do not acquiesce to the idea that they are purely to serve for economic and medical purposes. They are left devoid of a sense of self, and the search for possibles is a representation of this psychological struggle. The racialized other experiences a similar desire, attempting to find whiteness within oneself. Fanon writes,

the black man cannot take pleasure in his insularity. For him there is only one way out, and it leads to the white world. Hence his constant preoccupation with attracting the white world, his concern with being as powerful as the white man, and his determination to acquire the properties of a coating: i.e., the part of being or having that constitutes an ego. As we said earlier, the black man will endeavor to seek admittance to the white sanctuary from within.³³

Here Fanon is discussing the racialized other's determination to be accepted by the white community by means of acquiring a white sexual partner, but the broader notion that finding whiteness within oneself allows one to establish an ego or self is applicable to the clones' search for possibles. The clones seek their possibles in order to find themselves, or those who are apparently biologically identical to themselves within the oppressive community. By seeing copies of their bodies accepted in the outside society and leading normal lives, the clones are able to find the whiteness within themselves, so to speak, in the sense that they can observe their bodies and to a certain degree their selves as human and being treated as so. The clones cannot accept their rejection from the "normal" world, and their desire to find whom they were modeled from is both a grasp at identity and humanity and an attempt to psychologically become a part of the rest of society.

Race is never mentioned in *Never Let Me Go* until near the very end of the narrative in the most climactic scene in the novel. Kathy and Tommy find Madame and Miss Emily, two of the guardians at Hailsham, in order to ask for a deferral on their donations. Kathy and Tommy have heard from other students that such a deferral is possible on the grounds that they can prove they are in love, although Miss Emily

³² Kazuo Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go*, p. 139-40

³³ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, "The Woman of Color and the White Man," p. 33-34

tells them it is merely a rumor and there is no hope in escaping their morbid fate. In their meeting, Miss Emily has a Nigerian caretaker named George whose presence is subtle yet intriguing. Miss Emily recalls a previous moment when she passed Kathy in the street, stating, “you certainly didn’t recognise me then. You glanced at George, the big Nigerian man pushing me. Oh yes, you had quite a good look at him, and he at you.”³⁴ Miss Emily tellingly dwells upon the gaze between Kathy and George, a character who has no purpose in terms of plot. In this moment she draws a connection between the two exploited social castes, the clone and the service worker. Kathy must care for the weak and eventually donate her body to serve the outside community, and George too cares for the now weak Miss Emily and must relinquish the autonomy of his body for the service of those in power. Ishiguro connects to the two characters in their similar exploitation, and also alludes to British colonialism in his use of a Nigerian caretaker, who reminds the reader of another dehumanizing method of racialized exploitation that has left class disparity and hatred in its wake.

The association between the clone and the service worker is even more apparent when considering Ishiguro’s attention to class in *The Remains of the Day*. Stevens is humiliated one night when Mr. Spencer, a guest of Lord Darlington, accosts Stevens and presses upon him a series of questions about economics and politics that Stevens is unable to answer, replying “I’m very sorry, sir, but I am unable to be of assistance on this matter,”³⁵ to every question directed at him, much to the amusement of the guests. Mr. Spencer goes on to conclude that the parliamentary system, which relies on the votes of lower classes, is obsolete due to the fact that Stevens clearly cannot answer any of the questions. Lord Darlington apologizes to Stevens for the mockery, but also tells him “Democracy is something of a bygone era. The world’s far too complicated a place now for universal suffrage and such like. [...] The man in the street can’t be expected to know enough about politics, economics, world commerce and what have you. And why should he?”³⁶ Lord Darlington ultimately supports Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, stating, “Look at Germany and Italy, Stevens. See what strong leadership can do if it’s allowed to act. None of this universal suffrage nonsense there.”³⁷ He later excludes Jewish workers from his service staff as well, but instead of protesting, Stevens supports Lord Darlington’s position in order to justify his own life, declaring

Let us establish this quite clearly: a butler’s duty is to provide good service. It is not to meddle in the great affairs of the nation. The fact is, such great affairs will always be beyond the understanding of those such as you and I, and those of us who wish to make our mark must realize that we best do so by concentrating on what *is* within our realm; that is to say, by devoting our

³⁴ Kazuo Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go*, p. 256-57

³⁵ Kazuo Ishiguro, *The Remains of the Day*, p. 195

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 198-99

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 198-99

attention to providing the best possible service to those great gentlemen in whose hands the destination of civilization truly lies.³⁸ Similarly, after the failed search for her possible, Ruth flies into a rage, revealing the clones' recognition of their own pitiful class. Ruth denounces the entire search on the grounds that "They don't ever, *ever*, use people like that woman. [...] We're not modelled from that sort."³⁹ She goes on to make the fabricated claim, "We're modelled from *trash*. Junkies, prostitutes, winos, tramps. Convicts maybe, just so long as they aren't psychos. That's what we come from. [...] If you want to look for possibles, if you want to do it properly, then you look in the gutter. You look in rubbish bins. Look down the toilet, that's where you'll find where we all came from."⁴⁰ Although it is highly unlikely that the clones are actually modeled from the socio-economic group that she suggests due to the fact that the clones must be healthy, Ruth's diatribe reflects the social class that the clones identify with: the lumpenproletariat, those who are bound to remain the lowest class without any hope of escape. The clones are both a racialized group and a class of their own, destined to be slave bodies for the oppressive community and nothing else. Their struggle therefore reflects both the psychological repercussions of racialization and rationalized class exploitation. The clones form a race and class of their own.

Death and Biomedical Hegemony

The focus of both *Never Let Me Go* and *The Remains of the Day* on class disparity and those who give up their bodies for the service of others shows a trend running across both of Ishiguro's novels. The austere calculability of Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany in *The Remains of the Day* translates to *Never Let Me Go* in a modern biotechnological form. Ishiguro transposes the mass extermination in the concentration camps of World War II and the brutal racism that implicitly justifies the atrocity to the world of the clones, faced with a similar rationalized death regime. The comparison is even suggested in *Never Let Me Go*, when Kathy describes an event in one of her classes, recalling,

We'd been looking at some poetry, but had somehow drifted onto talking about soldiers in World War Two being kept in prison camps. One of the boys asked if the fences around the camps had been electrified, and then someone else had said how strange it must have been, living in a place like that, where you could commit suicide any time you liked just by touching a fence. This might have been intended as a serious point, but the rest of us thought it pretty funny. We were all laughing and talking at once, and then Laura—typical of her—got up on her seat and did a hysterical impersonation of someone reaching out and getting electrocuted. For a moment things got riotous, with everyone shouting and mimicking touching electric fences.

I went on watching Miss Lucy through all this and I could see, just for a second, a ghostly expression come over her face as she watched the class in

³⁸ Ibid., p. 199

³⁹ Kazuo Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go*, p. 166

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 166

front of her. Then—I kept watching carefully—she pulled herself together, smiled and said: “It’s just as well the fences at Hailsham aren’t electrified. You get terrible accidents sometimes.”⁴¹

The reader may infer from this scene that other institutions for the clones outside Hailsham are much more cruel, but most importantly, perhaps, the direct reference to the death camps of World War II solidifies the continuation of themes explored historically in *The Remains of the Day* in the speculative dystopian world of *Never Let Me Go*.

Achille Mbembe writes of the Nazi regime, “According to Foucault, the Nazi state was the most complete example of a state exercising the right to kill. This state, he claims, made the management, protection, and cultivation of life coextensive with the sovereign right to kill.”⁴² In his essay, Mbembe uses Foucault’s notion of biopower as a foundation for his work, assuming that “the ultimate expression of sovereignty resides, to a large degree, in the power and the capacity to dictate who may live and who must die.”⁴³ In other words, Mbembe analyzes the politics of death, or what he calls “necropolitics.” The exercise of precisely such necropolitics is a fundamental aspect of the dystopian society in *Never Let Me Go*; the society allows the outside world to live while demanding that the clones die. With this in mind, Kathy’s recollection of her class discussion of the concentration camps possesses a necropolitical bent. She says her classmate describes the concentration camp as strange because it is a place “where you could commit suicide any time you liked just by touching a fence.” The child describes the camp not by its restrictions or by its inhumanity, but rather by its strange instantiation of suicidal agency. The child seems intrigued by the possibility of suicide more than fearful of the injustice of the Nazi state. Mbembe states that in the contemporary sovereign state, “death and freedom are irrevocably interwoven,”⁴⁴ and death becomes a last resort grasp at individual autonomy. He writes,

Far from being an encounter with a limit, boundary, or barrier, it is experienced as “a release from terror and bondage.” As Gilroy notes, this preference for death over continued servitude is a commentary on the nature of freedom itself (or the lack thereof). If this lack is the very nature of what it means for the slave or the colonized to exist, the same lack is also precisely the way in which he or she takes account of his or her mortality. Referring to the practice of individual or mass suicide by slaves cornered by the slave catchers, Gilroy suggests that death, in this case, can be represented as agency. For death is precisely that from and over which I have power. But it is also that space where freedom and negation operate.⁴⁵

The child in Kathy’s recollection describes the electric fence as an available object of suicide due to his subjugation in the necropolitical regime of the outside community.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 78

⁴² Achille Mbembe, “Necropolitics,” *Public Culture* 15(1), Duke University Press (2003): p. 17

⁴³ Ibid., p. 11

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 38

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 39

Death becomes the only means of maintaining one's autonomy, and thereby a beacon of freedom in an oppressive world. This power over death the subjects attempt to maintain and the hegemony over who may live and who must die by the state comprise the dialectical tension of necropolitics.

Mbembe states that while the factors leading up to the Nazi regime are multitudinous and complex, "according to Endo Traverso, the gas chambers and the ovens were the culmination of a long process of dehumanizing and industrializing death, one of the original features of which was to integrate instrumental rationality with the productive administrative rationality of the modern Western world (the factory, the bureaucracy, the prison, the army)."⁴⁶ The dehumanization and industrialization of death is evident in the novel as well, primarily in the entire system of which the clones are an integral part, a system that raises them in contained environments in order to be sacrificed for the outside society. This dehumanizing rationality is particularly apparent in the clinical language Kathy uses to describe the donation process. When a patient dies from donating organs, Kathy says that they have "completed,"⁴⁷ and when boasting of her adequacy as a carer, she tells the reader "my donors have always tended to do much better than expected. Their recovery times have been impressive, and hardly any of them have been classified as 'agitated,' even before fourth donation."⁴⁸ Kathy's cold classification of emotions and pain and her use of almost technological terms to signify death reflect the industrialization of death through administrative rationality that Mbembe describes. Ishiguro takes the dehumanized and calculated death regime of Nazi Germany and extends it into the speculative narrative of *Never Let Me Go*.

But it is not just in the systemized death of the clones that the novel expresses its ties to necropolitics, for Mbembe also writes of the dehumanization and industrialization of death, "This development was aided in part by racist stereotypes and the flourishing of a class-based racism that, in translating the social conflicts of the industrial world in racial terms, ended up comparing the working classes and 'stateless people' of the industrial world to the 'savages' of the colonial world."⁴⁹ In short, he writes in observance of Arendt's thesis, "what one witnesses in World War II is the extension to 'civilized' peoples of Europe of the methods previously reserved for the 'savages.'"⁵⁰ Fanon's study of postcolonial subjects becomes directly applicable to the psychologies of the clones under the system of necropolitics. Kathy's coming to consciousness as a racialized other and the psychological traits the clones exhibit as a class and race of their own are byproducts of the necropolitics of the oppressive community. On racism Mbembe writes,

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 18

⁴⁷ The first example of this term appears on page 101, Kazuo Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go*

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 3

⁴⁹ Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics," *Public Culture*, 15(1), Duke University Press (2003): p. 18

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 23

in Foucault's terms, racism is above all a technology aimed at permitting the exercise of biopower, "that old sovereign right of death." In the economy of biopower, the function of racism is to regulate the distribution of death and to make possible the murderous functions of the state. It is, he says, "the condition for the acceptability of putting to death."⁵¹

The outside community racializes the clones in an attempt to justify the rationalized system of necropolitics they are attached to, and to allow themselves to continue putting the clones to death. If the clones were not considered something outside of humanity, something ontologically inferior, the society's medical practices would cease.

The society in *Never Let Me Go* justifies its death system as a source of medical material for the outside community. This resource extraction from the death of the clones is again related to necropolitics, for the necropolitical state of Nazi Germany and to a degree all modern states "undertook to 'civilize' the ways of killing and to attribute rational objectives to the very act of killing."⁵² Those who must die are relegated to communities or "colonies" separate from the rest of society where they may live and die. They are stationed in "the zone where the violence of the state of exception is deemed to operate in the service of 'civilization.'"⁵³ This zone in the novel is Hailsham and the other institutions that raise the clones, communities isolated and excluded from the rest of society, contained areas for the exercise of the necropolitical. The rationalized purpose of Hailsham and its associates is to serve the rest of society in an austere, dehumanized, biomedical manner; the clones die so that the rest of civilization can continue to live. The clones are the subject "whose biophysical elimination would strengthen [the outside society's] potential to life and security,"⁵⁴ the victims, in other words, of necropolitics. In her last meeting with Kathy, Miss Emily tells her the entirety of her dehumanization, exploitation, and economic purpose:

After the war, in the early fifties, when the great breakthroughs in science followed one after the other so rapidly, there wasn't 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. And for a long time, people preferred to believe these organs appeared from nowhere, or at most that they grew in a kind of vacuum. Yes, there *were* arguments. But by the time people became concerned about ... about *students*, by the time they came to consider just how you were reared, whether you should have been brought into existence at all, well by then it was too late. There was no way to reverse the process. How can you ask a world that has come to regard cancer and curable, how can you as such a world to put away that cure, to go back to the dark days? There was no going back. However uncomfortable people were

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 17

⁵² Ibid., p. 23

⁵³ Ibid., p. 24

⁵⁴ Ibid., p.18

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. So for a long time you were kept in the shadows, 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. And that was how things stood until our little movement came along. But do you see what we were up against? We were virtually trying to square the circle. Here was a world, requiring students to donate. While that remained the case, there would always be a barrier against seeing you as properly human.⁵⁵

This scene expresses most directly the concern of this essay as a whole. Miss Emily states that the science, which created the clones, came after the war, thus again applying the cold calculability of Nazi Germany to the contemporary biomedical field. The ontological implications of biomedical engineering suggest the redefinition of what is human through the possibility of transcending the human, all the while the cloned beings are regarded as ontologically inferior and are relegated to the status of a racialized other. Miss Emily tells Kathy that people convinced themselves "that you were less than human, so it didn't matter." Such otherness serves to justify the exploitation of their bodies and the death that is imposed upon them by the state, that further justifies the death system by upholding the medical benefits the system produces.

Mbembe states that "to exercise sovereignty is to exercise control over mortality and to define life as the deployment and manifestation of power," thus posing the question to the reader, "What place is given to life, death, and the human body?"⁵⁶ This question is emphasized by Thacker in his study of regenerative medicine and through it the potential for a human body without death. Thacker writes, "tissue engineering seems to be gearing itself toward a standard of the biomedical body that strategically eliminates one entire sector of the biological body's contingencies (chromosome degradation, tissue aging and decay, and the markers of the body's mortality)."⁵⁷ Thacker notes that the many factors of regenerative medicine "point to a more general desire effectively to engineer biological mortality out of the body."⁵⁸ Similarly, according to Mbembe the negation of death is what ultimately defines the sovereign. He writes, "the sovereign world, Bataille argues, 'is the world in which the limit of death is done away with. Death is present in it, its presence defines that world of violence, but while death is present it is always there only to be negated, never for anything but that. The sovereign,' he concludes, 'is he who is, as if death were not. [...] he is the transgression of all such limits.'"⁵⁹ Like the speculative implications of regenerative medicine, the sovereign does away with death by containing it in selective areas, the areas of the racialized other. The

⁵⁵ Kazuo Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go*, p. 262-63

⁵⁶ Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics," *Public Culture*, 15(1), Duke University Press (2003): p. 12

⁵⁷ Eugene Thacker, *The Global Genome*, "The Thickness of Tissue Engineering," p. 272-73

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, "Regenerative Medicine: We Can Grow It for You Wholesale," p. 285

⁵⁹ Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics," *Public Culture*, 15(1), Duke University Press (2003): p. 16

sovereign's control of life and death presupposes "the distribution of human species into groups, the subdivision of the population into subgroups, and the establishment of a biological caesura between the ones and the others. This is what Foucault labels with the (at first familiar) term *racism*."⁶⁰ The ontological redefinition implied by regenerative medicine necessarily also implies a "biological caesura" between those who must give organs and those who take, and therefore an "other" to be exploited. That is why, in the novel, the clones face the psychological turmoil of racialized others.

The title of the novel, *Never Let Me Go*, derives from a song of the same name that Kathy listens to as a young girl. Kathy tells the reader that she interpreted the song incorrectly, being the child that she was, confessing,

what I'd imagine was a woman who'd been told she couldn't have babies, who'd really, really wanted them all her life. Then there's a sort of miracle and she has a baby, and she holds the baby very close to her and walks around singing 'Baby, never let me go...' partly because she's so happy, but also because she's so afraid something will happen, that the baby will get ill or be taken away from her.⁶¹

At one point Kathy listens to the song and begins holding a pillow as if it were her child, singing along, and notices Madame watching her, and when she looks at Madame she realizes Madame is crying. Towards the close of the novel, Kathy asks Madame about the scene, telling her the erroneous interpretation of the song, wondering if Madame interpreted it similarly. Madame replies,

I was weeping for an altogether different reason. 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. It wasn't really you, what you were doing, I know that. But I saw you and it broke my heart. And I've never forgotten.⁶²

Madame's interpretation of the scene is fairly straightforward. Madame sees the new scientific world as cruel and austere, and her idea of the "old kind world" cherished by "a little girl" reveals her nostalgia for a purer humanism, soon to be extinguished by the encroaching medical era. She directly laments the establishment of a rationalized world and the loss of a culture that still upholds humanist ideals. On the other hand, Kathy's interpretation is "for an altogether different reason" as Madame says it is. Kathy's interpretation of the song, although childish, reflects an aspect of the society in the novel from a surprising perspective not yet addressed. She focuses on a mother that, due to some medical condition is unable to produce children, only to miraculously be granted the opportunity. Recalling our societal acceptance of in vitro fertilization and surrogate motherhood, two forms of creating

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 17

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 70

⁶² Ibid., p. 272

life that push ontological boundaries and also allow motherhood for those previously denied it, Kathy's interpretation recognizes the promises of biomedical advancement and the extent to which it actually propagates the humanistic ideals Madame extols. The two interpretations of the same song recognize the complexities of motherhood and birth, as well as the implications of the biomedical field as a whole, both in the fictional world of the novel and in the world of today. *Never Let Me Go* juxtaposes the necropolitical with the humanistic, death with birth, and the possibilities of the future with the danger involved, an assemblage that encompasses the expectancy and trepidation of the contemporary moment.

In the wake of regenerative medicine and necropolitics the question becomes: who now must die for our lives to continue? Despite the bleakness of the novel, *Never Let Me Go* does not promulgate naïve Luddism, adamantly against the biomedical advancements of the modern era; rather, the novel expresses the urgent necessity for examining regenerative medicine because of its inherent possibility of creating another atrocity in light of the ongoing necropolitical paradigm. In colloquial terms, we must think before we leap, for after we do it will be too late. As Miss Emily states, "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."⁶³ If we are trading in life, where do we draw the line? The world is on the brink of altering the human, and Ishiguro's novel reminds us that we must keep in mind all that is at stake.

⁶³ Kazuo Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go*, p. 263

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